

Huron-Manistee National Forests

Success Story



Fire crews watch the prescribed fire near the Mio office information board.

Prescribed burn at USFS office in Mio

It is not unusual to see Huron National Forest fire personnel conducting prescribed burns. In fact, during the 2008 spring season, crews have safely accomplished 14 prescribed burns to date, encompassing approximately 3500 acres of USFS lands.

However, the prescribed burn that occurred on Tuesday April 29 was unusual in that it took place on the 26 acres of USFS land around the brand new Mio District Ranger Station complex. The new facility was completed in 2006 and prior to the burn, was surrounded by land containing high levels of hazardous fuels. If a wildfire event were to occur, both the new Forest Service buildings as well as the neighboring residences and businesses would be at an elevated risk of potential damage. Huron National Forest Fire Management Officer Chris Johnson said that: "We always talk the talk about the value of prescribed burns in reducing hazardous levels of fuel loading. It was time for us to walk the walk."

April 29 was chosen as the day to conduct the prescribed burn because of the specific weather conditions that were present. Temperatures were cool and helped to keep the fire at a low intensity. Also, the winds were slight and were moving in a direction that kept the majority of the smoke away from populated areas.

When the decision was made to conduct the prescribed burn on the morning of the 29th, fire personnel went door-to-door informing businesses and adjacent residents of the plans for the day. The burn was ignited at noon and was completed by 4:00 PM. The fire was ignited slowly and in sections that were staffed and observed by fire personnel. The smoke column drifted away from the site to the southeast. During the burn, visibility along the adjacent highway was fine. Fire personnel directed traffic on a secondary road for a short time to ensure public safety. During the burn, the Mio District office remained open for business as usual. Employees continued with their duties and customers were able to come in and do business. Following the burn, fire personnel worked onsite to monitor the smoke and to ensure that the fire was completely out.

Planning for this prescribed burn took over a year and involved site analysis and examination of the anticipated environmental effects. Concerns were raised by members of the public during the planning phases which were taken into consideration in the development of the project. The primary concerns were regarding the effects of smoke in town and the potential for the fire to escape from the prescribed area. By choosing the right day and the right weather conditions, the possibility for either to happen was greatly decreased.

Assistant Fire Management Officer Charlie Patterson was very pleased with the end results of the prescribed burn. He stated that: "All aspects of the prescribed burn went smoothly and there was a minimum disturbance to the community. We met our objectives of reducing fuels and re-introducing fire into the environment."