



FACT SHEET



United States Department of Agriculture
Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

United States Department of Interior
Web: <http://www.doi.gov>

Healthy Forests Initiative Update for Arizona

Current Forest Conditions

In 2002, the effects of a large bark beetle outbreak across Arizona became obvious to the general public. Several native bark beetle species are responding to the weakened condition of over-crowded, drought-stricken forests. These native bark beetles are typically present in small populations. However, in Arizona, several species of beetles have taken advantage of trees weakened by drought and overcrowding and infested large tracts of forests. The resulting outbreak has killed millions of ponderosa and piñon pine trees. The trees most affected are those in stress-prone sites, such as the Mogollan Rim.

While bark beetle outbreaks have occurred in the past, unprecedented overcrowding in today's forests is leading to extraordinary tree losses. The area affected in 2002 is a seven-fold increase from 2001 and is a twenty-fold increase over the 1998 to 2001 average. Specifically, total acres infected with pine bark beetles on Arizona forests in 2001 was 78,600; in 2002, it increased to 564,600 as of the time that surveys were done in August and September.

Projects to strategically remove infested trees and protect uninfested areas are underway. Thinning to reduce overcrowded forest conditions and enhance the vigor of individual trees is ongoing. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior are also educating the public about how to minimize bark beetle impacts.

2003 Fire Season

As of August 10, 2,004 wildland fires in Arizona have burned 185,294 acres. The most recent large fire (mid-July) was the Kinishba fire that burned more than 20,000 acres on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in east central Arizona.

The most destructive wildland fire of the season has been the Aspen Fire that began on June 17th in the Santa Catalina Mountains above Tucson, Arizona. On the afternoon of June 19, strong winds and low humidity combined to push the fire northeast through the small community of Summerhaven where 333 structures burned that day. The Aspen fire was contained on July 15, 2003 after burning 84,750 total acres. The cost of fighting the fire was more than \$16 million.

Currently fire danger is very high in northeastern Arizona, although tempered somewhat by the beginning of monsoonal moisture for the state. Northeast Arizona also has the greatest potential for new large fires. The threat of lightning ignitions remains high, although cooler, more humid conditions (especially nighttime recovery) should increase the chances that new fires will be suppressed with initial attack.

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Resources for Fighting and Preventing Catastrophic Wildfires Have More than Doubled

Fire preparedness funding for Arizona in 2003 is more than double 2000 levels. The Forest Service plans to maintain personnel and equipment in Arizona at the FY 2002 levels of 914 firefighting personnel, 7 helicopters, and 80 engines. DOI plans to maintain a firefighting workforce of 502 firefighting personnel, 61 engines, 6 helicopters, 8 water/foam tenders, 6 dozers, 4 boats, and 6 airtankers, 6 tractor plows, and one other aircraft. Depending upon wildfire circumstances across the country, resources supplement the baseline firefighting force maintained by the two Departments.

Funding for hazardous fuels reduction in Arizona exceeds \$37 million, more than double the 2000 funding level. In 2003 Federal agencies will complete treatments on more than 218,000 acres, nearly double the total acres treated in 2002.

Recovery Efforts from the 2002 Fire Season - Rodeo-Chediski Fire are Ongoing

In 2002, Arizona experienced record hot and dry conditions throughout much of the state. A reported 3,041 wildland fires burned more than 700,000 acres. The most severe of these was the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. At 468,638 acres, it was the largest and most destructive wildfire in the state's history. The communities of Lakeside, Pinetop, Hon Dah, Clay Springs, Linden, Heber, Overgaard and Show Low were evacuated for extended periods during the fire. Approximately 13,500 structures were threatened and 491 were lost, including 465 homes, 6 commercial properties, and 20 outbuildings. Suppression costs were approximately \$43.1 million.

Areas within the fire's perimeter where the forest was thinned contributed greatly to a change in fire behavior and intensity. A review of the Rodeo-Chediski fire showed the thinned areas to be a vibrant green mosaic within the larger burned area.

In 2002 emergency stabilization treatments implemented in the Rodeo-Chediski fire area by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs totaled \$19.9 million. Treatments included seeding (228,500 acres), mulching (34,500 acres), hazard tree removal (302 miles), erosion control barriers (1,000 acres), reforestation (1,000 acres), emergency road treatments (130 miles) and other stabilization work. Lawsuits delayed or threatened to stop several of these treatments, however, a July 9, 2003, U.S. Federal District Court ruling allowed the treatments to proceed.

Long-term treatments on 124,000 acres in the Rodeo-Chediski fire area will be completed in FY03 including watershed hillside treatments, such as seeding and mulching; heritage and threatened and endangered species protection; and replacement and repair of forest infrastructure, such as boundary and internal fencing, roads, trails, and recreation facilities. Six treatments totaling approximately 3,000 acres will use new categorical exclusions provided under the Healthy Forests Initiative.

To download more information on the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>

August 2003