



News Release

For more information, contact:
Wendy Burnett
478.751.3535
wburnett@gfc.state.ga.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...June 8, 2015

WARE COUNTY ARSON SUSPECT ARRESTED

A Waycross man is in custody following his arrest by Georgia Forestry Commission law enforcement personnel on wildland arson charges. Forty-one year old Eric Lee Westberry is charged with six counts of arson of lands in connection with a series of fires in Ware and Charlton Counties between May 6 and May 13, 2015. Arson of Lands is a felony offense in Georgia, punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$50,000.

"Georgia Forestry Commission investigators worked very closely with a number of partner agencies to secure warrants and find this suspect," said Georgia Forestry Commission Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement Billy Leitch. "Ware County Sherriff Deputies deserve special recognition for information leading to the arrest on Friday, June 5 at a residence in Pierce County. Westberry is being held in the Pierce County jail without bond and will be transferred to the Ware County jail," Leitch said.

According to Leitch, Westberry is a suspect in 13 intentionally set fires that burned more than 100 acres. Seven fires occurred in Ware County, five in Charlton, and one in Brantley County. The investigation is ongoing and additional charges are expected.

"Due to multiple search warrants issued across several jurisdictions, numerous law enforcement agencies were engaged," Leitch said. "In addition to Ware County Sheriff's Deputies, others involved represent the Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Charlton, Brantley and Pierce County Sherriff's Office and the Ware County Fire Department. Georgians can be proud of the way these professionals work together to support law enforcement in our state."

Arson is the third leading cause of wildfires in Georgia and GFC Forestry Investigators have full arrest and enforcement authority in the state. They are specially trained to conduct wildland fire investigations and other forestry related crimes. An average of 700 arson fires which burn approximately 9,000 acres are recorded in Georgia annually.

For more information on reporting suspicious fires, burning safely and services of the Georgia Forestry Commission, visit GaTrees.org.

###