

CARSON NATIONAL FOREST

FIRE PREVENTION COMMUNICATION PLAN

FY2007

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Fire Prevention Communication Plan

Carson National Forest 2007 Fire Season

Background: Healthy forests are important to our nation. Fuel buildup and catastrophic fires, in addition to widespread problems with insects and diseases are all symptoms of poor forest health. In today's overcrowded forests, competition for limited water and nutrients will keep trees weak and unhealthy forever, or until the next devastating fire, disease, or insect outbreak. Proactive, ecosystem-based land management is needed to improve and maintain forest health.

In the Forest Service, especially in areas that are at high risk from catastrophic fires and insect outbreaks, aggressive fuels management is a big step in restoring forest health and reducing the danger of catastrophic wildland fire. Fuels management employs various tools: suppression, fire use, thinning and prescribed burns to accomplish these goals.

More people than ever are building homes in a wildland-urban interface area. Fighting fires in these areas is very dangerous, expensive, and difficult. People living in the wildland-urban interface need to take an active role in protecting their homes from wildland fire. It is important that the fire-fighting community knows and understands the messages, and the importance of using every available opportunity to get the word out.

Objectives: The purpose of this communication plan is to inform Forest Service employees, the wider fire fighting community and others of the need for active land-management and active fire-management to protect ecosystems, communities, homes, and people. This plan has been developed to insure that the communities of the Carson National Forest are kept informed on all fire related activities. The plan is designed to incorporate all jurisdictions and cooperators in the gathering and dissemination of fire information. While this communication plan sets the general guidelines for fire information, communication plans for specific fire activities have been developed and will be used during a fire event.

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I. Actions:

- A. Deliver current, accurate, consistent information on the status of wildfires, prescribed fires, prevention, wildland urban interface areas, restrictions, closures, and smoke management on the Carson National Forest.
- B. Provide clear and concise information for public dissemination.
- C. Advise forest users, recreationists, hunters, etc. about the possible effects that wildfire, prescribed fire, restrictions, and closures may have on local communities.
- D. Alert all users of any potential danger as a result of wildfires or prescribed fire activities.
- E. Work with cooperators to coordinate key messages to better utilize communication tools to affect a larger audience.
- F. Provide a pro-active Fire Prevention Education message for communities and schools.
- G. Establish and maintain a good working relationship with state, regional and local media.

H. Emphasize **SAFETY** to all firefighting resources and general public.

II. Communication Contacts

A. Internal

1. The information necessary for the implementation of these objectives is to be shared internally with all Forest Service personnel, Fire Prevention Teams, Fire Information Officer, Public Affairs Officers, and Frontliners across the Forest and Taos Zone Coordination Center.
2. A “Burning Issues” form is to be completed on all prescription burn activities by FMOs and posted by FMOs and Frontliners. Completed forms are to be submitted to Fire Information Assistant and Taos Zone Dispatch for distribution of information at SO, Districts, Taos Zone and media contacts. Forms must be submitted with ample time to properly inform the public. A twenty four hour notification to Taos Zone Dispatch is required prior to ignition on published Rx burns.
3. Updated information on fire incidents and activities should be submitted from FMOs to Fire Information Assistant daily prior to 9:00 am. Fire Information Assistant will submit information to district and SO frontliners.
4. Fire Prevention Techs and Fire Information Officers (IOF) will be assigned as needed.
5. The Fire Prevention Communication Plan will be posted on the Carson National Forest Web Page for access by all employees and the general public at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson>.

B. External

Working with communities and local collaborators is key to implementing the National Fire Plan, a component of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Maximizing the use of the media to assist the public in understanding the message is imperative.

1. All fire related information will be coordinated through the Forest PAO for review and approval prior to distribution by the Fire Information Assistant or the PAO designee.

2. Fire related updates and press releases will be sent to Congressionals, State, Local and Tribal Government Officials, media and local communities by the Forest PAO, Fire Information Assistant or designee. Local communities will be contacted using “trapline” methods.
3. All fire related media contacts will be initiated by or directed to:

**Dorotea Martinez,
Fire Information Assistant
Carson National Forest
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571
Phone Number: 505-758-6345, Cell 741-1516
Fax: 505-758-6213**

III. Fire Restrictions and Closures

Under certain prolonged extreme fire weather conditions, normal prevention and detection measures may be insufficient to reasonably reduce the risk of a major conflagration. When such conditions occur, it sometimes becomes necessary to implement Fire Restrictions and Specific Area Closures.

The progression from “no restrictions” to “restriction” to “partial closure” to “full closure” should be viewed as a continuum. As fire danger and/or fire preparedness levels change, the line officer evaluates risks and compares those risks to the potential costs and benefits of imposing varying degrees of restrictions and/or closures. Each stage involves implementation of progressively more limiting restrictions. Restrictions are cumulative in nature – that is, Stage II continues to implement Stage I restrictions, while Stages III and IV closures continue to implement all Stage I and II restrictions, as appropriate. Within each progressive stage, the line officer has the option of adding controls to the restrictions and/or closures that are appropriate for the circumstances and that will best meet the fire restriction or closure objectives. The four stages of fire danger and the restrictions or closures that apply are as follows:

- A. Stage I (Restrictions)** – This first stage occurs when there is an increasing fire danger and/or increasing preparedness level and the risks of keeping the forest open to all activities begins to be outweighed by the risks inherent in doing so. Stage I imposes restrictions aimed at preventing the start of wildfires based on human activities that are know to be high risk, specifically smoking, campfires, and fireworks.

Definition: (Restricted Activities)

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire or stove fire except within a developed recreation site.
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site, or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable material.
3. Possessing, discharging or using any kind of firework or other pyrotechnic device.

The following persons are exempt from this order:

- a) Persons with a permit that authorizes actions specifically prohibited by this order.
- b) Any federal, state or local officer or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty.
- c) Lessees or permittees within the restricted area are exempt from prohibition 1 above, provided such fires are within their residence.

B. Stage II (restrictions) – As the risks increase, the line officer may choose to move to Stage II. This stage intensifies the restrictions from Stage I by focusing on activities that, although normally managed under permit or contract, have a relatively high risk of causing a fire start.

Restrictions under Stage II will affect forest users and will have additional economic impacts to contractors, permittees, and others. Therefore, the decision to move to Stage II will involve a risk benefit assessment as well as consideration of economic and social impacts.

Definition:

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire or stove fire.
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building.
3. Possessing, discharging or using any kind of firework or other pyrotechnic device.
4. Using any explosives.

5. Operating a chainsaw or other equipment powered by an internal combustion engine is prohibited from 1:00 pm to 1:00 am.
6. Operating or using any internal or external combustion engine without a spark arresting device properly installed, maintained and in effective working order.
7. Welding, or operating acetylene or other torch with open flame.
8. Possessing or using a motor vehicle off of National Forest System Roads, except when parking overnight in developed campgrounds and at trailheads.
9. Violating any state law concerning burning or fires which are for the purpose of preventing or restricting the spread of fire.

The following persons are exempt from this order:

- a) Persons with a permit that authorizes actions specifically prohibited by this order.
- b) Persons in a developed recreation site using a fire fueled solely by liquid petroleum or LPG fuels.
- c) Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty.
- d) Lessees or permittees within the restricted area are exempt from prohibition 1 above, provided such fires are within their residence.

C. Stage III (Closure) - Stage III is the closure of specific areas of the Forest. This stage is selected when the ability to mitigate risks using Stage I or II restrictions is no longer viable. The social, economic, and political impacts of implementing a partial closure at this point are outweighed by the benefits associated with virtually eliminating the potential for human-caused fire starts.

Definition:

Partial Forest closure, with very few exceptions as detailed in the closure order.

D. Stage IV (Closure) – Stage IV is full closure. This stage is selected when the ability to manage risks using Stage III closures is no longer viable. The social, economic and political impacts of implementing a full closure at this point are outweighed by the benefits associated with virtually eliminating the potential for human-caused fire starts.

Definition:

Full forest closures, with very few exceptions as detailed in the closure order.

IV. What About Closure?

The Southwest Area is continuing to experience some of the driest seasons in recorded history. The moisture of winter and spring of 2005 increased the concentrations of grasses and other fine flashy fuels in all terrain at all elevations. The combined long term drought, vegetation mortality from insect damage and heavy accumulation of forest litter and other fine fuels are all contributing factors to what can easily become a very active and early fire season. Increased and sustained amounts of precipitation will be necessary to significantly change the overall condition of the forest for an extended period of time.

As long as this continued trend of dry conditions exists, firefighting resources will suppress all unplanned fires, however, **under no circumstances will firefighter and public safety be compromised.**

Forest Service Resource Managers recognize the impact that a Closure could have on the communities, small businesses and forest visitors. All options will be looked at in order to minimize these impacts.

A critical factor in determining whether any type of closure should be implemented is the potential for numerous simultaneous wildfire starts. In trying to respond to these fire starts, we quickly exhaust all wildfire fighting resources. Implementing **SPECIFIC AREA CLOSURES** will allow us to keep visitors safe and reduce the risk of placing firefighters in potentially hazardous situations. It is important to stress that the unhealthy state of our forests coupled with the existing conditions of hot, dry weather, dry fuels and wind, will increase fires potential to grow quickly and cover large areas in a substantially short amount of time.

Persons or groups planning outings in the Forest in June and July **should** consider establishing alternative sites, **in the event that a Specific Area Closure is implemented.** They should contact the Forest Service prior to their travel to obtain information regarding the status of restrictions and closures by calling **1-877-864-6985**.

Information on the current fire level, fire restrictions and closures on the Carson National Forest can be found on the web at http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/html_main/list_fire.htm or by calling **1-877-864-6985**

A Fire Information Office has been established in the Supervisor's Office. The phone number is (505) 758-6345. The office is staffed from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday thru Friday. Hours may be extended during fire season as conditions dictate.

Information on fire level, restrictions and closures on Public Lands not in the Carson National Forest can be found on the web at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/fire/welcome.htm>, click on Fire Information.

V. Fire Information Outreach

- A. Fire Prevention Techs are scheduled to patrol all Districts. Should it be necessary to impose restrictions or closure, their efforts will extend Zone wide as we coordinate this effort with all our Zone partners.
- B. Fire Prevention Techs will continue Defensible Space, Campfire Safety and Healthy Forest campaigns as well as Forest Restrictions or Closure information by making personal contacts throughout the Forest and communities. They will also be available to conduct fire prevention activities in local schools and surrounding communities. During fire severity, AD Prevention Techs will be used on the Cumbres Toltec Railroad as part of our Fire Prevention Program, as well as in other areas. Fire Prevention Techs will coordinate with the Fire Information Assistant and district FMOs to keep communities apprised of Fire related activities (Rx burns, smoke, mechanical treatments, fire restrictions, etc.).
- C. Fire Information Assistant will be kept current on fire related information from the district to be able to respond to inquiries from the public, make appropriate media contacts and provide information internally.
- D. In order to be effective, the forest signing program must be timely and correct. The FMO/AFMO will be responsible for notifying district personnel of changes in fire conditions and together with the Prevention Techs will be responsible for posting signs in their respective areas.

VI. Prescribed Fire Projects

- A. Currently two thirds of federally managed wildlands are at risk from catastrophic fires. Aggressive fuels management is an important step in restoring forest health and reducing the danger of catastrophic wildland fire.
- B. There are prescribed fire projects planned on all Ranger Districts of the Carson National Forest. The objective of these projects is to reduce fuel loads, create firebreaks, and improve forest health.
- C. These projects will be implemented when climate and fuel conditions meet the pre-established burning prescriptions. Should any component of the prescription

be out of compliance, the project will not be implemented. These projects will be closely monitored at all times.

- D. Fire Information Assistant and Fire Prevention Techs **will** properly notify the public of the project including date, location, size, purpose, smoke emissions, etc.
- E. All prescribed burn activity will be posted with the Southwestern Region and the Southwestern Coordinating Center (SWCC) by Taos Zone Dispatch.
- F. Maps of projects can be found on the web at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/> under air quality and Smoke Management Program.

VI. Smoke Management

- A. Smoke emissions will be a primary concern for Fire Management Officials. Quick and safe initial attack response to all fires possible can minimize duration, resulting in less smoke emissions.
- B. In the event of a wildland fire, there is a potential for long-term fire activity, which will cause smoke emissions for days or even weeks. The public will be kept informed as to the anticipated duration of such an event and potential smoke hazard levels.
- C. Postings and personal contacts will be made prior to any ignition in communities to be affected by smoke from prescribed burns.
- D. For more information on smoke management, check Air Quality on the New Mexico Environmental Department website at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/> .

VIII. Prevention Message

- A. Healthy Forests are important to our community. They produce income, enjoyment, and other benefits to society and the environment. Our primary goal for the 2005 fire season is to reduce the number of human caused fires. We kindly ask all forest users, local resident and visitors to:
 - 1. Exercise extreme caution in and around the forest and the community. All types of vegetation and fuels are extremely dry and could easily result in the rapid spread of a fire.
 - 2. Make sure your campfire is dead out by using plenty of water so that coals are cold to the touch.
 - 3. Please obey all restrictions and/or specific area closure orders; they have been implemented in the interest of public and firefighter safety.

4. If you live in an urban interface setting, where heavy fuels (trees, grasses, and brush) surround your home, help reduce your risk of wildfire by developing **Defensible Space** around your home. Contact your local Fire Department, State Forester or Forest Service Office for information about **Defensible Space**.

IX. Safety Message

A. Being safe is everyone's responsibility whether it's at home, at work or at play in your National Forest.

1. If you live in an urban interface setting, where heavy fuels (trees, grasses, and brush) surround your home, help reduce your risk of wildfire by developing **Defensible Space** around your home.
2. Be careful with all types of ignition sources, especially near grasses and on windy days. Keep informed on current fire conditions and restrictions.
3. Make sure your campfire is cold and dead out. Abandoned campfires are the major source of human caused fires.
4. Forest Visitors are encouraged to contact local Forest Service offices to obtain current information on fire activity.

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http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/html_main/list_fire.htm

or by calling 1-877-864-6985

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<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/fire/welcome.htm>, click on Fire Information.

X. How Are We Doing?

A. What is the tone of our message?

We are striving to maintain a positive and courteous attitude in delivering the message of fire prevention education and safety. It is important that we share the message that we have implemented restrictions as a necessity due to the severe dry conditions and unhealthy state of our forests. Our message is a positive one of genuine concern for the safety of forest users, our communities and firefighters.

The success of our fire prevention efforts will be measured by the number of human caused fire starts and by the satisfaction of other agencies and partners that they are informed and have sufficient tools to assist in informing the public about prevention, restrictions and closures.

Notes:

Prevention activities planned for the week should be submitted to Fire Information each Monday along with “Carson Community Events” forms with previous week’s activities. All activities should have photo documentation for possible media release.

Weekly Conference calls between Prevention Techs, Frontliners, and Fire Information will be scheduled to insure that information is being shared and determine if resources need to be shifted to a district for additional help.

Actions: In coordination with Fire Information Assistant, all districts will develop action plans and calendars to implement the wildfire prevention program. Each plan needs to include the following:

1. Use of established protocol for dissemination of information through Frontliners to Fire Information Tech.
2. Establish contact with school district.
3. Establish contact with local governments.
4. Establish contact with local fire departments.
5. Establish “Traplines” for each community.
6. Establish key contact list and method of contact for each.
7. Establish and maintain information “Kits” with materials on prevention and other agency information
8. Determine any other materials and resources necessary to carry out the prevention program.
9. Attend NEPA scoping meetings

Each of these items requires an action, example, #6 Obtain community calendar of events, and follow through with scheduling and attending the event to disseminate wildfire prevention information.

While these elements are necessary to conduct the program, we encourage districts to be innovative with their plans, as we can all learn from each other.