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NATIONAL FOREST MANAGERS BEGIN ANNUAL FIRES TO IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH

HOT SPRINGS, AR — The Ozark-St. Francis National Forest and the Ouachita National Forest will be conducting prescribed fires during the next several weeks.

Prescribed fire is a method used by foresters and wildlife biologists to help improve overall forest health for both plants and animals. Highly trained Forest Service fire managers control the intensity of the fires, keeping the fire in a defined area. Some areas inside the firelines are left unburned, leaving a mosaic of burned and unburned patches.

Prescribed fires help to control heavy underbrush and reduce leaf litter on the forest floor. This same litter and underbrush could be the fuel for an accidental, destructive wildfire.

Prescribed fires help to recycle nutrients into the soil, increasing the mineral nutrients needed for plant growth. Flowering annuals and biennials are more visible and grow better following a prescribed fire. The number and variety of small plants also increases and becomes better wildlife food. Grasses grow more rapidly and are more nutritious and digestible for many animals, including deer, following the fires. Turkey, quail, and doves also benefit because of the increase in grasses and legumes after a burn.

Safety and health are the top priority during prescribed fire season and many requirements must be met before a prescribed fire can take place. The day chosen must be a combination of the correct humidity, wind, temperature, fuel moisture, and atmospheric conditions. Factoring in all these requirements limits the number of days in which a prescribed fire can take place.

“We only conduct prescribed fires when all the conditions show that there will be a minimal impact to the public,” Jim Burton, Fire Team Leader for both forests said. “These fires continue to serve as a valuable tool in reducing the risk of destructive wildfires, as well as improving valuable wildlife habitat and maintaining to health of Arkansas’ and Oklahoma’s National Forests.”

The Ouachita and Ozark-St. Francis National Forests will notify local media outlets on days when prescribed fires are scheduled.

For more information, call your local district office, or the Ouachita Forest Supervisor's Office at (501) 321-5202 or the Ozark-St. Francis Forest Supervisor's Office at (501) 968-2354.

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