



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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News Release

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Dry Lake Fire News Update

Bayfield, Colo., August 4, 2023 – Over 120 fire personnel are assigned to the Dry Lake Fire, which is burning in the First Notch area on the Columbine Ranger District. The lightning-caused fire ignited within a network of Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) trails and Forest Service System Roads that will be used as containment lines. Today, firefighters are “blacklining” these roads and trails to suppress the fire. Blacklining removes fuel on one side of containment lines to make them wider. This activity means residents and travelers will see more smoke coming off this fire. This evening, smoke may settle between Yellowjacket Pass and Chimney Rock on the Highway 160 corridor, and into the Piedra River drainage toward Arboles.

The Dry Lake fire is burning within a tract of land that was treated by a prescribed fire in 2019 and was planned for a second prescribed burn this fall. Fire crews have been preparing control lines using the surrounding roads and OHV trails in the roughly 1400-acre section for the past several weeks that will now be used for wildfire containment. “This wildfire scenario is precisely why we do prescribed burns,” says Incident Commander Brad Pietruszka. “Reducing hazardous fuels on the forest makes wildfires easier to contain and reduces the long-term risk of catastrophic wildfire in these areas,” Pietruszka added. Fire managers expect low-to-moderate fire behavior over the next several days.

The San Juan National Forest Incident Management Team (IMT) is managing the firefighting efforts. Benefits of reintroducing fire in this landscape include reducing hazardous fuels, encouraging the growth of native plants, increasing species diversity in the understory, restoring ecological balance, and reducing the potential for future high-severity wildfires. These efforts align with the Forest Service's 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy, which aims to increase the use of fire on the landscape as well as other treatments to improve forest resiliency for generations to come.

Smoke will be visible to travelers along US Highway 160 between Bayfield and Pagosa Springs, and to some residents in Ignacio and Archuleta County. Please watch for extra fire traffic in the area and along First Notch Road (FR 620) this week and into this weekend.

Wildfire smoke may affect your health. For more information, please go to:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health>

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