Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon Rangelands

7/7/2017

Subject: **Potential for extreme fire spread rates, significant fire spread and increased resistance to control due to increased loading and continuity of grasses in Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon rangelands.**

Discussion: Optimal growing conditions this spring created an above normal grass crop. Many locals are reporting the most grass they have seen and monitoring data show 2 to 3 times the normal grass load. Some locations are reporting grasses that are taller than the shrubs around them.

Most grasses are cured at this time but partially green grasses are deceptive and are burning rapidly with the additional cured grass load. Shrubs are contributing to increased fire intensity and prolific short range spotting even though they are not at their normal critical moisture levels. Extreme rates of spread and continuous spread have been observed on recent fires.

Resistance to control is greatly increased. Recent fires have reported:

- Extreme rates of spread and continuous spread even with moderate winds
- Areas with green that would normally slow fire spread are not slowing fire spread
- Normal retardant coverage for grass fires is not stopping fires as it normally would
- Increased potential for the fire to rekindle after it has been knocked down
- Prolific short range spotting in brush that would normally be too moist to be a problem

Some units are only sending the most experienced supervisors to rangeland fires.

Conditions across the area are likely to get worse as grasses and shrubs continue to cure and dry out.

Difference from normal conditions: Recent fires are spreading faster than expected, more intensely and typical firefighting tactics were not effective even with moderate winds.

Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Extreme rates of spread with moderate winds can exceed firefighter production rates, and put firefighters and the public at risk.
- Large areas can be consumed in short periods of time, even in lower slope and wind conditions.
- Fires will be easier to start, spread and spotting will be more problematic with the increased grass continuity
- Additional effort is needed to ensure wet lines and retardant lines are secure
- Fire behavior can change rapidly with changes in relative humidity, wind speed and direction.

Mitigation Measures:

- Brief incoming resources about conditions, especially resources out of area not familiar with grass fires
- Increased emphasis of Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes and Safety Zones is needed
- Plan for larger safety zones and plan to escape to them sooner
- Ensure firefighters have good anchor points and are keeping one foot in the black
- Indirect tactics may be the most effective, but increased emphasis needs to be placed on LCES.
- Establish trigger points and constantly re-evaluate tactics/weather/fire behavior to ensure safety.
- Always be aware of the latest weather and fire danger information

Area of Concern: Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon Rangelands.