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NEWS • RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Rains Bring Some Relief to Linville Gorge Firefighters

JUNE 15, 2007--Scattered heavy rain showers across the area last night and today brought some relief to 373 federal and state firefighters working on the Linville Gorge fires in the Pisgah National Forest. Between 0.8 and 1.0 inches of rain fell on the Dobson Knob and Shortoff Mountain fires overnight knocking back the fires and allowing crews to continue building and strengthening containment lines. As of 4 pm Friday, approximately 1,700 acres have burned from these two Burke County fires that were started by lightening a week ago June 6.

Fire lines have been completed around the 818 acre Dobson Knob fire and officials hope to be able to declare it contained this weekend. The Shortoff Mountain Fire poses more of a problem because it is located in the Linville Gorge Wilderness where the steep, rugged terrain makes direct attack on the fire extremely difficult.

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Wildland firefighters hope to continue burnouts or “back fires” to clear out combustible fuels inside the control lines to make it more difficult for wildfires to jump the lines. The burnouts will be done in stages as needed and may take several days to complete.

“We currently have 373 firefighters working on these fires” said Incident Information Officer Bill Sweet. “We are using 4 helicopters, 13 engines, four dozers and one fixed wing support aircraft, Sweet said. “Our priority remains to protect private property and to confine the fire within the Linville Gorge Wilderness,” Sweet added.

The Linville Gorge Wilderness remains closed to the public until further notice. “It is still not safe for the public to enter these areas, especially as we do the burn out operations and before the fire is declared totally under control,” said Grandfather District Ranger Joy Malone.

“The precipitation reduced the fire activity but we are not ready to say that the fires are under control, said Forest Service spokesman Terry Seyden. “The soils and vegetation in the Linville Gorge Wilderness were extremely dry because of the extended drought. If we don’t get additional rain, the area could quickly dry out and the fire could resume actively burning.”

The public can check for updated fire information at the National Forests in North Carolina website <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc>. Detailed maps showing the current locations of the fires have recently been posted on this site

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Note to reporters: unless conditions significantly change, this will be the last scheduled daily news update on the Linville Fire Complex. For the latest fire information, contact Incident Information Officer Bill Sweet at the numbers listed above.