Forest Service News Release

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Spring 2024 Wildland Fire Outlook FAQs

Duluth, Minn., February 26, 2024— This spring is following a warmer winter with less precipitation and the Superior National Forest (SNF) reminds visitors and residents to be FireWise as we move into the 2024 fire season. Once any remaining snow melts, dead grass and leaves quickly dried by the sun and wind, make it easier for fires to start and spread quickly. Forty percent of wildfires in Minnesota result from debris burning. As fire staff prepare for the spring wildfire season, the public is encouraged to be extra vigilant.

"Staying vigilant in fire prevention year around is key, and especially during dry and warm conditions," says Nick Petrack, SNF/CNF Fire Management Officer, "we are gearing up earlier on fire prevention messaging, wildland fire fighter crew preparedness, and focused on working with our communities to reduce vegetation across more fire prone landscapes." Petrack notes that close interagency coordination is paramount to the success in reducing wildfire risks in Minnesota.

Wildland fire activity is occurring earlier in the spring, lasting longer into the fall, and involves more intense, difficult-to-control large wildfire activity. The public can do their part to prevent human-caused wildfires and take Smokey's message #onlyyou personally this year. Smokey Bear turns 80 this August, and the Forest Service is keen on celebrating this milestone to increase fire prevention awareness across the country.

The SNF will continue to promote fire prevention tactics, and prescribed fire projects to reduce vegetation for this upcoming spring and summer, see below how you can stay informed. The following frequently asked questions will help to prevent wildfires:

1. If fire danger is high, can I still get a burn permit from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)?

The Minnesota DNR issues burn permits for debris burning. Make sure you obtain all required permits prior to burning. However, when fire danger elevates across portions, or all of the State, the Minnesota DNR will restrict open burning across necessary counties, which can include in and around the Superior National Forest. Once restrictions are in place, the State will not issue burning permits for brush or yard waste in these counties until fire risk lessens. A variance permit may be obtained for special agricultural, industrial or management circumstances. Residents may use alternatives to burning such as composting, chipping, or taking brush to a collection site. Collection sites are located at-

Cook County Brush Disposal Sites:
https://cookcountymn.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8b737cea668a414b9019745988bfd893

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Lake County Brush Disposal Sites: Yard Waste and Compost – Lake County, MN

St. Louis County Brush Disposal Sites: https://www.stlouiscountymn.gov/departments-a-z/environmental-services/disposal-information

2. It's hot and dry out, what can I do to help prevent wildfires, minimize smoke in my community, and lessen the burden on emergency responders?

Being fire safe is important around homes and properties during high fire danger. Even if you have a burn permit, weather conditions can change quickly, never burn on dry, windy days as these conditions cause fires to spread rapidly. Other helpful tips include:

- Don't dump your sauna or wood ask with hot embers in the woods.
- Don't light off fireworks or use matches carelessly.
- Never park a vehicle over tall, dry grass (vehicles cause more acreage burned than any other equipment).
- Install spark arrestors on outdoor equipment and recreational vehicles.
- Maintain recreational vehicles, trailers, and farm equipment to minimize the potential for sparks or other sources of heat.
- Check for dragging chains before hauling campers or trailers. Dragging safety chains down the road can quickly become hot and make sparks, causing grass fires.
- Don't throw your cigarette butt out the car window.

3. When there's not a fire ban in plan for the Superior NF, is it still safe to have a fire?

Even though there is not a fire ban in place, visitors and residents are asked to assess if they need a fire for their outdoor experience, especially on hot, dry, and windy days. Consider using a camp stove for cooking. Most wildfires are human caused. If you must have a fire, remember these things:

- Prepare the fire area: campfires in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and developed campgrounds on the SNF are only allowed in a designated fire grate or ring. Campfires in the general forest areas need to be away from tall grass or other flammable vegetation. Use extra care to prevent the fire from escaping.
- Use wrist-sized dead and downed wood and keep fires small. Never cut live vegetation or peel birch bark.
- Have water nearby the fire to allow for easy access if the fire starts to leave the fire grate or fire ring area.
- When done with your fire, extinguish it completely by drowning it-stirring it-drowning it again, and feeling the fire area to make sure it's completely out.

Never leave a fire unattended. Leaving a fire without completely extinguishing it is prohibited.

4. How can I help Firewise my home?

There are many things' homeowners can do to make their homes more Firewise. The four main factors are access, site, structure, and burning practices. Read more on these items at: https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/ & https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/firewise/index.html

5. Why do fires occur in Northern Minnesota and why do fire staff conduct prescribed burns?

Fire is a natural disturbance element of the boreal forest. Much of the vegetation of the boreal forest is dependent on fire disturbances to regenerate and create the landscape patterns that wildlife depends on. However, wildfires do not know property boundaries and can spread to communities and homes across the landscape.

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Prescribed fires are conducted following specific guidelines and when the weather conditions are more cooperative for lower intensity burning. Conducting prescribed fires under specific conditions reduces fuel loads in the forest (brush, dead trees and foliage) and the potential for future higher intensity wildfires.

6. How does the Forest Service make a decision when a wildfire occurs?

Many factors are involved including an assessment of the weather and conditions in the Forest, availability of resources to respond, forest plan guidance on managing fire, and most importantly firefighter and public safety.

7. How do all the agencies work when there is a wildfire?

All the different agencies including the USDA Forest Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, State counties, local fire departments, and Tribal fire programs have a role in wildfire response. Following initial response of the wildfire, depending on factors such as those listed in the previous question, a State or even national fire management team might take command of the fire. These teams have a chain of command and resource support like FEMA response teams.

8. How do I stay informed of wildfire danger, restrictions and wildfires in my area?

- For information and daily updates on Minnesota wildfire danger, current burning restrictions or to obtain a variance burn permit, visit the Minnesota DNR website at: mndnr.gov/burnrestrictions.
- For more information about current wildfires, please see: InciWeb or visit our SNF Alerts and Notices page.
- For current fire activity or emergencies in Minnesota, see the Minnesota Incident Command System web site
- For updates regarding conditions on the Superior National Forest visit www.fs.usda.gov/superior. https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/superior/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=fsm91_049815 , and social media sites www.facebook.com/SuperiorNF/ or https://twitter.com/SuperiorNF
- More information about fire prevention and education visit Smokey Bears Website or contact one of our SNF Fire Prevention team members (see below) if you are looking for a group or event presentation.

Contacts

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Find out more about the Superior National Forest at www.fs.usda.gov/superior and follow us on Twitter-X @SuperiorNF, on Facebook and Flickr (photo credit: Superior National Forest) #superiornf
The Superior National Forest is managed in Five (5) districts, with a Supervisor's Office:

- *Supervisor's Office, Duluth: 218-626-4300*
- *Gunflint District Office, Grand Marais: 218-387-1750*
- *Kawishiwi District Office, Ely: 218-365-7600*
- *LaCroix District Office, Cook: 218-666-0020*
- *Laurentian District Office, Aurora: 218-453-8650*
- *Tofte District Office, Tofte: 218-663-8060*

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