



Hazards of Walking Through a Recently Burned Forest....or Reasons to Stay Out of the Las Conchas Fire area

A recently burned forest is a very dangerous place to venture. The lack of vegetation in the burned area will contribute to high run off from almost any rainstorm or thunderstorm in the fire area. It is possible to see peak flows **10 times larger** than the past normal. This is a significant danger for anyone in the fire area, in particular in drainage bottom location where many roads are located.

The fire has weakened or killed a great number of trees and they could fall any time with no advanced warning. Trees that still have green needles may have had their root system burned away, and may topple over in a slight breeze without warning. This is especially true for spruce trees. Burned branches may also fall from standing trees.

Trees that were consumed completely in the fire leave a "stump hole" and this may not be visible because of ash and dirt. It is very easy to break an ankle if you step in one of these. They may also still hold hot embers which can burn you.

On hillsides, where root systems that held rocks in place are now burned away, rocks may give way and roll down the hill. Footing can be tricky where the rocks are now loose.

Ground-nesting wasps can be disturbed by the fire and become quite agitated.

It is better to wait one or two years before walking through a burned forest. And even then you must be very cautious. Most of the weakest trees will have fallen in the first year, but snags will continue to fall for many years to come.

Lastly, agency personnel will have people and equipment working in the fire area for some time. The combination of the roads and work traffic adds a level of congestion which adds to hazards in the area.

Certain areas of the burned forest will experience radical change as a result of flooding, erosion and mudslides. With mudslides, it is not a matter of "if", but it is "when".

These issues are significant and will likely lead to the existing access restrictions continuing for some time.

Please refer to the emergency Area Closure Orders and Fire Restrictions on the Santa Fe National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/sfe/conditions/index.html>; or call 1-877-971-3473; contact your local ranger district or the Forest Supervisor's office.