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# News Release

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## North Zone 2017 Prescribed Fire Accomplishments, Wrap-Up Announced

**Fredonia, Ariz., Nov. 20, 2017 – For Immediate Release.** As the year winds down, so will much of the fire management activity on the Kaibab National Forest and the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park. But for the North Zone Interagency Fire Management Program, one burning fact remains – the fall of 2017 yielded a busy and highly successful prescribed fire season, with more than 13,500 acres treated across the 1.6-million acres that the North Zone is responsible for in roughly four weeks.

Generally speaking, when this time of year rolls around, most forest visitors are thinking about recreational activities. Few are thinking about a fire in the woods – unless it's a campfire. However, for the North Zone fire managers, returning fire to a fire-adapted ecosystem is precisely the kind environmentally-honed thinking that happens during the fall and spring months.

Each year, fire managers plan to put fire on the ground, but the planning process begins long before the prescribed fire season begins, often years prior – starting with NEPA.

**The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA):** Every proposed prescribed fire project begins with NEPA.

“During prescribed fire season, our goal is to put fire on the ground at a landscape scale – mimicking fire’s natural disturbance throughout the area,” said North Kaibab District Ranger Randall Walker. “It’s a tool we use to help maintain the health of the fire-dependent ecosystem here on the Kaibab.”

However, before any action can take place on the ground, the proposed project area must be analyzed under NEPA – a process that includes collaboration with wildlife, recreation, heritage, timber, silviculture, range, soil, and fire fuels specialists. Once the effects of using or not using a prescribed fire treatment are analyzed, resource and prescribed fire objectives can be identified.

**The Burn Plan:** On a remote landscape, the planning process can be challenging, and the timeline from NEPA to deliberate on-the-ground actions can take anywhere from 1-to-2 years or more before any ignitions take place. The burn plan is initiated from the Kaibab National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, often referred to as the forest plan, which provides the overarching direction to resource specialists, land managers, and fire managers during this planning phase.

“Once NEPA is cleared, we can begin working on the next critical step in the process – the burn plan,” said Walker.

Outlined within a burn plan is an extensive combination of institutional knowledge, data collection, analyses and collaboration to include: the silviculture prescription, associated maps, a description of the proposed treatment area, complexity analysis, project-specific job hazard analysis, site preparation plan, communications plan, medical plan, aviation plan, ignition plan, holding plan, contingency plan, monitoring plan, post-burn activities plan and any additional personnel and safety needs, to include prior and continuous coordination with all supporting agencies.

Writing a burn plan is a comprehensive process, but once a proposed project has cleared NEPA and a burn plan approved – it's time for fire managers to start looking at windows of opportunity.

**The “Burn Window”:** The timing must be *absolute*. Often referred to as the “burn window” – the timing is comprised of many environmental and resource factors that must align to meet parameters outlined by the project's silviculture prescription. Those environmental factors and resource variables include current and predicted weather, relative humidity, wind speed, smoke dispersion, fuel moisture, personnel, and equipment availability to carry out the burn, monitor, and patrol.

“These burn windows are typically very narrow and infrequent,” said North Zone Interagency Fuels Specialist Dave Robinson.

As an example, the burn window for the first-entry Tipover East project took several years of waiting for conditions to align before fire managers could move into the unit to reduce the accumulations of hazardous fuels.

“We don't just wake up and decide to burn,” said Robinson. “If we are out of prescription, we can't burn. It is as simple as that, and these burn windows don't come around like clockwork, but when we have that window, the plan is in prescription and ignitions are a go.”

**Building the Fire Organization:** Once a burn window is identified, there is still more coordination required. Coordination with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, appropriate fire weather forecasters, and coordination with other wildfire agencies to build the operational organization.

The complexity of each prescribed fire determines the organizational structure needed to safely achieve the objectives specified in the burn plan, and building the organizational structure is contingent upon the National Preparedness Level. There are five preparedness levels established year-round by the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group, and the levels exist to help assure that firefighting resources are ready to respond to new incidents. The National Preparedness Level is dictated by burning conditions, fire activity, and resource availability. So if the nation is at a preparedness level 1 (PL-1), then resource availability for a prescribed fire project is likely whereas it would not be if the national preparedness level were a PL-5.

**Mission Complete:** The Moquitch-3 prescribed burn unit was the last large-scale project planned for the North Zone this year. Planned operations for the North Zone will be to monitor and patrol all active units, look for additional opportunities to burn several small ignition blocks within the Bright Angel project area at the North Rim and assist the South Rim with any prescribed fire projects if requested.

**What's Next?** As winter weather conditions allow and snowpack is determined suitable, fire managers will transition to pile-burning operations for the winter.

**Fire Information:** Additional fire information about the North Zone Interagency Fire Management Program's winter pile burn operations will be made available through the following resources: <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/5632/>; Kaibab National Forest Fire Information Phone Line 928-635-8311; or [https://www.nps.gov/grca/learn/management/fire\\_info.htm](https://www.nps.gov/grca/learn/management/fire_info.htm).

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