



Boulder Burn Air Quality Alert — Information for Respiratory Patients

The Problem

Our National Forests are at high risk to large uncharacteristic wildfire. This year the Sierra Nevada Region has experienced very large wildfires such as the Rim Fire that are burning at high intensity, at times damaging our forests, producing copious amounts of smoke and threatening many communities. The Forest Service is committed to restoring the resilience to our National Forests. As part of this commitment to achieve restoration and resilience in these fire adapted and fire dependent forests, the Sequoia National Forest has planned a controlled burn in the Boulder Creek Watershed, 50 mile east of Fresno. Within the Boulder Creek Watershed, the only feasible option to treat steep and mechanically inaccessible landscapes is with controlled fire – a fire that is ignited under prescriptive parameters to avoid a costly wildfire and the associated smoke impacts from an uncontrolled wildfire.

The Project

The Boulder Creek Restoration Project (Boulder Burn) has three intended purposes: 1) to reduce the 100+ years of fuel accumulation due to fire exclusion, 2) to reestablish fire and promote healthy, resilient, and diverse habitat, 3) and to protect and maintain old growth in 3 giant sequoia groves and associated wildlife species. The Boulder Burn is a 5-year project that will treat 6,000 – 9,000 acres with controlled fire. The first phase of the Boulder Burn is planned to occur sometime in the fall, as early as October, when the weather is favorable. The initial phase of the project will burn 2,000 – 3,500 acres on the eastern portion of Boulder Creek. This is an important and strategic location, taking advantage of the “good” work done during the Sheep Fire in 2010, which reduced fuel loads and created a natural fuel break. Using this natural fuel break will limit the fire’s progression allowing the Forest Service to contain the fire within its intended boundary. Once ignition occurs, it is likely that the surrounding communities may experience periodic smoke for approximately two weeks. The communities that may be affected by smoke include: Hume Lake, Cedar Grove, Grant Grove, Pinehurst, Dunlap, Mammoth Lakes, Bishop, and the Fresno and Clovis areas.

The Contact Effort

We understand that there are very serious health consequences for some people related to smoke emissions. In an effort to engage with the communities that may experience smoke impacts and particularly those persons that have respiratory or cardiac illness, Sierra Forest Legacy and Forest Service are creating an early contact network with the medical community to disseminate information to those that may be affected by an increase in smoke. We view this network as critical to continued collaboration for achieving resilience in our national forest along with the understanding that smoke impacts are serious and that smoke under planned conditions can save the public and respiratory patients a great deal of unplanned and unmanageable smoke later.

The Outcome

We seek to establish an early contact network with the medical community in the affected areas. This will consist of 3 notifications: 1) a notice that a burn is planned (September 30, 2013), 2) a notice when the burn is imminent (scheduled date is October 7, 2013 pending weather and air district approval) and 3) a notice when the burn is near completion.

More Information

- 1) Karina Silvas-Bellanca, Fire Policy Coordinator, Sierra Forest Legacy
Email: karina@sierraforestlegacy.org Phone: (530) 878-2795 or visit www.sierraforestlegacy.org
- 2) Paul Leusch, Battalion 32 (Fuels AFMO), Hume Lake Ranger District, Sequoia NF
Email: pleusch@fs.fed.us Phone: (559) 338-2251 ext. 323 or Denise Alonzo (559) 539-2607 ext. 72212.
Updates also available at <http://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/3734/>