

NEWS RELEASE

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Date: November 30, 2005

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Planning Prescribed Fires Takes Skill and the Right Conditions

Spearfish, SD – It's already been the best year for prescribed burning in the Black Hills in a decade and crews have burned almost 4,000 acres since October 1.

With a little help from her friends, Pam Brown, Northern Hills District Ranger, hopes to prescribe burn over 1,900 acres of pine forest just south of Spearfish to help make the forests and neighborhoods near the forest more fire-worthy.

“What we're trying to do is clean up fuels on the forest floor along roads to serve as fuel breaks or adjacent to private land next to homes,” Brown said. Part of the area has been treated with a piece of machinery with a mechanical head that breaks trees and shrubs in tiny pieces and scatters them on the forest floor, she said. The result is a clean area without any big pieces of slash lying around.

Fire management officer Randy Skelton, said planning successful prescribed fires take science, skill, and experience, and lots of help. “We have very stringent prescription standards that we adhere to in regards to smoke, fuel moistures, wind speed, temperatures, relative humidity,” he said. “All of those have to be just right before we actually put fire on the ground.”

Frank Castillo, a Smokejumper from Missoula, MT is here with other firefighters including California's Sierra Hotshots and Black Hills crews to help make sure the fires stay in the lines. “Of course in the fall and in the spring is when you really need to introduce fire to the forest,” Castillo said. “It's much easier to handle than in the heat of July when things are going to town on you.” Castillo has been from Mississippi to Michigan already this year.

While the district waits for better weather for prescribed burning, the district now with snow cover has an opportunity to burn 20,000 hand piles generated from fuel reduction projects and an estimated 800 piles from timber sales.

Meanwhile, crews from Rapid City and the Mystic Ranger District have accomplished 1,550 acres of prescribed burning in the Horse Creek and Nugget Gulch areas since the end of October. They plan to accomplish an additional 1,000 to 1,500 acres in the Horse Creek and Bald Hills areas this winter.

Hell Canyon Ranger District crews near Custer have burned about 700 of its 1,400 acre goal south of Pringle near Wind Cave National Park. Snow cover is allowing crews to start pile burning near the communities of Custer, Keystone, and in the Limestone area where visible smoke may be seen from Hill City.

The Bearlodge Ranger District in Sundance, Wyo has completed their prescribed burning for the season. 1,600 acres was completed on October 27th.

INTERVIEWS ON TAPE:**Cody Rose, Firefighter**

“Out here today my job is an ignition specialist on the Horse Nugget RX and what that does is go through where people actually put the fire on the ground to do the lighting. Out here today the fuels we are getting some pretty heavy concentration to ground fuels so we are getting heavy concentration to ground fuels so we are getting a little bit of active fire behavior but overall the fire behavior is fairly moderate. We do have some of the grasses a little moist still so we are not getting a whole lot of real fire or increased fire activity but it is burning fairly well today.”

Randy Skelton, Fire Management Officer, Northern Hill Ranger District

“We are not out there burning stuff to burn it and we have a very stringent prescription standards that we adhere to regards to smoke, fuel moistures, wind speed, temperatures, relative humidity and all those have to be just right before we actually put fire on the ground.”

Ken Jordan, Superintendent, Sierra Interagency Hotshot Crew

“We have to do a few things. Open up the road so we can access it with the engines and the holding crews and the lighters that will light. The other thing is secure the road so the fire want cross outside the unit. So that means we take down all the dead snags that are standing so they want fall across the road and any place.”

Frank Castillo, Squad Leader, Missoula Smoke Jumper

“Of course in the fall and in the spring that is when you really need to introduce fire to the forest. It’s much easier to handle than in the heat of July when things are going to town on you. This is exactly what we do all over the country. Infact, we also have people in North Dakota doing fire and come spring time we also go to Mississippi all over region eight and Michigan. So when we’re not jumping this is exactly what our job entails is helping forest no matter where they are at with their prescribed fire and project work.”

Pam Brown, Northern Hills District Ranger

“What we’re trying to do with the Griggs Project is clean up fuels on the forest floor either adjacent to the roads to serve as fuel breaks or adjacent to private land next to

homes. The area you are looking at behind me we are actually came in with a piece of machinery with a big mechanical head that's almost like a big mowing head and it comes down on top of the trees and shrubs and actually breaks them up in tiny pieces and scatters them on the forest floor. So what you see as a result is you have really clean finished product and you don't have any big pieces of slash laying around on the forest floor anymore.”
