



# NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service

Daniel Boone National Forest

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For Immediate Release

## **PRESCRIBED FIRE: AN ANCIENT CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S FOREST**

If you live near the Daniel Boone National Forest, you may see some smoke over the next several weeks. Professional fire personnel are gearing up to burn nearly 14,500 acres across the eastern Kentucky landscape during the 2004 fire season. The Forest Service refers to these burns as “prescribed fires,” set under controlled conditions to meet specific land management objectives. As a doctor prescribes medication for a patient, prescribed burns are used to improve various forest conditions.

Prescribed fire is nothing new to Kentucky’s forests. Humans have used fire to influence the landscape for thousands of years. Native Americans used fire to drive game during hunting and to clear vegetation for agriculture and travel. European settlers continued the practice of burning for farming and grazing of livestock. Most of today’s forests and grasslands have been shaped by fire. Many plant and animal species depend on habitats maintained by fire.

The prescribed fires that are currently planned for the Daniel Boone are being proposed to meet various objectives, depending on the location of the proposed burn. One of the objectives is to reduce woodland ground fuels by conducting “fuel reduction burns.” Prescribed burning reduces leaf litter and woody debris on the forest floor that can fuel uncontrolled wildfires. Woodland fuels are at a record high due to insect and ice storm damage. These added fuels increase the potential for larger, hotter wildfires to occur. Prescribed burning can minimize the impacts that result from wildfires.

Within the past five years, the Daniel Boone National Forest has come under detrimental assault by two native insects: the southern pine beetle and the two-lined chestnut borer. The southern pine beetle epidemic has resulted in forest-wide losses of mature pine, while the two-lined chestnut borer continues to attack mature oak trees. Prescribed fire in insect damaged areas is proposed for “ecosystem restoration,” to promote forest health and the regeneration of pine and oak where it once occurred. Prescribed fire is a tool used to prepare sites for planting by clearing the forest floor and reducing competition for tree seedlings.

Some of the proposed burns are planned to improve habitat for wildlife. Foraging opportunities are enhanced as fire promotes and maintains native grasses and other vegetation that many

wildlife species depend on for food. Plant diversity increases as fire releases nutrients to the soil and allows for new growth, providing a protective cover for many game and non-game wildlife species.

Prescribed fires are controlled by the construction of “firelines” or by the use of natural fire barriers such as roads and streams. A detailed burn plan, or prescription, is written for each area to be burned. The burn plan considers the proximity of each private residence, business or road. The prescription is designed to minimize impacts to the public or limit impacts to a very short period of time. The burn plan considers specific weather conditions such as temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and wind direction required to conduct each burn successfully. Such specific weather requirements reduce burning opportunities, limiting the number of days suitable for prescribed burning.

Arsonists set the majority of woodland fires in Kentucky, creating uncontrolled wildfires that pose a tremendous threat to lives and property. The major differences between prescribed fires and wildfires due to arson are:

1. Prescribed fires are controlled with pre-established firelines in place; arson fires are set without any established control lines.
2. Prescribed fires are set by a team of professional firefighters who are on site from start to finish, using backfires to control fire intensity; arson fires are set “on the run” by individuals without professional fire training.
3. Prescribed fires are set under suitable weather conditions for safe and productive burns; arson fires are set under any weather condition with the intent that they rage out of control to achieve the most damage.

Arson is a felony offense punishable by fines and imprisonment. Citizens who witness arson are urged to contact the Target Arson Hotline at 1-800-27-ARSON.

The public may contact their local United States Forest Service office with any questions regarding prescribed burning in their area.

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