



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 3/7/2016**

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### **Arkansas Wildfires Burn 1,896 Acres through the Weekend**

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.** – Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) crews worked to suppress 55 wildfires over the weekend, which consumed 1,896 acres. No homes were lost, and no injuries were reported. Single Engine Air Tanker planes dropped 18 loads (up to 800 gallons of water, each) of water on fires to assist dozer crews with wildfire containment in Carroll, Izard, and Miller Counties on Sunday. Wildfires exceeded 100 acres in size in Boone, Franklin, Izard, and Searcy Counties. One fire in Searcy County accounted for an estimated 500 acres on Sunday, and was contained today.

This year to date, AFC officials have suppressed 485 wildfires that have burned 9,349 acres; though wildfire activity was high over the weekend, these totals are common for this time of year when compared to historic Arkansas wildfire patterns. February-April is the normal first season of heightened wildfire activity in Arkansas because of dormant, dry vegetation, and unpredictable weather patterns which usually include low humidity and gusty winds. With rain forecasted for the rest of this week, wildfire danger should be low, and activity will likely be little. Estimated totals today have included six suppressed wildfires, on 144 acres, with seven wildfires still burning. No structures have been lost; and no injuries have been reported.

With so much wildfire activity over the weekend, why is wildfire danger rated at low-to-moderate, and why are there no Arkansas Burn Bans? Conditions in Arkansas from February-April are often very difficult to predict and/or rate for wildfire danger due to the variability of weather conditions. The AFC will rate areas at moderate-to-high wildfire danger, and County Judges will usually declare Burn Bans, after several days-to-weeks of little rain, and a fairly certain extended forecast for gusty winds and humidity below 35-40%. Also keep in mind, wildfire activity is sometimes elevated over weekends because of so many visitors to the forest.

Weather factors during Arkansas's two highest periods of wildfire activity (February-April and August-October) have two things in common: low-to-mild humidity and gusty wind. Low humidity indicates a lack of moisture present in the atmosphere. When moisture is not present, or is only present at a small percentage, wildfires can grow in intensity very quickly. Gusty winds also move a fire quickly by providing direct force to flames as they spread across the landscape.

Vegetation (leaves, pine needles, brush, shrubs, trees, branches, etc.) usually dries quickly from February-April because it is still in winter dormancy. This vegetation – which serves as fuel for wildfires – changes to green when the precipitation and warming temperatures of spring arrive. We call that the “spring green-up.” Before the spring green-up, oftentimes the ground is wet, but the vegetation on top of the ground is quite dry and can burn quickly. This explains how we can have large wildfires during non-drought conditions, like this weekend and today.

The weather and vegetation present from February-April and August-October are also often used by forestry and wildfire professionals, as well as forest landowners and farmers, to conduct prescribed burns. Prescribed burning is a forest management tool that mimics natural processes and offers a variety of benefits including improved wildlife habitat, added wildfire safety, an open understory – conducive to native plant species, a healthier, less dense forest – more resistant to pests and disease, among many others. Prescribed burns are strategically planned, carefully managed fires that burn at a low intensity and during safe weather conditions to ensure that flames accomplish specific forest management objectives. Officials at all forestry and conservation agencies also plan and manage prescribed burns to cause as little risk or inconvenience to residents and the general public as possible.

Until the spring green-up, Arkansans can expect heightened wildfire danger and/or wildfire activity during any period without rain. Arkansans should take active wildfire safety precautions all year long, especially from February – April and August – October. **What precautions can Arkansas residents take to burn safely and ensure that all Arkansas wildfires are reported?**

- Report Wildfires quickly to the AFC Dispatch Center at 1-800-468-8834.
- Before you burn, check to make sure that winds are not gusty. Gusts of over 5-10 mph can transfer flames and build a fire’s intensity quickly.
- Before you burn, make sure that humidity in your area is above and will stay at 35-40% during your burn.
- Always plan to stay with your burn site, throughout the duration of flame activity. Never leave a fire of any size unattended.
- Avoid burning near other flammable vegetation, structures, overhanging branches, vehicles, outbuildings, porches/decks, and other yard debris. If possible, it is best to dig a dirt ring around your entire burn site, so that flames only burn within a designated area. Remember that brown/dry grass burns very quickly.
- Always have a water hose nearby, in case of an emergency situation.
- Carefully supervise all bonfires, campfires, and open grills throughout this period. Ensure that flames are extinguished when leaving these sites.
- Be mindful of using heavy equipment during this time of year – keep an eye out for sparks that can quickly ignite grass fires.
- Never throw cigarettes from the window of vehicles. Keep cigarette disposal in closed containers.
- Call the AFC Dispatch Center to report your Prescribed Burns or to receive the latest Fire Weather Conditions at 1-800-830-8015.
  - See a list of reported Prescribed Burns at the AFC website: [www.arkfireinfo.org](http://www.arkfireinfo.org)
- Check for county Burn Bans (declared by County Judges) and Wildfire Danger by county at the AFC website: [www.arkfireinfo.org](http://www.arkfireinfo.org).

The mission of the Arkansas Forestry Commission is to protect Arkansas's forests, and those who enjoy them, from wildland fire and natural hazards while promoting rural and urban forest health, stewardship, development, and conservation for all generations of Arkansans.

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