

News Article
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Coosa Landowners Attend Awareness Program

The Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee recently partnered with the Coosa County Sheriff's Department to host a Landowner Awareness Program. The program drew a crowd of over 70 landowners to learn about the types of illegal activities that a landowner should watch for on his or her farm and forestland.

The program began with Sheriff, Terry Wilson explaining that while living in a rural area of the state has many benefits, it can also make us a target for those who would like to conceal activities such as the production of crystal methamphetamine, marijuana, and other controlled substances. He went on to explain that his deputies are always on the look-out for suspicious activities and encouraged landowners to contact the Sheriff's Department anytime they observe something unusual, including unusual smells.

The Sheriff then introduced Deputy, Eddie Burk who gave an in-depth description of the types of meth labs that landowners should watch for. He reviewed the fact that the meth labs can be very small such as a sports drink bottle or they can be much larger. Very often the chemicals used in the process of making this drug have a very strong odor and so landowners should also notice any unusual smells. The term "cooking" is often used in relation to the manufacture of this drug, but in most instances it is produced with a cold chemical reaction rather than by using any kind of heat as might be expected with the term cooking. He went on to say that while the number of marijuana cases have gone down in the last few years, the department has made around 8 or 9 arrests in the last 6 months in relation to meth use and production. A very interesting exhibit was also available to let landowners see first had the type products being used for making this drug. In fact, for every pound of meth produced, there are from six to twelve pounds of toxic waste produced.

County Forester Blake Kelley, then moved the discussion to the next topic related to wildfires and the urban-wildland interface. He discussed that anyone burning more than one quarter of an acre of land should first obtain a burn permit number through the Alabama Forestry Commission Office (1-800-492-3711). There is no charge for the permit but landowner must have all the necessary equipment and personnel to manage and control the fire. They are also taking on responsibility should they allow the fire to escape, so it is wise to use the services of the Forestry Commission or a consulting forester for assistance. The landowner must also know the section township and range of his or her property as shown on the deed. He then discussed the urban-wildland interface which is a program to evaluate the potential of wildfire to a residence or other structures close to a wooded area. The Forestry Commission can assist in evaluating the risk of a structure and make recommendations on how to reduce the hazard potential.

To finish the program, Joel Glover with the Department of Conservation introduced our two Coosa County Conservation Enforcement Officers, Thomas Traylor and Clint Middlebrooks. These two officers encouraged landowners to contact them through Operation Gamewatch (1-800-272-4263) if they suspect any illegal hunting or trespassing on a landowner's property. They also recommended landowners not confront illegal hunters but to simply report the situation to these officers and let them take it from there. On another note they mentioned a problem with people picking up what they believe to be an abandoned fawn. These fawns are not usually abandoned at all, the doe will return if you just leave the fawn alone. It is also illegal to possess a deer or fawn in captivity.

As landowners we should all be very appreciative of the work done by our Sheriff's Department and Conservation Officers. If you carry a cell phone, it's a good idea to program in the phone number for the Sheriff dispatch office (256-377-2211) and call them anytime you witness something that looks suspicious or illegal. And call RIGHT THEN, not three weeks or months later.