



# OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

Mississippi Forestry Commission  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Stone County Man Charged with Woods Arson

Wiggins, MS—Hal Benton Broadus, age 28 of Mchenry, MS in Stone County has been arrested and charged with multiple counts of felony woods arson MS Code 97-17-13. Broadus has been charged with three separate woods fires; two in Stone County and one in Harrison County. The fire in Harrison County burned approximately thirty acres and threatened several homes.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, which runs from July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013, the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) responded to a total of 39 fires which burned 368 acres in Stone County. During this same time frame Stone County was ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup> hottest county in the state in number of wildfires. In Harrison County the MFC responded to 69 wildfires which burned 802 acres. Harrison County was ranked as the 4<sup>th</sup> hottest county in the state in number of wildfires in FY 2013.

The average number of wildfires suppressed by the MFC per year statewide is 2,268 fires which consumed and average of 27,999 acres. Fiscal year 2011 was the highest year for number of wildfires in recent years with the MFC suppressing 4,142 wildfires statewide which burned 54,535 acres.

The two most common causes of wildfires across Mississippi are escaped debris burns and woods arson. The MFC responded to 584 wildfires that were a result of escaped debris burns in FY 2013 that burned 5,678 acres, and 680 wildfires that were the results of arson which burned 9,125 acres.

In Mississippi, a person convicted for felony woods arson is sentenced to the state penitentiary for not more than two years, nor less than one year, or can be fined not less than \$200, nor more than \$1,000, or both at the discretion of the court.

The Forestry Commission asks that anyone with information on any woods fire, or any suspicious behavior in regards to a woods fire, call the **Woods Arson Hotline at 1-800-240-5161**. Information leading to the arrest and conviction of a woods arsonist can be rewarded up to \$2,500.

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*Don't Burn on Windy Days because Carelessness Causes Wildfires. Check for local burn bans at*  
[www.mfc.ms.gov](http://www.mfc.ms.gov)