

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



April 19, 2005

News Contact: Paula Nelson, 406-329-3472
George Weldon, 406-329-3296

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forest Service Prepares for Fire Season

Missoula, Mont -- Preparations for the 2005 fire season in the Forest Service Northern Region are underway with training, hiring, and contracting for fire response, according to Regional Forester Gail Kimbell.

“We will have comparable wildland fire fighting resources and capability as in previous years,” Kimbell said. “While there were some earlier concerns about resources, additional funding has been made available for aircraft contracts and other needed firefighting resources, improving our capability for this season.” An additional allocation of \$2.5 million aided the region in preparing for this season’s activities, according to Kimbell.

The Northern Region covers 25 million acres of national forests and grasslands in northern Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and northwestern South Dakota and participates as member of the multi-agency Northern Rockies Coordination Group, made up of wildland fire fighting and emergency response agencies across the geographic region.

“Fire detection, initial attack and extended attack continue to be our priority,” said Kimbell. “Our goal is to suppress fires when they are small. If conditions get severe, contract resources and resources from outside the region will help us reach the same fire fighting capability as last year.”

-- more --

According to George Weldon, Forest Service Deputy Director of Fire, Aviation and Air resources in the Northern Region, planning for this year's activity began early based on the potential for a challenging fire season. "We emphasized filling fire leadership positions across the region," Weldon said. "These leaders will ensure safe and effective management of any additional resources that augment our forces later in the season."

Weldon indicated that the Forest Service strategy encompasses a different distribution of resources, more specialized equipment, and fewer summer hires than last year. "The look may be a little different, but we'll be ready," said Weldon.

"The Forest Service is aggressively working to reduce hazardous fuels buildups," Kimbell said. "A focus of this takes place in cooperation with communities. We encourage residents to work with us by taking FireWise prevention steps on their own property before this year's fire season gets underway," Kimbell concluded.

Simple fire prevention tips are available at: http://www.firewise.org/fw_index.htm

Note to editors:

Check for local information from your local Forest or Grassland Supervisor's office. Additional background information can be found at the following websites:

- Northern Rockies Coordination Group can be found at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg/about_index.htm
- An early fire season severity prediction is available at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcc/predictiveservices/outlooks/seasonal_assment.pdf
- Drought information is available at: <http://drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html>
- Fire hiring information is at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/people/employment/index.html>
- Fire contracting information is at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg/fire_contractors.htm

-- end --