

Meet Ember, the Newest Canine in the AFC's "Arson Dog" Program

*By Elishia Ballentine
Editor*

The Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) is doggedly determined to stop arsonists in their tracks. To assist in finding wildland arson suspects in North Alabama, a second bloodhound has recently been purchased by the Alabama Forestry Commission. This action will give the agency more complete coverage across the entire state, according to AFC Law Enforcement Chief Craig Hill. "The decision to add another bloodhound was based on the successes of 'Blaze,' our first arson dog," said Hill. "Stationed in South Alabama, it is not practical – neither logistically nor economically – to use Blaze in North Alabama . . . it's just too far to mobilize him to a woods arson crime scene in a timely manner."

The new bloodhound puppy, a liver-and-tan colored female, has been named "Ember" by AFC employees. Chief Hill related, "We got her in March from Grant Mountain Bloodhounds located in Marshall County. At the time, she was about 8 weeks old and only weighed between 10-15 pounds." Ember and her handler, AFC Investigator Jamey Bozeman, are currently being trained to track human scent by Sleuth Hound, LLC of Madison County. The team should complete their training by December of this year, and then be nationally certified in scent discrimination by the International Bloodhound Training Institute.

In the four years prior to the implementation of Blaze, an average of over 40 percent of all wildfires in Alabama was determined to be "incendiary" in nature, not only destroying natural resources, wildlife, and property, but also endangering human life. Since he went "on duty" in 2009, the average arson rate has dropped to approximately 31 percent. Blaze is credited with five arrests and/or confessions. He has also been utilized in three other criminal activities occurring on AFC property, as well as assisting in finding missing persons.

State Forester Linda Casey said, "The great thing about our Arson Dog program is that it has been funded totally through donations. All expenditures connected with the purchase, veterinary care, and training of these puppies are covered by contributions. We appreciate the organizations and individuals who support this program, especially Sunshine Mills, Inc. and Tractor Supply Co. for providing the food for our dogs. We initiated the bloodhound program to reduce the unacceptable high number of woods arson cases in Alabama, and the statistics show that strategy is working. With the addition of this new puppy to our law enforcement team, we look forward to increasing our effectiveness even higher in deterring arsonists across our state."



In its mission to protect and sustain Alabama's forest resources, the Alabama Forestry Commission is committed to reducing the number of forestry-related crimes that occur each year across the state. These crimes generate losses of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to landowners, the timber industry, and Alabama's economy. The AFC provides an Arson/Forest Crimes Hotline so that citizens can call and report wildland arson, theft of timber, and vandalism or theft of harvesting equipment. The toll-free number is 1 (800) 222-2927. Any information provided is confidential and the caller remains anonymous. ♻️