



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
February 23, 2004

Contact: Rob Kopack
Magazine Ranger District
Ozark-St. Francis National Forests
Phone: 479-963-3076

Mt. Magazine prescribed burn will benefit land and communities

RUSSELLVILLE, AR – On a clear morning in the next few weeks smoke may be seen rising from the south face of Mount Magazine.

People living in the area should be aware that this isn't the beginnings of a wildfire that has smoldered overnight. Rather, it is a carefully orchestrated prescribed fire being conducted by several land management agencies.

The Magazine Ranger District is partnering with Mount Magazine State Park, the Arkansas Forestry Commission, and several other ranger districts on the Ouachita and Ozark-St. Francis National Forests to conduct a 4,500-acre burn on the south face of Mount Magazine. This larger-than-average burn is intended to be completed before April 1. Managers intend to begin the prescribed fire by 9 a.m., completing the ignitions by 4 p.m.

Prescribed burning is a method used to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in the wildland/urban interface, where houses and development meet the forest. By thinning the fuels and reducing the risk of destructive wildfires, there is less chance that Mount Magazine State Park would be destroyed by wildfire.

Foresters and wildlife biologists also use prescribed fire to improve the forest for both plants and animals. Two rare species expected to benefit from this burn are the Rufous-crowned sparrow and the Diana fritillary butterfly, both found on Mount Magazine.

Several factors contributed to the need for this prescribed fire. The development of the new Mount Magazine State Park includes the construction of a \$32 million lodge and 13 cabins along

the south bluff of the mountain. Reduction of fuels on the south slope of the mountain will help to protect these structures from destructive wildfire.

On August 30, 2000, a wildfire started in Petit Jean State Park, threatening several historic structures, including Mather Lodge. Although it was contained within a day, it burned 1,401 acres and cost an estimated \$52,880. This is almost \$40 an acre to fight the fire, as opposed to nearly \$15 an acre to conduct a prescribed fire and help reduce the risk of a wildfire.

The fire will take place when conditions warrant, taking into consideration factors including weather (temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction), fuel moisture content, and helicopter and fire crew availability. A primary emphasis is placed on conducting the burn safely and efficiently.

“We are focused on public and fire fighter safety, not only as we conduct this prescribed burn, but as we look to the future and reduce the risk of destructive wildfires in this area that could potentially threaten the lives of firefighters and the public,” Burton said. “We are committed to completing this burn safely and efficiently and keeping the public informed as we progress.”

As a result of these activities, Highway 309 will be closed from Barber Ridge to the Mount Magazine State Park Visitor Information Center on the day of the burn. Residual smoke in the surrounding river valleys can be expected for a few days after the burn is complete.

For more information, contact the Magazine Ranger District at 479-963-3076 or Mount Magazine State Park at 479-963-8502.

###