



News Release
USDA Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
300 West Congress
Tucson, AZ 85701
www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado

Effective Immediately

CONTACT: Heidi Schewel (520) 388-8484

CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST PRESCRIBED FIRE
Agua Caliente Burn to Improve Wildlife Habitat and Watersheds

TUCSON, AZ (May 7, 2008) – The Coronado National Forest, in partnership with Arizona Game and Fish Department, plans to use prescribed fire on 11,000 acres in the area of Agua Caliente Hill in Redington Pass, east of Tucson, to reduce heavy accumulations of brush, which will restore wildlife habitat, improve watershed conditions, and reduce future wildfire potential.

Currently scheduled for ignition on May 12th, the two-day burn is dependent on weather and vegetation conditions that fall within narrowly defined tolerances – called the “prescription” -- so the ignition date is subject to some adjustment, though the “burn window” is *not* likely to exceed more than a week. If the burn cannot be completed during the week of May 12 or soon after, it will likely be postponed until fall of 2008.

Occurring approximately three miles inside the National Forest Boundary, the fire will remain far away from residences that border Redington Pass; however, smoke will be visible from the Tucson Basin. During the day, smoke will generally disperse to the east, away from Tucson. At night, when the fire is less active, winds *may* shift, carrying light smoke westward toward the city. Residents in the vicinity of Redington Pass may notice the odor of smoke.

Crews have already prepared the burn area by constructing control lines on the ground, and, on the first day of ignition, will further secure the burn perimeter by “blacklining,” a method of applying fire to a swath of vegetation immediately inside the control lines to create a wide barrier to contain the fire within the designated area. On the second day, fire will be applied to the interior of the burn area using an aerial ignition method in which small plastic spheres containing potassium permanganate and ethylene glycol (referred to as “ping pong balls”) are dropped from a helicopter. The chemicals react thermally to produce fire that ignites vegetation.

Prescribed fire restores declining wildlife habitat and watershed conditions. This area is now overgrown with thick brush which, in part, has altered the natural fire regime from frequent low-intensity fires to infrequent high-intensity fires that can move upslope from

Redington Pass into the Santa Catalina or Rincon Mountains. Plants used as forage by wildlife have become coarse, dense and overcrowded. The post-fire landscape will support a variety of grasses and forbs, which are more palatable and nutritious for wildlife species.

The burn area will be closed to the public, and access to Redington Pass will be limited for the duration of prescribed fire activities. As currently scheduled, a pilot car will lead through traffic between the end of the pavement on Redington Road to Milepost 11 on May 12, 13 and possibly 14.

The Bellota Trail from the trailhead east of Catalina Highway will be closed to the junction with Redington Road and Agua Caliente Trail will be closed May 12 through approximately May 18, depending on weather and fire conditions. (These dates are subject to modification based on the actual date of ignition during the burn window.)

Cooperating organizations include Rincon Valley Fire Department, Rural Metro Fire Department, Saguaro National Park and the Tubac Fire Department.

For more information about the Agua Caliente Prescribed Fire, the public can visit www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado, or phone 520-388-8308.