

Prescott National Forest Prescribed Fire Conditions, April 23, 2004

A quick note to advise you all about what is happening here on the Prescott as far as what we are experiencing during our prescribed burning. About two weeks ago we conducted a 1000 acre burn in the chaparral south of Prescott and only used 10 gallons of fuels and not a twig was left standing. The next day we decided to burn a pine stringer with a brush understory next to the burnt area and decided against it after our test burn in fear that once again a twig would not be left standing. We missed a good week of burning because all our resources were committed to the Arizona Wildfire Academy, so yesterday we geared up and went to Crown King to burn a 600 acre unit in the WUI. Felt pretty good, heck the snow had just melted about 10 days ago, 30 people on site, OK weather conditions, all parameters in prescription, good time to burn. During the briefing one of my IHC foreman relayed some information that he had gotten with a conversation with Fred Schoeffler about the burning conditions during Rx burning and wildfires over on the Tonto. The fire behavior that was being observed on the Tonto was what it should be in May and not mid-March. So I put that data into the old memory bank and went on to conduct our test burn.

We lit a good area that represented the burn block and we got a bit spooked on what we saw. The manzanita that we lit in the test burn area was completely consumed and this unit does have a lot brush understory and a decent size manzanita patch on one side of it. All the red flags went up and thought about the info that Fred had shared and decided that burning this unit was going to have to wait. Amazing how fast it dried out and how the brush type is not recovering from being drought stressed even after receiving a fair amount of moisture this winter. I am sure we are not the only ones, but here on the Prescott we have a lot of dead component in our brush due to the dry conditions that we have experienced over the years. With the above normal temperatures that we have been experiencing we can very easily have a large fire already on our forest. Here on the Prescott we know how important it is to meet our fuels targets, but Mother Nature is not cooperating with us.

Our fuel moistures are low and getting lower by the day. 69% in the chaparral two weeks ago, probably a bit higher by now but not by much. Our thousands are dry, I broke apart some logs yesterday, and not much if any moisture left in them.

Thank you for your time and wish us luck this summer, going to be interesting if the weather doesn't bring us any relief.

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