



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DROUGHT CONDITIONS MEAN POTENTIAL FOR EARLY FIRE ACTIVITY IN SOME AREAS WITH WIDESPREAD ACTIVITY BY JUNE

Phoenix, AZ (3/22/21) – Fire managers with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management say current conditions continue to line up for another potentially active fire season across all corners of the state.

Once temperatures warm up, the central and southern regions may see an early start to wildfire activity due to multiple factors, including the state's severe drought status, a lack of precipitation, and a carryover of heavy, grass mat in unburned areas. By June, fire managers say the potential for widespread, statewide fire activity exists if precipitation remains minimal through early summer. Forecasters do expect La Nina conditions to linger for the next few months, however early indicators point toward a timely arrival of a normal monsoon season.

Last year's extreme heat and lack of moisture coupled with a blanket of fine fuel across the Sonoran Desert provided a foundation for one of worst fire seasons in the state. More than 2,500 fires burned 978,519 acres of state, federal, and tribal lands.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 environment, DFFM will again operate within its COVID-19 wildfire mitigation plan. Some items addressed under the plan include, increased sanitizing of vehicles and equipment, social distancing and mask usage within fire camp and during briefings, and temperature checks for all fire personnel assigned to incidents. Again, this year, DFFM plans to provide engine patrols and stage crews in higher risk areas to provide for faster response with the goal of limiting fire activity and spread, and ultimately, the amount of resources requested.

'Not one of us wants a repeat of last year. However, if we do not get more help from the public we may find ourselves in a similar, precarious situation. Eighty-two percent of 2020's fires were human-caused and all likely avoidable if people paid more attention. State fire investigators responded to one too many fires started by folks using equipment or target shooting in restricted areas that sent sparks flying into dry fuel beds. It is imperative everyone takes personal responsibility and help us as we work together to prevent wildfires,' said John Truett, Fire Management Officer for the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management.

When working outdoors, always pay attention to the weather. Never burn on windy days or use equipment that can throw sparks. If having a campfire, be sure it is out and cool to the touch before leaving the area. Drown, stir, and repeat. Secure tow chains, ensure vehicles and tires are in good working order before getting on the road, and avoid pulling a vehicle over into tall vegetation.

Residents need to be proactive and create defensible space around their properties. Remove any dead or dying vegetation, keep lawns watered and mowed, remove flammable materials from around the exterior of the structure and remove leaves from rooftops and gutters.

Sunday, March 28, begins Wildfire Preparedness Week with this year's theme, 'Preparedness is Year-Round.'

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