

## **EMNRD, Forestry Division, January 14, 2004**

### **General Information About the 2004 Fire Season**

#### **Why we are worried about wildland fires.**

Fire is a natural part of our natural environment

People live in this fire environment, where homes are built and maintained without regard to wildfire

With more people using our wildland more fire ignitions are likely

Today's wildland fires burn more intensely and are more difficult to control due to increased fuels build ups.

Today's wildland fires result in:

- 1) Greater risk to the public,
- 2) Damage to natural resources,
- 3) and increased costs to fight wildland fires.

#### **2004 Preliminary Fire Season Outlook for New Mexico**

The Weather Service predicts the weather outlook for New Mexico will be warmer and drier than average resulting in increased fire activity.

We are expecting a very active wildland fire season this spring and summer. Normal "fire season" in New Mexico occurs from May 1st to July 15<sup>th</sup>. This year expect large fires to occur early, in March and April.

The Southwest Coordination Center 's preliminary fire season outlook, published January 13, 2004, advises there is potential for a severe fire season, similar to 2002.

In 2002, the EMNRD Forestry Division took action on over 1100 wildland fires that burned more than 323,000 acres on non-municipal, non-federal lands (state and private).

- More than 225,000 acres of commercial forestland was burned.
- Twelve (12) fires were 5000 acres or greater.
- Nine (9) fires threatened New Mexico communities causing evacuations and destruction of homes and property.
- The State of New Mexico expended over \$23.0 million dollars for emergency fire suppression.

Weather/climate factors influencing this fire season:

- Long term drought
- Deficit in current seasonal moisture and snow pack
- Prediction for below normal precipitation for the remainder of the 2004 season.

Fuel factors influencing this fire season:

- Live and dead fuels will be drier than usual and more readily available for combustion.
- Fine fuels such as grass are more abundant than in 2002 and will result in fires spreading more rapidly.
- Deforestation due to drought and insects will add to the fuel loading and will increase fire intensities in Ponderosa fuel types. (We anticipate the needles will fall off the Santa Fe area piñon pine and the potential for crown fires will actually be reduced)

Spring precipitation is unreliable however, timely moisture that can reduce fire danger.

### **The need to prepare and respond.**

To prepare for the upcoming fire season EMNRD, Forestry must work cooperatively with

- Federal agencies responsible for wildfire management, including the US Forest Service, to plan and coordinate fire suppression resources.
- Department of Public Safety, Office of Emergency Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to plan for community evacuations and cost recovery.
- Local governments to train, equip, and mobilize fire departments.
- Communities at risk from catastrophic wildland fire to continue fire prevention and fuels reduction projects.

During fire season EMNRD, Forestry must

- Keep fire fighters and the public safe and minimize loss of property and natural resources,
- Be cost effective in our fire fighting efforts.
- Provide prompt reimbursement of vendors who provide services for emergency fire fighting effort.

### **Fire Fighter and Public Safety**

We are stressing safety first on all fires. We are reminding all New Mexico fire fighters to be physically fit and fire ready. Fighting fires in the wildland environment can be overwhelming, especially when the safety of the public and their homes are at stake.

Firefighting is dangerous. Firefighters are reminded: "Don't Bet Your Life". Firefighters are reminded to stay calm and organized, think clearly, act decisively.

Citizens who live in areas that can be impacted by wildland fire can prepare by providing fire fighters a defensible space around their homes. Citizens should reduce fire danger by treating flammable vegetation near their home.