

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service Pacific
Umatilla National Forest

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UMATILLA NATIONAL FOREST IMPLEMENTS FALL PRESCRIBED BURNING PLAN

"Cooler temperatures and scattered rain showers have improved forest conditions enough to begin implementing the Umatilla National Forest's fall prescribed burning program," announces Brian Goff, Deputy Fire Staff Officer. Forest visitors can expect to encounter prescribed burning activities this fall and need to be cautious when hunting or camping near a treatment area.

Prescribed burning is highly dependant on weather conditions. "Conditions have to be within a narrow criteria window in order to use prescribed fire," said Goff. "Wind speed and direction, temperatures, relative humidity, and fuel moistures are all taken into consideration." Fall and spring weather provide the best conditions for prescribed burning: moist soil, dry material and cooler temperatures. The fall prescribed burning program should be completed by the end of November.

Prescribed burns are used to achieve several goals. Most burns are prescribed to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by reducing dead fuel accumulation, rearranging fuel accumulations and effecting the live vegetation in the area. "Research has shown that, in areas where prescribed burning has taken place, wildfires are more likely to stay in the surface fuels, close to the ground, and out of the tree crowns," said Goff. Previous fuel treatments and prescribed burns on Umatilla National Forest Lands played a significant role in stopping the progress of the 2006 Columbia Complex Wildfire and the 2005 School Wildfire. Prescribed burning is also used to significantly lower the risks that wildland fires represent to local communities, such as public safety and loss of private property.

The fall burn program includes burning both activity fuels and natural fuels. Activity fuels such as "slash piles" consist of the non-merchantable material remaining after harvest activities. Activity fuel burns also reduce potential fire hazards and prepare the area for reforestation. Removing slash can stimulate plant growth for wildlife winter forage and reduces fuel accumulations. Natural fuels are created by the normal accumulation of dead and down material and can be compounded by insect and disease mortality. Natural fuel burns, or "landscape burns," are low intensity burns conducted to meet forest management objectives and can take weeks to complete.

Ignition will either be done on the ground by hand crews with drip torches or by aerial release of ping-pong balls, filled with a dark gray, granular substance called potassium permanganate that bursts into flames seconds after being injected with ethylene glycol (anti-freeze). Ping-pong ball ignition is an efficient, cost effective method for igniting large areas. Ping-pong balls drop through the tree canopy, keeping flames small and close to the ground.

All prescribed burning will comply with federal, state, and local air quality and smoke dispersal guidelines to reduce the impacts of smoke on forest visitors and local residents.

“Now that weather conditions have changed, the public can expect to see several public land agencies taking advantage of good burn days,” said Goff. In addition to the Umatilla National Forest, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest will also implement a fall prescribed burn program. The Oregon Department of Forestry has suspended their regulated closure and will allowing open burning and slash burning once the required burning permit is obtained through their office.

For more information concerning the Umatilla National Forest Prescribed Burning program, contact Brian Goff in Pendleton at (541) 278-3748 or one of the following Ranger District contacts:

--Brian Spradlin	Heppner RD	(541) 676-9187
--Mark Johnson	Walla Walla RD	(509) 522-6290
--Scott McDonald	North Fork John Day RD	(541) 427-3231
--Steve Carlson	Pomeroy RD	(509) 843-1891

A schedule and maps of the Umatilla National Forest’s prescribed burns are available at any Umatilla National Forest Office and are located on the Forest website at

www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/fire/prescribed-burning-plan/