

The Warm Fire 2006

What Can You Expect To See?

July 3, 2006

As you drive on Arizona State Highway 67 to the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park, remember that you are driving through an area that recently burned. First and foremost, you should be watching for safety hazards, such as dead trees that might have fallen near or into the road or firefighting vehicles and equipment that might still be in the area. You should also be watching for wildlife. Wildlife, such as deer, often move quickly back into burned areas. As long as you are driving cautiously and watching for such hazards, you should also take the time to notice the effects of the Warm Fire.

Warm Fire Statistics:

Location: North Kaibab Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest. The northernmost extent of the fire perimeter is about 2 miles south and east of Jacob Lake; the southernmost extent is about 14 miles north of the Grand Canyon National Park boundary.

Cause: Lightning **Size:** 58,630 acres **Containment:** 70%

As you drive south on Highway 67 toward Grand Canyon National Park, you will first enter an area that burned at a low intensity level. You will probably notice that the ground is black and the trees have some black showing near their bases. The crowns of the trees are generally green. In this area, most of the medium and larger sized trees will survive. Some of the smaller diameter trees may die.

As you continue, you will enter areas that burned at a moderate intensity level. In these areas, the scorch on the trees reaches higher. You may notice that lower branches and needles have burned. The crowns of some trees are green while others are black. In this area of moderate-intensity burning, most of the small and some of the larger trees may die. However, many of the larger diameter trees will survive. Finally, you will move into an area that burned at a high intensity. You will know when you have entered this area. Almost all of the trees are black and have already lost their needles. These trees will not survive.

The majority of the acres of the Warm Fire burned at a low level of intensity. Of the 58,630 acres that burned, about 38,360 acres (65 percent) burned at a low intensity level. The rest (35 percent) burned at either a moderate or high intensity level. Some of the areas of highest intensity burning occurred along Highway 67 because of slope and other terrain factors.

When fires burn at such varying intensity levels, fire managers refer to the resulting pattern on the landscape as a mosaic. To fire managers, all of these effects have their place as part of fire's natural ecological role. Fire is an integral part of the forests of the Southwest.

Warm Fire Background Information

The Warm Fire began as a wildland fire use fire. A wildland fire use fire is a fire that is managed for resource benefits. Before a fire is put into wildland fire use status, land managers evaluate several criteria. For example, if a fire threatens life, property or resources, it is not considered appropriate for wildland fire use and is immediately suppressed. Once a fire is put into wildland fire use status, it is actively managed, meaning that fire managers establish boundaries and define weather and fuels conditions under which the fire will be allowed to burn. All wildland fire use fires must be naturally-ignited (lightning).

The Warm Wildland Fire Use Fire was first detected after a lightning storm moved through the area on June 8. It initially provided great ecological benefits to promote the health of the forest. Some of the resource objectives of wildland fire use fires include:

- 1• Recycling nutrients into the soil
- 2• Enhancing habitat for wildlife
- 3• Reducing accumulations of woody material on the forest floor
- 4• Increasing the amount of perennial grasses, forbs and browse plants for the benefit of wildlife and livestock
- 5• Maintaining grassland ecosystems by controlling the encroachment of trees
- 6• Reducing the potential for high-intensity fires
- 7• Protecting threatened and endangered animal and plant habitat from the negative effects of high-intensity fires
- 8• Creating conditions such as more open stands and reduced fuels
- 9• Allowing fires to actively function as an ecological process across the landscape

During the Warm Wildland Fire Use Fire's first week and a half, it burned at a low level of intensity. High southwest winds on June 18 and 19 pushed the fire several miles to the northeast. Continued drying and warming, as well as strong and gusty winds, caused fire activity to increase.

Even when the fire was in wildland fire use status, suppression tactics were extensively used to prevent it from threatening structures at Jacob Lake and crossing Highway 89A.

The Warm Wildland Fire Use Fire started to push aggressively on June 23 against portions of the boundary that had been established for it. Kaibab National Forest managers, in coordination with the fire use team that was managing the fire, made the decision on the morning of June 24 to bring in an incident management team that specialized in fire suppression. The team's objectives were to continue managing the fire use fire but to take suppression action on the northern and southern flanks. The suppression team was in place but had not yet taken command of the fire when it made a major run and dramatically increased in size on the evening of Sunday, June 25.

The Northern Arizona Incident Management Team took over management of the Warm Fire at 6 a.m. on June 26. Suppression tactics used on the fire have included the use of MAFFS (Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems – MAFFS are military C-130 airborne fire fighting units that eject foam retardant), helicopters, engines, dozers, and burnout operations. Weather conditions began to change on June 26 with increasing relative humidity levels. On June 27, much of the fire received scattered rain showers. By the end of the day on June 26, the fire was 5 percent contained. By the end of June 27, the fire was 20 percent contained. Containment levels have increased each day. Today (July 3), the fire is 70 percent contained. Full containment is expected by tomorrow evening.

No structures have been destroyed or damaged by the Warm Fire.