



**U.S. Forest Service
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
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News Release

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Forest Managers Plan Area Closures as Conditions Worsen

Springerville, AZ—May 16, 2018—For Immediate Release- Due to increasing drought conditions and high to very high fire danger across the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNFs), area closures will be implemented in some parts of the forest. Areas outside of the closures will remain in Stage II Fire Restrictions.

Closure areas are decided upon by district and forest leadership with the primary objective of providing protection to communities at risk of wildland fire. Prevailing southwest winds are consistent to areas within the geographical location of the ASNFs and will play a role in determining locations of area closures.

ASNFs wants concerned citizens to know that forest closures are not taken lightly, as they affect many people, businesses, partner agencies, important restoration and other work on the forest, and the public. When forest closures are in effect, everyone is prohibited from entering the forest – including Forest Service personnel, unless they are responding to a wildfire or other emergency or patrolling to ensure enforcement of the closure.

- Work on thinning and other forest and watershed restoration projects ceases under a forest closure.
- Partner agencies, organizations, concessionaires, outfitters, permit holders, and contractors, including utilities, are all prohibited from entering the forest to even make repairs or work on infrastructure running through the national forest. Only emergency or other very limited exceptions are made.

While the Forests hope we never have to go into a full forest closure, it is always a possibility depending on conditions and if there is an increase in human caused fires. Fire and public contact patrols have been increased on all districts along with firefighting personnel. Information is being disseminated far and wide about forest conditions and the need to be extremely careful when using the forest. The public can help by spreading the word, reporting violators, and making sure their homes and communities are Firewise.

When it comes to implementing both fire restrictions and closures, community sentiment is always a major consideration for us. We balance the need for restrictions with the ability for the public to enjoy and retain economic benefits from the National Forest. We hear a range of opinions and comments from our local community members and our visitors and consider these very seriously in our decisions about what level of restrictions or closures to implement and when.

When plans are finalized, information will be shared on when and where the area closures will be implemented.

Fines & punishments for violating fire restrictions:

- Violating Stage II fire restrictions or going into a closed area is a violation that carries a mandatory appearance in federal court.
- Violation of these restrictions is punishable as a Class B misdemeanor, which means a fine of up to \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment of up to six months, or both.
- Fines and punishments are determined by a federal court judge.

For more information on:

- Fires in Northeastern Arizona www.311info.net dial 311 or 928-333-3412
- Fire Restrictions in Arizona <https://firerestrictions.us/az/>

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