

News Release



USDA Forest Service
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GMUG HAS FIRST FIRE USE FIRE

Gunnison, CO., (July 2, 2007) – The Gunnison Ranger District of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG) is managing the Forest’s first “Fire Use” fire. The fire, located near Lujan Ridge, initiated from a lightning strike and was detected on June 17. At that time it was estimated to be approximately 1 acre in size, burning in mostly spruce and fir with some aspen, grass, and pockets of pine in the area. An initial attack crew responded and investigated the cause, terrain, potential to burn, fuel type and loading and other pertinent factors, as well as, whether any homes or structures were threatened. In consultation with the initial attack crew, resource specialists, and given onsite and forecasted conditions and environmental needs, the Gunnison District Ranger made the determination to manage the fire under “Fire Use.” Making the decision to let this naturally-occurring fire reduce fuel loading in the area, create pockets of regenerated aspen forest, and improve wildlife habitat will mimic historic disturbances that have been suppressed in past years.

District Ranger Jim Dawson stated, “We were and are very aware that there have been other wildfires around the State and that some Forests and locales are enacting fire restrictions. Across the GMUG and especially locally, we have been monitoring the weather, fire risk, fuel moisture

and other factors to ensure that we are not getting out of our safety parameters.” Dawson went on to state, “This fire is a higher elevation fire, with cooler temperatures and higher humidity than some of the Forests around us. So far, we have not met the criteria to enact fire restrictions nor to move into a suppression mode for this fire. If the situation changes to meet the conditions that would dictate restrictions or suppression, then we will respond accordingly.”

Smoke from the fire is visible from Highway 114. Signs are posted along the highway to notify the public that there is smoke that may affect visibility at times and identifying that this is a Fire Use managed fire. The fire is currently estimated at 50 acres in size. Two fire engines and approximately 8-10 staff are monitoring and managing the fire to stay within the prescribed parameters and boundaries in the Fire Use Plan. The crew has been enforcing perimeter lines and conducting “burn-out” lines where desired to re-enforce the Fire Use boundary. If conditions change and fire suppression becomes necessary, these same crews are trained firefighters and are equipped to respond immediately with fire suppression tactics.

Fire Use has been previously approved and used locally by the Bureau of Land Management and the Park Service. The GMUG National Forest completed the necessary public involvement, environmental analysis and issued a decision to amend the Forest Plan to allow Fire Use on the Forest earlier this year. The ability to apply Fire Use to naturally ignited wildfires, under very specific conditions and situations, allows beneficial fire use to modify the landscape and environments locally that have been lacking fire, and that have historically created healthy forest and rangeland landscapes and wildlife habitat, through wildfire occurrence. It also allows for better management across jurisdictional boundaries with the BLM and Park Service.

More information about Fire Use, what it means and how it is used can be found on the following website: http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/fireuse/wildland_fire_use/role/role_pg1.html