2013 Fire Season

March 21, 2013

The BLM manages wildland fire through interagency efforts including a number of federal, state, county and local firefighting units. Through this interagency team, firefighting resources can be mobilized within 24 hours throughout the country. In Colorado, the BLM has a full cadre of ground and aerial firefighting resources.

The potential for wildland fires grows each year due to aggressive fire suppression during the last 100 years, increased population within fire-prone areas, past land management practices and changing climate. However, the BLM mitigates these risks by educating the public on how to protect their homes, and by following best practices to manage our wildland areas.

Colorado's most severe fire seasons are characterized by significant spring precipitation deficits, intensifying drought, above average temperatures, early season snow depletion, frequent wind events, and an early onset of fire activity. An active weather pattern during the last 30 days has, so far, prevented an early onset of the 2013 fire season, as was experienced in 2012. Additionally, frequency of warm, dry and windy periods have been less than experienced in 2011 and 2012, resulting in less fire activity across the plains and foothills of eastern Colorado compared to late winter and early spring averages. Though below seasonal averages, current state-wide snowpack and expected precipitation patterns should promote spring green-up conditions that exceed 2012 levels, but still less than seasonal norms. Overall, all factors suggest a near average pre-green fire season (typical fire activity at lower elevations east of the Divide) through mid-April, with a near average onset (late May) of the core summer fire season.

SEASONAL FIRE OUTLOOK

- All of Colorado continues under the influence of long-term drought; most notably across the northwest corner of the state and portions of the eastern grasslands where drought indices remain in the "extreme" to "exceptional" categories. However, with occasional precipitation in the last 30 days, the drought trends have shown some improvement. Improvements have been slowest across the northwest and southeast corners of the state.

- Mountain snowpack has been gradually recovering from a significant early winter deficit, currently at 77 percent of average. Additionally, below average temperatures since January 1, 2013, have prevented an earlier than normal snow melt as experienced in March and April 2012 (April 1, 2012 snowpack was at 52 percent of average). Recent storm systems have also brought average to above average precipitation to areas east of the Divide during the last 30 days.

- Long-range forecasts continue to indicate an active weather pattern for spring 2013, with precipitation near seasonal averages and temperatures slightly above the seasonal averages. A typical onset of the Southwest Monsoon is forecast, which usually occurs by mid-July.

- Wind events have been less frequent and less severe, compared to 2011 and 2012.

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- *Bottom line:* Current snowpack and long-range forecast prior to an increased likelihood of spring green-up conditions that are expected to exceed 2012, preventing an early onset of fire activity and severity as experienced last season. A more typical fire season window is forecast, which usually extends from late May through August, with a decrease in fire severity by late July during the monsoon season. Significant wind event frequency is forecast to be less compared to the 2012 fire season. 2013 fire season severity will likely be focused at lower elevations in the fine fuel and Pinion-Juniper fuel regimes.

BLM FIRE PROGRAM

- BLM Colorado lands are broken into five Interagency Fire Management Units.

- Each unit has a Fire Management Officer and staff to plan, oversee and coordinate operations.

- The 10-year average for wildland fires on BLM lands in Colorado is:
    - 493 incidents (human and lightning)
    - 10,621 acres burned annually

- Typically in Colorado, between 10 to 20 percent of wildfires on BLM lands are human caused.

RESOURCES:

BLM Colorado has the following fire suppression resources available within the state:

- One interagency hot shot crew
- One wildland fire module
- 11 Type-6 engines
- Seven Type-4 engines
- One Initial Attack squad
- Six Type-2 hand crews
- One helicopter and staff for 90-day contract
- One Type-3 SEAT based in Grand Junction for a 60-day contract

- BLM Colorado has access to approximately 77 national on-call Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs), two Colorado State Forest Service SEATs, one BLM exclusive-use SEAT based in Grand Junction, nine interagency SEAT re-load bases in the state, five BLM SEAT bases, and one BLM Large Air Tanker (LAT) base in Grand Junction to support 10 LATs that are managed nationally. One Very Large Air Tanker with an 11,700-gallon capacity will be available this year on a call-when-needed basis through the United States Forest Service (USFS). There are also 192 Type-1 and Type-2 helicopters available through call-when needed contracts. A BLM National Office-funded exclusive-use Air Attack training platform is based in Grand Junction.

- Nationally, the BLM can call on more than 400 smokejumpers. Of these smokejumpers, about 150 are BLM employees and the rest are from the USFS. Grand Junction hosts an annual contingency of smokejumpers through an agreement with the BLM Boise Smokejumpers. This resource has been prepositioned at times in Cañon City and Durango.

- Nationally, there are more than 100 interagency hot shot crews (IHC). The BLM Craig Hotshot Crew is located in Colorado and will be available beginning May 6.

- Nationally, there are four National Incident Management Organizations, 16 Interagency Type-1 Incident Management Teams, and 53 Type-2 Incident Management Teams available for large and complex fires.

2012 HAZARDOUS FUELS TREATMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY BLM COLORADO:

- Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) acres treated 9,023
- Non-WUI acres treated 1,465
- **Total acres treated** **11,869**