

Rocky Mountain Geographic Area

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Subject: Record Energy Release Components (ERC), curing live fuels, low fuel moisture in large diameter fuels, and localized bug killed stands of dense timber contribute to the potential for active fire behavior in much of the area.

Discussion:

ERC's (fuel model G) across most of the RMA are at high percentiles. ERC's in western Wyoming and western Colorado are at record highs, and the Black Hills in South Dakota exceed the 97th percentile. In northeast Wyoming, the southern Colorado Front Range, and the San Juan mountains of southwest Colorado, ERC's are above normal, but still below the 90th percentile. Most FMO's report critical fuel conditions in the lower elevations. Conversely, in spite of the very high ERC G indices, FMO's in many higher elevation zones report non-critical fuels status except in bug-killed stands. Long range forecasts 14 days out indicate hot and dry weather in the RMA implying continued elevated ERC values, with occasional relief in terms of higher relative humidity and/or wet thunderstorms in eastern Wyoming, the Black Hills, and eastern/southern Colorado.

Recent hot and dry weather is contributing to the curing of fine fuels and reducing live fuel moisture.

Concerns to Firefighters and the Public: Firefighter and public safety is first and foremost should a wildland fire occur in these conditions. Rates of spread and intensities may compromise suppression strategies.

- Recent fire activity on the west slope exhibited very active to extreme fire behavior in pinyon juniper and oak fuels.
- Once live fuel moisture and dead aerial fuel values fall, flaming fronts will elongate and fires will burn with more intensity and fire behavior will become more extreme.
- Anticipate fires to exhibit extreme spread rates, elongated flaming fronts, and increasing fire brands; **expect more long range spotting.**
- Anticipate dependent and independent crown fires in the insect infested, high mortality stands.
- Watch for rapid drying and increased fire behavior following periods of high relative humidity and/or wet thunderstorms.

Mitigation Measures:

- Make sure LCES and situational awareness are in place and followed.
- Review 6 Minutes for Safety posted on the daily situation report.
- Ensure firefighters have good anchor points - keeping one foot in the black.
- Have adequate numbers of Field Observers who understand the effects of weather changes, topography and can see the flaming front.
- Consult the latest Fire Weather Forecasts, Monthly Fire Weather/Fire Danger Outlooks, and Pocket Cards posted at: "<http://www.blm.gov/colorado/rmafwx/index.html>"

Area of Concern: Fuel types associated with beetle infested stands