

Appendix H West Uncompahgre FMU

The Fire Management Situation

- 1) *Weather patterns influencing fire behavior and historic weather analysis.* Sanborn RAWS is within the FMU and best represents this site, but the west end of the unit tends to be warmer and drier during the summer. Winters are cool with winter temperatures averaging in the 20s and 30s, but it is not uncommon for occasional rises above 40 in February and March. There is usually a light cover of snow for at least a couple months. The area usually warms and becomes snow free by early May, often in late April. Summers tend to be warm, with temperatures in excess of 90 degrees common on the west end of the unit. Monsoon moisture usually arrives in early July and last until late August. Isolated thunderstorms begin to develop in June with lightning and associated fire starts. The unit is positioned so that it develops many thunderstorms, via orthographic lift as monsoon moisture begins to approach the area in June. Lightning levels increase as moisture episodes become more prevalent in July, but most of these storms have streaky shower patterns with most of the landscape remaining dry. The highest risk for fire starts is immediately before the arrival of significant monsoonal moisture in mid July. Although some wetting occurs, it is uncommon for the unit to get so dry as to have a “mid-season” ending event as fires continue to occur during this wet period although the ERC are lower so that the risk of large fires is slight diminished (but still possible). Daily fire starts are likely until the end of the monsoon flow which is usually occurs in late August. Once this moisture pattern ceases, ERCs begin to climb for a dry peak in late September, or early October. This late peak generally has little lightning, but a prolonged risk for human starts with hunting associated starts until a season ending event. The season ending event is generally a snow storm in late October or early November.
- 2) *Fire Season Determination.* The ERC curve begins to rise noticeably in late May with the primary peak in late June – early July. A secondary peak occurs as the monsoon starts drying in mid August. There is also a third, minor rise in the ERC curve in late September – early October. The planned fire season of mid-May to late October, for the Montrose Interagency Fire Unit, appropriately represents the fire season for the West Uncompahgre FMU.
- 3) *Fuel conditions in the FMU likely to influence fire behavior.* The Fire Behavior Fuel Models in West Uncompahgre FMU are:
 - Fuel Model 4 (30%)/6 (70%) (Pinyon-Juniper)
 - Fuel Model 5 (Sagebrush)

- Fuel Model 6 (Oak, Serviceberry and Mtn. Mahogany)
- Fuel Model 2 (60%)/9 (40%) (Ponderosa Pine)
- Fuel Model 9 Aspen

Fire suppression has altered fuel conditions over the last 100 years. There is certainly potential for large, as can be seen by the very active large fire occurrence in the last decade.

- 4) *Fire regime alteration.* The Ponderosa Pine, Oak associations and Pinyon-Juniper have all had significant alterations in fire regime resulting from suppression and other management practices. These communities are all at moderate to high risk of losing key ecosystem components.
- 5) *Control problems and dominant topographic features.* The control problems within this FMU are two-fold with the condition class 2/3 fuels and the deeply divided canyons making access difficult.
- 6) *Other elements of the fire environment affecting management.* The West Uncompahgre FMU contains the following attributes:

Protection Attributes: These are either renewable or non-renewable values or attributes in the FMU that could be damaged or destroyed by fire. They are listed below in the order which they are weighted for FPA.

Enhancement Attributes: These are the renewable values or attributes in the FMU that could be enhanced by fire. They are listed below in the order in which they are weighted for FPA. The determination to allow fire use within the FMU is dependent upon current agency policy. The forest service does not currently manage fire use (Fire use will begin with the Land Management Plan that is currently being revised and expected to be implemented in the Fall of 2006.) San Miguel County is currently finishing a community fire plan and is considering allowing fire use management on some large private land holdings. Montrose County is also developing a county fire plan, but fire use in Montrose County is not anticipated. Management parameters are/will be established for all fires managed for resource benefits.

West Uncompahgre FMU objectives:

Management Emphasis - The emphasis for management in the West Uncompahgre FMU include:

1. Protect Communities at risk
2. Provide for high quality Gunnison sage grouse habitat.
3. Manage undesired, invasive species (focus on the Burn Canyon Fire area).

4. Diminish fire hazard by reducing fuels, and tree densities in areas adjacent to the 8 communities (Communities at risk: The Meadows, Ute, Sanborn Park, Upper Dave Wood, Iron Springs Mesa, Gurley Reservoir Area, Norwood, and Nucla.)

Suppression-

1. Use an appropriate management response (MIFU Fire Management Plan) to control 90% or higher of all fires during the initial attack (24 hours, or initiation of second burn period).

Wildland Fire Use-

- 1) Fire Use will not occur on the USFS lands until the LMRP is completed (scheduled for Fall of 2006). All Fire use on the BLM will be managed in compliance with the Uncompahgre Fire Management Plan

Prescribed Fire-

- (1) Conduct 100% of all prescribed burns in a manner consistent with Federal, State and county smoke management requirements.
- (2) Treat fuels in Ponderosa Pine that are within condition class 2 and 3 to initiate a maintenance cycle of burning to manage fuels.
- (3) Treat 10% per year of Condition Class 3 acres to improve the existing condition class.

Community Protection/Community Assistance Objectives-

- 1) Work collaboratively with San Miguel and Montrose Counties as they complete their County Fire Management Plans.
- 2) Work in association with the county, state and private land owners to treat hazardous fuels adjacent to developed private land and cooperate with the private land owners, as desired, to reduce fire risk on private land adjacent to federal lands.
- 3) Plan and implement fuels treatment for the East Naturita (east side of the Naturita Division) area in order to address perceived hazards adjacent to private land.

West Uncompahgre FMU Strategies:

Suppression Constraints-

- 1) An appropriate management response will be used for all ignitions. A Wildfire Situation Analysis (WFSA) will be written for all fires extending beyond one burn period.
- 2) No mechanized equipment or retardant will be used in riparian areas.

Wildland Fire Use-

- 1) Manage according to prescriptions as identified in The Uncompahgre Fire Management Plan.

Prescribed Fire-

- (1) Do not violate air quality NAAQS
- (2) Ensure there are no unacceptable impacts to cultural resources, Management Indicator Species, or T&E species.
- (3) The planning unit is adjacent to Norwood. Prescribed burns shall be planned to minimize the smoke impact upon Telluride, Norwood, Ridgeway/Ouray, and Naturita/Nucla.

Non-fire fuels Treatments (include by-products utilized)-

- 1) Use mechanical treatments, including understory thinning, as stand alone fuels treatments or as preparation for prescribed burns.
- 2) Design treatments to reduce hazards exposure to private lands and improve/protect habitat for big game winter and transitional range.
- 3) Use stewardship contracting to reduce treatment costs.

Post Fire Rehabilitation and/or actions for Restoration-

- 1) Monitor and take aggressive actions for limit noxious weed invasion into the Burn Canyon Rehabilitation area.
- 2) Continue to implement the Burned Area Rehabilitation Plan for Burn Canyon.

Community Protection/Community Assistance-

- 1) There are 6 communities that are preparing risk assessment and hazardous mitigation plans in conjunction with the San Miguel and Montrose County Fire plans.

Priority Rankings:

- Suppression:
- Prevention:
- Mitigation:

Prescriptive Criteria:

Treated:

- Minimum Management Area (MMA) is within or at edge of treated area
- Up to 30% of area may be untreated
- Areas are not in precipitation deficit
- Gunnison Basin Wide ERC < 70
- 1000 hr. Fuel moisture >8%
- Live fuel moisture > 105%
- Probability of Ignition < 80%
- Spotting Distance <.3 miles