



For Immediate Release  
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## **Current Outlook Indicating Near Average Fire Season**

Northwest Colorado – In Colorado we have the saying, “If you don’t like the weather, wait five minutes and it will change.” Trying to predict fire activity for the coming season is almost as challenging since it’s largely based on the weather. The Predictive Services group converged in Boulder, Colorado last week for a National Seasonal Outlook Workshop. Meteorologists, Fuels Specialists, and Climatologists from across the county met to develop the first fire forecast of the 2007 season and determined that western Colorado has the potential for a slightly higher than average fire season.

There was concern regarding the warm weather and early run-off of snow pack in March, but recent cooler temperatures have slowed the significant melting of remaining and new snow in many areas. Snow pack is typically a good predictor for determining onset dates of fire season and not necessarily severity. Also, according to Fire Meteorologist Tim Mathewson with the Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center, “We’re better off this year than we were last year at this time.” “Despite and a relatively dry and warm March, spring storms have increased over the last several weeks, bringing much needed rain and snow to the region.”

The anticipated La Nina conditions (cooler than average sea surface temperatures) in the Tropical Pacific Ocean hasn’t materialized yet, so at this time is not impacting weather patterns across the U.S. In the past, some of the stronger La Nina episodes have generally brought windy, dry and warm conditions to portions of the region. NOAA’s Climate Prediction Center is predicting higher than normal temperatures with near average precipitation. Mathewson said it is looking as though the next two to three weeks may present more opportunities for precipitation before moving into a drier part of the summer. “We will continue to monitor possible effects related to La Nina,” said Mathewson, “Which will be reflected in our next seasonal outlook updated planned for June.”

“A good portion of the area is in ‘green up’ with high levels of moisture returning to grasses and shrubs,” said Dale Beckerman, local Fuel Specialist. Even during the green up phase, pinon and juniper trees are available to burn because of their woody, dry composition. Average does not mean a season without incidents. Northwest Colorado, especially Moffat County and Rio Blanco Counties, always have fire activity. The average is about 200 to 250 fire starts a year. That includes everything from a single tree to large fires. Over 90% of the fires occur naturally due to lightning strikes, so fire activity in northwest Colorado depend largely on the thunderstorms that materialize. And over 90% of the reported fires are extinguished in the initial attack stage. Fire season typically runs May through October with the busiest months being July and August. Even in a normal year, there are periods of intense fire activity. The Northwest Colorado Fire Management Unit covers Rio Blanco, Moffat, Routt, Jackson, and Grand Counties.

Fires are still possible this time of year. The current fire danger is low, but even small fires can be damaging. County officials along with state and federal land management agencies remind everyone to use caution with fires of any type.