

Fire in the Natural Ecosystem

Fire in the wildlands is a natural process of the environment. The vegetation and landscapes of Colorado are created primarily by fire, and have adapted to fire. Fire is needed to maintain healthy forests, generate new forests and recycle nutrients in our dry climates.

The climatic pattern of spring drought followed by summer lightning storms has persisted for thousands of years in the southwest. Historically, frequent low to moderate intensity fires burned throughout the many forest types on the San Isabel National Forest. Most of these fires were caused by lightning, extinguished themselves naturally, and reduced the level of combustible forest fuels at regular intervals.

However, more effective suppression over the past 100 years has allowed fuel loads to build to levels which now can support large-scale, high severity fires. Other changes, such as climatic cycles, over this time period have also increased the frequency and intensity of wildfires.

Meanwhile population growth has increased the number of homes and communities at risk that require protection. Greater demand for water has placed additional emphasis on protecting critical watersheds. Initial attack suppression is successful on about 98 percent of all fires on National Forest lands. This is effective in the short-term, but in the long run the inevitable consequence is higher intensity fires that are harder (and sometimes impossible) to control and negative impacts to our communities and other values such as wildlife habitat and watersheds.

Proactive actions such as thinning and prescribed fire are needed across the vast landscape to reduce the hazard in the long run. Prescribed fire is a tool which can reduce risk to our values through reducing fuel loads as well as mimicking important natural processes such as recycling of nutrients, improving vegetative diversity and wildlife habitat, and regenerating grasses and shrubs. Reducing the potential for high intensity fires also lowers the risk to firefighters and the public which are our highest valued resources.

Prescribed (RX) Fire on the San Isabel National Forest



...to sustain the health,
diversity and productivity
of the Nation's forests and
grasslands to meet the
needs of present and future
generations



Pike-San Isabel National Forests &
Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands

Prescribed (RX) Fire

Each prescribed burn has a detailed prescribed fire plan developed from the comprehensive planning efforts conducted long before the project activities are initiated. The burn plan provides guidelines for what objectives are desired, when and where to burn, under what conditions to burn, acceptable fire behavior, organization, contingency plans for fire control, smoke management and public concerns. Daily weather conditions play a key role in go/no go decisions. This is the reason why prescribed burns may be cancelled at the last minute and predicting the exact day of a burn is difficult. Smoke from all prescribed burns is closely monitored to ensure that the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division regulations and permit requirements are being met. Prescribed fire smoke may affect your health. For more information see: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health>



The primary objective when land managers conduct fuels reduction projects is to reduce the possibility of large wildfires which can, among other things, generate dangerous amounts of smoke. The amount

and duration of lingering smoke created from prescribed fires is minimal compared to the numerous dense smoke-filled days of many summers, which are due to the numerous large wildfires that have occurred throughout the West.

Planned Prescribed (RX) Fire Events

Salida RD 719-539-3591

- Cleveland Mountain: Between CR 210 & Hwy 285 (Chaffee County)

Leadville RD 719-486-0749

- Railroad Bridge Piles: Between CR 371 & CR 375 (Chaffee County)

San Carlos RD 719-269-8500

- 12-Mile – vicinity of San Isabel near State Highways 78 & 165 (Pueblo & Custer Counties)
- Cuchara – near Highway 12 N of Cuchara (Huerfano County)
- Black Mountain – N of Gardner (Huerfano County)
- Greenhorn – along the crest of the Wet Mountains, near Forest Service Roads 401 & 369 (Custer County)

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