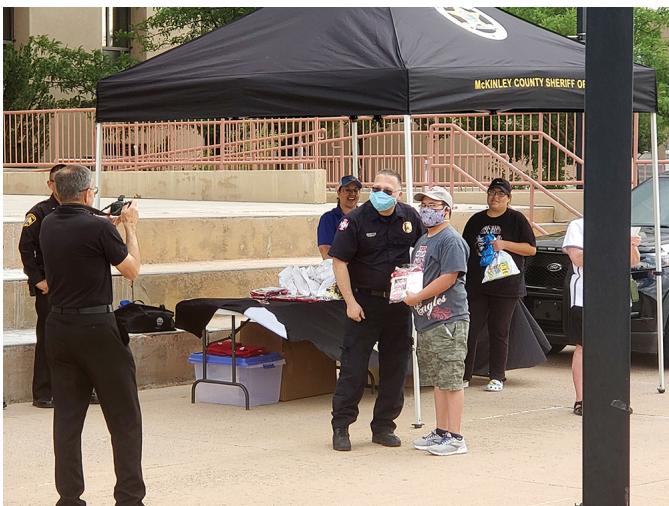


Bringing down the heat

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
Friday, 16 July 2021 05:25



Ground game for fighting wildfires

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More than 1.4 million acres of land have burned across the U.S. due to wildfires in the 2021 wildfire season.

Twenty-seven wildfires have scorched lands in Ariz. and eight wildfires burned across N.M. in recent weeks. Wildfire seasons are typically between May and October, although recent fire seasons have stretched into December.

Sandra Moore, Fire Communications Specialist for the U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region, told the *Sun* there are 12 fires currently burning in Arizona.

“This has been a busy year, extremely busy for the past three weeks,” she said.

In the Southwest area, the U.S. Forest Service reported 165 human-caused fires burned 4,914 acres, 92 natural-caused fires burned 183,762 acres, and 31 fires without a known cause, burned 236,715 acres. The amount totaled 288 fires that burned 425,390 acres, so far in 2021.

In comparison, in 2020, there were 639 human-caused fires in Arizona that burned 208,800 acres. In N.M., there were 182 human-caused fires that burned 70 acres.

Lightning has been the ignition that caused the most damage in 2020. In Arizona, 233 wildfires caused by lightning burned 332,822 acres. In N.M., 162 such fires burned 76,608 acres.

Fighting wildland fires is expensive. The largest wildfire in Arizona history was the Wallow Fire, which burned approximately 538,000 acres and cost more than \$79 million to fight.

“The cost of each fire varies due to the complexity, duration, and number of resources needed to manage it,” Moore said.

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She said the best weapon in firefighting is prevention, adding that it is never too late for people to take proactive measures around their property to reduce flammable material.

“Understanding that we live in a situation where we may have large woodland fires at any time of the year, means that we all need to ensure that we are ready for wildfires before they start,” she said.

Reducing brush and combustible material helps to slow or stop wildfire spread, and creating space also provides a safe place for firefighters to work.

The U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region continues to work with interagency partners in the Southwestern Region, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“We are ready to work with our local, state, Tribal and federal partners to respond safely and effectively to wildfire to protect our communities and natural resources,” Moore said. “It is important that we all work together across the landscape to help improve forest health and resiliency.”

Navajo Region Assistant Fire Management Officer Johnson Benallie, said the current Navajo Nation fire season has been moderate for the most part.

“We have no major active fires going right now. The majority of fires we are responding to are from people burning trash and those fires getting into the wildland side,” he said.

The ongoing drought continues to impact wildland fires. Those dry conditions on tribal lands were the focus of a recent address by the Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management June 25 in a declaration related to the ongoing drought and increased fire restrictions from Stage 1 to Stage 2 signed by President Jonathan Nez June 21.

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“The threat of wildfires is very serious, especially in the Southwest. In the Four Corners, there are multiple wildfires happening and the impacts are even more devastating due to the lack of moisture,” Nez said.

“Everyone has a responsibility to prevent fires and we have to hold each other accountable and encourage our loved ones to be safe and responsible at home and in our communities,” he added.

The restrictions include prohibition of possessing, manufacturing, selling or using fireworks and other pyrotechnic devices, all debris and field-clearing burns, all wood-burning, charcoal fires, campfires, warming fires, and charcoal barbecues, and discharging a firearm, except while engaged in a lawful hunt.

In addition, ceremonial fires must be properly registered and permitted by the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency five days prior to a ceremony.

Benallie encouraged the general public to follow Navajo Nation regulations during the Stage 1 and Stage 2 restrictions.

“Be cognizant when utilizing fire. Monitor winds and adjacent fuels. Put in the effort to prepare and pre-plan. Again, follow Navajo Nation regulations during the fire restrictions,” he said.

The Navajo Nation is working with the Navajo Forestry Department, BIA, and Navajo Region Branch of Wildland Fire and Aviation Management to encourage fire prevention.

By Rick Abasta
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