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Description automatically generated**To: David Arnold, State Forester

From: Tim Phelps, Communications & Outreach Unit Leader

Date: March 31, 2020

**Subject: 2020 Tennessee Forestry Camp - CANCELLATION**

Following counsel with colleagues closely associated with Tennessee Forestry Camp, **I am recommending that the Division of Forestry cancel the event for this year due to safety concerns and logistical challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

This is a time of uncertainty on many levels, and the safety of campers, teachers, and staff is always a top priority of camp. As of today, schools across the state are closed under the governor’s order until April 24. This date has been extended once and it could be extended again, though that is not known for certain. If schools go back into session to finish the school year, they will be subject to multiple end-of-year decisions and possible extensions that would complicate or impact camp schedule.

While camp can logistically be “stood-up” within about a two-month window, which includes promotion, camper registration, food and supply order, and scheduling, these current uncertainties make it difficult to foresee a smooth execution of the event on May 31 – June 5. Furthermore, sensitivities to social distancing will likely continue beyond the expected (though unknown) coronavirus peak. This factor would affect camper attendance as well as apply added pressure to staff and counselors to ensure CDC safety guidelines are met at camp. Lastly, the location where camp is held at Fall Creek Falls State Park is unavailable at other times throughout the summer, so postponing the event is not an option.

While breaking a 70-year tradition of this partnership between our Division and TN FFA is difficult, I feel this is best decision to move us beyond this pandemic and begin work to build on camp in 2021.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this recommendation and if additional input is required by the Department of Agriculture before making this recommendation final and announcing to our partners.