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USDA FOREST SERVICE, 160A ZILICOA STREET, ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

NEWS • RELEASE

Contact: Terry Seyden
828-231-4009
terryseyden@yahoo.com

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Lightning Starts Two New Fires Near Linville Gorge

Lightning started two new fires in the Linville Gorge area of the Pisgah National Forest late Friday afternoon. The fires are on national forest land in Burke County about six miles apart from each other. As of 10:00 am Sunday, the Dobson Knob fire, three miles north of Lake James, had burned over 250 acres. The Shortoff Mountain fire has burned about 125 acres on the east side of Linville River within the Linville Gorge Wilderness.

The fires are currently burning on national forest lands and no private lands or homes are threatened. State and federal helicopters and air tankers made water and retardant drops yesterday to help slow down the fires and are available today if needed. Two dozers are also being used to construct containment lines around the perimeter of the fires.

Approximately 140 firefighters are now on the scene battling the two blazes, and more crews are en route.

The hot, dry weather the last two months in western North Carolina has created unusually high fire danger conditions for this late in the season. “The extended drought and a buildup of dead pines killed by southern pine beetle outbreaks have combined to cause these fires to burn much hotter and spread faster than what we normally see”, said U.S. Forest spokesman Terry Seyden.

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At this time the Forest Service does not have an estimate of when these two fires will be contained. Long range weather forecasts call for continued hot, dry conditions which will make it more difficult to bring these fires under control. “What we really need is an extended period of heavy, soaking rains, but unfortunately that’s not in the forecast,” Seyden added.

To ensure public safety, trails in the southern part of Linville Gorge Wilderness area will be closed until further notice. The public can check for updated fire information at the National Forests in North Carolina website <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc>.

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