

SOUTHWEST AREA



April 24, 2008

Directed To: Southwest Coordinating Group Agency Representatives, for distribution to their Agency Administrators

From: Chair, Southwest Coordinating Group (SWCG)

Topic/Issues: Coordination of Fire Restrictions and Closures

Sections of southern/eastern New Mexico and Arizona have again had very little moisture and are at substantial risk for significant wildfires. Recently we have had several threatening wildfires in southern New Mexico and southern Arizona. As the 2008 fire season escalates, the need for fire restrictions and closures will increase as agencies seek to minimize the number of human caused fires.

If and when restrictions/closures are discussed by your units, please coordinate your efforts with your interagency partners. Ideally we want to go into and out of restrictions/closures at the same time on similar lands and vegetation types to make it less confusing for the visiting public. Please give your partner agencies lead time to consider their risk condition and the possibility of taking coordinated interagency actions. Try and initiate restrictions/closures earlier in the week, so that the word can get out to the public before they head out for the weekend. While some agencies utilize different parameters for restrictions and closures, efforts to keep them similar will allow greater public understanding and compliance, which leads to better protection of lands and sensitive resources. The benefits of coordinated prevention and information sharing have been proven time after time.

In an effort to better consolidate and disseminate Southwest area fire restriction/closure information, the SWCG has contracted with the Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA) to provide a comprehensive website to post restrictions/closure information for all agency lands in Arizona and New Mexico. The focus of this Public Lands Information Center (PLIC) website will be to identify what is open, restricted or closed on agency lands and recreation sites. Local units should forward their restriction news releases, closure orders, and maps to the PLIC contact, as well as their regional or state-wide agency coordinator. PLIC will provide the additional service of posting restrictions or closures necessitated by construction, seasonal conditions and other factors, such as prescribed burns. PLIC will also accept information on larger and longer-lasting active fires that significantly affect access to major public recreation sites in order to better manage their recreation website. This contract is a one year pilot project for 2008.

The Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) will no longer track and post restrictions and closure information on their website, but will provide links to the PLIC website since users are familiar with going there for information. The Southwest fire prevention and information committee will continue to work with the PLIA to ensure that the website meets the needs of the public and interagency partners. The website is currently operational and you can view and bookmark the new web pages for each state at the web addresses below.

<http://www.publiclands.org/firenews/AZ.php>

<http://www.publiclands.org/firenews/NM.php>

Attached, you will find a fire restrictions checklist that may assist you in determining if fire restrictions/closures are needed in your area. Use this attachment as another tool to guide you on your decision making in regards to fire restrictions/closures.

Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please direct them to a member of the Southwest Prevention and Information Committee, or to your SWCG agency representative.

/s/ Bob Lineback
Chair, Southwest Coordinating Group

Attachment: Fire Restrict-Closure Checklist