

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service Prescott National Forest

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Wildfire Season Has Arrived Once Again in the Southwest

PRESCOTT, Ariz— As the warm spring weather continues, residents and visitors are gearing up for outdoor activities in the Prescott National Forest and areas in north central Arizona. Weather forecasters are predicting dry and windy conditions with a slight chance of moisture over the next week.

“Although we received close to normal precipitation this winter, it was not enough to offset the current drought conditions we have been experiencing the last three years. As the Forest continues to get drier, rain would be a welcomed event, however, if we do get rain, it won’t be enough...the Forest is so dry that any moisture received now will only buy us a few days of relief. The combination of winds and warmer temperatures can dry the vegetation out within a few days, or sometimes even hours,” commented Forest Fire Management Officer Robert Morales.

Fire restrictions have not been implemented on the Prescott National Forest yet, but conditions are nearing the management action points that the forest has developed that would trigger fire restrictions.

Due to the long-term drought, the Prescott National Forest is experiencing an unprecedented bark beetle infestation that has killed roughly 50% of the Ponderosa Pine trees on the forest and the mortality is expected to dramatically increase this summer. With thousands of acres of dead standing trees with green fading or red needles and thousands of acres of dead brush, another effect of the drought, the probability of wildfires in the area getting big and very hot, and becoming catastrophic in nature is very high. With this in mind, people are asked to use extreme caution with any type of ignition source.

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The southwest has already experienced person-caused wildfires that have threatened homes. On the Prescott National Forest within the last week, numerous abandoned campfires have been found and this weekend we experienced two person caused fires. “Fire season has arrived. The responsibility lies with all of us to be careful with fire,” Morales emphasized.

As we continue to evaluate and monitor current conditions, fire prevention is our first line of defense. Fire prevention units are currently patrolling the forest. If and when a fire does start, we will hit it HARD with our initial attack forces. In anticipation of having a severe fire season, we are going to be adding addition initial attack resources to our area. Two air tankers that call Prescott home this time of the year are currently based out at the Prescott Fire Center. Most of the Hot Shot crews in the region are now fully staffed as well as the engine crews.

It is also very important that you continue to create defensible space around our homes in the event of a wildfire to protect your home and to give fire fighters an area to make a stand against the fire.

Report abandoned campfires or wildfires to the Central West Zone/Prescott Dispatch Center in Prescott at (928) 777-5700, or call 9-1-1.

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