United States Department of Agriculture

FACTSHEET

Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire Updated 09/15/2016

Anticipated Dates of Burn: September - October of 2016

Location and Sizes: Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire includes three units totaling 4659 acres located inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) approximately 22 miles north of Grand Marais on the Gunflint Ranger District on the Superior National Forest in Cook County, MN. This prescribed fire is within two miles of the Canadian border.
LEGAL LOCATION: *Unit 1* (451 Acres) in Township 65N, Range 2W, Sections 25, 26 and 36; and Township 65N, Range 1W, Sections 29, 30 and 31. *Unit 2* (1,914 Acres) in Township 65N, Range 1W, Sections 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 32. *Unit 3* (2,295 Acres) in Township 65N, Range 1W, Sections 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 34.

Purpose: Superior National Forest managers plan to conduct the Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire within the BWCAW to reduce the risk of wildfires that could threaten people, homes, cabins, camps, businesses and other resources outside of the Wilderness and across the international boundary into Canada. This extreme wildfire risk resulted from the 1999 massive windstorm that affected nearly 500,000 acres on the Superior National Forest, including approximately 367,000 acres in the BWCAW. The storm caused thousands of acres of trees to be blown-down, creating the potential for large, difficult-to-control wildfires.
The Forest Service has been working to break up continuous areas of blowdown in the Wilderness with a series of strategically-located prescribed fires that include the Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire. The Forest Service has demonstrated over the past fifteen years, the use of prescribed fire under favorable conditions reduces the concentrations of hazardous fuels created by the storm. This improves public safety by creating conditions that will decrease fire intensities and the rate of fire spread in the event of a wildfire, providing firefighters time to implement suppression and containment activities as well as evacuations if needed.

Description: The Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire plan delineates three ignition units which were identified as wildland fuels hazards by the BWCAW Fuel Treatments Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision completed in May 2001. All three units were impacted by the 1999 blowdown storm and now contain high concentrations of balsam fir regeneration along with dead, blown-down trees. Many residences, camps, and businesses immediately outside the Wilderness boundary are within close proximity of the blowdown fuels in the three planned prescribe fire units.
Based on monitoring and observed fire behavior, Forest managers have determined that fire behavior predictions outlined in the original FEIS are still valid for areas of untreated blowdown fuel. A recent example of this behavior was documented during the 2011 Pagami Creek Wildfire and again during an August 2013 wildfire near Knife Lake within the BWCAW. Post-wildfire monitoring and evaluation indicates that treatment of units containing blowdown has successfully reduced intensity and spread rate of wildfires.
The Father's Day blowdown storm in June of 2016 created an additional 5,000 acres of large-diameter down woody debris within and outside of the planned Duncan Lake prescribed fire units. Recently felled vegetation of this size takes time to cure and will resist consumption at this time. Therefore, the Duncan Lake burn unit perimeters were adjusted to exclude most of the new blowdown. Resource managers are concerned about the risk these new blowdown areas pose to resources outside of the BWCAW and plan to begin the process to analyze these areas for fuel hazard impacts.
Managers will conduct the Duncan Lake Prescribed Fire, under conditions specified (prescribed) in the burn plan and guided by the FEIS, the Supplemental Information Report completed in April 2016, Wilderness Management direction and management objectives stated in the Superior National Forest

Land and Resource Management Plan. To minimized impacts to wilderness character, implementation of the prescribed fire will follow recommendations in the Minimum Requirement and Minimum Tool Determination completed as part of the FEIS analysis and included in the Record of Decision.
Fall is the time of year expected to provide the most favorable weather conditions to meet defined management objectives and hold the fire within the planned project area boundaries. The burn plan identifies potential natural and human-created breaks in fuel that will help to hold the prescribed fire within the planned area. Lakes including Daniels, Duncan, Rose, Partridge and East Otter will be the primary holding boundaries used to keep fire within the project area.
During ignition operations, people in the vicinity of Mid-Gunflint Trail can expect to see helicopters, airplanes and smoke. Many firefighters will also be visible in the area during ignition, as well as several days after burning is completed while they continue to monitor the prescribed fire area. Depending on wind direction, residents and visitors in Cook and Lake Counties may see and smell smoke from the prescribed fire.

Closure Information:

- For public safety, certain canoe travel ways, entry points, hiking trails and campsites will be closed one to two days prior to burning and will remain closed until it is safe for the public to be in the prescribed fire area. Areas closed to public use during prescribed fire operations include Duncan, Daniels, Partridge, East Otter, Dunn and Hoat lakes. Additional closure areas include all hiking trails entering the prescribed fire area and the campsites located along the south shore of Rose Lake.
- If the burn occurs before the end of the wilderness quota permit season on October 1st, the Forest Service will notify BWCAW quota permit holders approximately one week prior to the anticipated project start date.
- If conditions are favorable to allow safe public travel, the international boundary paddle route from South to Rove Lake will be kept open to travelers. To coordinate safe public travel, Forest Service personnel will be posted at the Rose to Rove and Rat to South Lake portages. Fire behavior and smoke may present hazards for short durations, and travelers should be aware that short delays in traveling through the project area may occur when prescribed fire is burning near the international boundary.
- The Border Route Trail and all associated spur trails between Topper Lake and Rove Lake may be closed depending on weather and smoke conditions.

Fire Management Resources:

- Since heavy blowdown and conifer/brush regeneration makes foot travel unsafe for ignition on the ground by firefighters, helicopters equipped with ignition devices will be used to conduct ignition from the air.
- Holding crews of firefighters using hand tools, fire hose, portable pumps, boats and canoes will be working around the perimeter of the prescribed fire units.
- Water delivery aircraft will also be on standby during the burn to support holding operations if required.

Management Objectives:

The objectives of the prescribed fire is to improve public safety by reducing the potential for high-intensity wildland fires to spread from the BWCAW into areas of intermingled ownership, which include areas containing homes, cabins, resorts, other improvements and areas across the international border into Canada. This will be done by using low to high intensity fire to reduce the pre-burn fuel loading in the 0-3 inch size class dead fuels by 60-100%. Low intensity fire is targeted for areas where there is an overstory canopy with and understory of blowdown fuels.

For more information on these burns, contact the USDA, Forest Service, Gunflint Ranger District at 218-387-1750.