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BRONSON TO SPEAK AT NATIONAL FIREWISE CONFERENCE IN TAMPA

October 22, 2008- **TALLAHASSEE**— Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson will address hundreds of members of the wildfire community at the biennial National Firewise Program's *Backyards & Beyond* Wildfire Education Conference in Tampa on November 4-6.

Bronson is one of several leading Firewise advocates speaking at the conference to urge residents, community leaders, planners, builders and developers to utilize the Firewise Communities approach in planning and designing safe communities. This includes individual responsibility for safer home construction and design, landscaping, and maintenance, as well as effective emergency response.

The *Backyards and Beyond* conference offers a great opportunity to learn from those who work and live in the wildland/urban interface, including residents and experts who work with Firewise principles on a daily basis.

"Florida increased its commitment to wildfire prevention and mitigation following the severe 1998 wildfire season and developing Firewise Communities has been a large part of our focus," said Bronson. "We hope that others participating in this conference can benefit from our experiences putting the Firewise principles into action."

"The *Backyards and Beyond* conference continues to grow as an invaluable opportunity for anyone who is impacted by the threat of wildfire," said Jim Smalley, National Firewise Communities Program Manager. "For everyone in attendance, the conference offers a unique perspective – not only from well-known experts on the issue, but also the residents and community leaders who have real-life experience with Firewise on the ground."

Session participants will also hear from leading wildfire experts Jack Cohen, research scientist at the USDA Forest Service, Scott Shuford, scientist at The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Sarah McCaffrey, social researcher at the U.S. Forest Service. The panel will discuss the historic and social aspects of how decades of fire exclusion in the WUI has increased the probabilities and risks from wildfire threat, and the impact of climate change on wildfires.

The 2008 *Backyards and Beyond* conference will take place on November 4-6 at the Hyatt Regency in Tampa, Fla. More information on this year's conference and ways to become Firewise are available online at www.firewise.org/conference08

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