Western Great Basin Coordination Center

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Updated September 26, 2012

Subject: Very low fuel moistures over western and parts of northern Nevada point to continued potential for extreme fire behavior in those areas of the Western Great Basin.

Discussion: Fires over western and parts of northern Nevada have exhibited extreme to advanced fire behavior this year. Well below-normal winter precipitation, very low winter snowpack and above normal spring and early summer temperatures have resulted in an exceptionally dry duff layer and very low soil moistures over especially western, central and parts of northern Nevada. Very dry and warm weather continues into the fall with record high ERCs and record low fuel moistures in these areas. Carryover grasses from 2 previous wet winters were not compacted by snow and are contributing to moderate fuel loadings in the lower elevations. These fuels are exhibiting high ignition efficiency which can result in more frequent human or lightning caused starts.

Recent wet and cool conditions over eastern, central and southern Nevada have lowered the threat for large fires. The U.S. Drought Monitor shows all of western and parts of northern Nevada in extreme drought, while improvements have occurred over southern, central and eastern Nevada. Energy Release Components (ERC) across much of western and northern Nevada have exceeded record levels, and have only come down slightly due to a period of cool and wet weather in late September. **Current ERCs and fuels conditions are well above what would normally occur in late September and October.**

Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Anticipate flashy fine fuels and pinyon-juniper to ignite easily and exhibit rapid rates of spread.
- Anticipate large areas to be consumed in a short period of time, even in low wind conditions, in all fuel types.
- Old burns may not be adequate fire breaks due to prolific cheatgrass growth allowing fire to spread rapidly.
- Expect longer burn periods and higher intensity burns, even at the higher elevations.
- Short periods of precipitation and higher relative humidity will moderate fire behavior for a short period of time, but expect warm and dry weather to quickly dry fine fuels and return fire behavior conditions to extreme.

Mitigation Measures:

- Review evacuation plans in communities that may be affected.
- Consider indirect tactics.
- Use larger safety zones than recommended and escape to them sooner.
- Ensure firefighters have good anchor points - keeping one foot in the black.
- Post lookouts that understand the effects of weather changes, topography and can see the flaming front.
- Establish trigger points and constantly re-evaluate tactics to ensure safety.
- Consult the latest weather and fire danger information at http://gacc.nifc.gov/wgbc/.

Area of Concern: Areas of concern include western and northwest Nevada where rainfall has still remained well below normal with record high ERCs and record low fuel moistures.