

Charlton County Emergency Management Agency

426 Rosa Parks Road
Folkston, GA 31537
(912) 496-1081
ema@charltoncountyga.gov

Tiffany Yearwood, Director



Date: Sunday, June 27, 2026

To: Rich Wiltfang, Southern Linc; Kristie Holder, Region M Healthcare Coalition

RE: Southern Linc Support – Brantley County Hwy 82 Wildfire

During the Brantley County Highway 82 Fire, I was traveling through the area and stopped to offer assistance, arriving at the same time as the first responding fire units. While on scene, I remained in a support role, assisting with emergency management coordination related to public messaging and evacuations.

This was a rapidly evolving wildfire that ultimately grew into a large, multi-day incident. During the first week of operations, multiple evacuations were ordered as fire conditions changed and the fire spread across the landscape. Maintaining situational awareness and effective communication between agencies was critical to supporting operational decision-making and protecting both responders and the public.

When Georgia Forestry personnel arrived that first night, it became apparent that there was no direct communications link between Brantley County Incident Command and Georgia Forestry operations. To help bridge that gap, I retrieved the Southern Linc radio issued to me through the Region M Healthcare Coalition and made it available at the Incident Command Post. The radio quickly became a vital communications link between Incident Command and Georgia Forestry personnel operating in the field.

As the incident intensified, seven Georgia Forestry tractors were deployed into heavy smoke conditions to construct fire breaks ahead of the advancing fire (see attached photo). While standing by at the Incident Command Post, a transmission came across the Southern Linc radio from a Georgia Forestry operator who had become disoriented in the dense smoke and was unable to visually locate a safe route back to other crews. The urgency and concern in the transmission immediately alerted personnel at the command post to a potentially serious situation.

Upon hearing the radio traffic, drone operators launched unmanned aircraft to obtain aerial situational awareness and identify the operator's location so guidance could be provided if needed. Fortunately, another Georgia Forestry team member was able to successfully guide the operator back to their location from the ground before additional intervention was required. However, drones were in the deployed, and Command was prepared to help provide guidance.

Throughout the incident, the Southern Linc radio provided command staff and drone operators with real-time awareness of forestry operations, allowing them to anticipate needs and be prepared to provide support when requested. The ability for Incident Command to monitor field operations was especially important given the dynamic fire conditions, ongoing evacuations, and the need to rapidly adjust operations as conditions changed.

The Southern Linc remained a critical communications tool for multiple days, serving as the primary link between Incident Command and Georgia Forestry personnel until direct communications capabilities could be established by Brantley County.

This incident demonstrated the importance of interoperable communications during multi-agency emergency operations. A single Region M Healthcare Coalition-issued Southern Linc radio provided a reliable communications bridge that enhanced coordination, improved situational awareness, supported evacuation decision-making, and contributed to responder safety during a fast-moving wildfire incident.

Thank you to Southern Linc and the Region M Healthcare Coalition for providing and supporting this valuable communications capability.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark green ink, appearing to read 'T. Yearwood'.

Tiffany Yearwood, Director
Charlton County Emergency Management Agency

