

Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland

Prescribed Fires: A Pathway to a Fire Resilient Landscape

Managing overgrown vegetation (fuels) is an important part of the Forests and Grasslands. Fuels management is done to reduce wildfire risk to communities; improve ecosystem health and diversity; and increase forest and watershed resilience and recovery when wildfires happen. Implementation of projects can include thinning and removal of trees and overgrown vegetation, typically followed by prescribed fire.

Prescribed Fire Type: Pile Burning

The USDA Forest Service burns piles of woody debris (slash) to reduce hazardous fuels. These piles are made from branches and limbs left after thinning or cutting of trees in the forest. Typically piles need to dry out for a year or two before they can be burned. Some piles may be left on the landscape for wildlife habitat benefits.



Slash piles burning in the snow.

Conditions for Burning

Certain criteria must be met for piles to be burned, including wind for smoke dispersal, and snow or forecasted precipitation in the immediate burn area. These conditions are outlined in a burn plan that is thoroughly reviewed before implementation. The decision to light piles is made by managers daily based on site-specific weather forecasts and observations as well as staffing and resource availability.

Moisture, namely snow, helps contain the piles and firefighters monitor the area during and after the burn. Monitoring continues until the piles are considered out. While the use of planned fire to reduce fuels is not without risk, public and firefighter safety is always the number one priority in burning operations.

Smoke

Smoke, flames, and glowing embers are often visible, and are a normal part of pile burning operations. This can be visible throughout the night.



CDPHE.Colorado.gov

Prescribed fire smoke may affect your health, however the degree and duration of impact can be managed during a planned burn, unlike an unplanned wildfire. All pile burns are conducted within the requirements of a smoke permit issued by the State.

Stay Informed

For information on the Arapaho & Roosevelt pile burning projects, point your smart phone camera at the images below, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @usfsarp.

INTERACTIVE MAP



usfs.maps.arcgis.com

PILE BURNING INFO



inciweb.nwcg.gov

NEWS & INFO
EMAIL SIGNUP



Constantcontact.com

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YOU GO



fs.usda.gov/arp



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Prescribed Fire FAQ: Pile Burning

Q: What is a pile burn?

A: Pile burns are a type of prescribed fire where firefighters pile and burn forest debris to reduce an area's wildfire risk. Prescribed fire is an important tool for decreasing long-term fire risk to communities and to restore our forests so they are more resilient to wildfire in the future.

Q: Why do you burn piles when it is windy?

A: Firefighters watch the forecast very carefully for favorable weather conditions and can safely burn piles in windy conditions. We analyze the short and long term forecast every time we ignite. While wind is needed for smoke dispersal, if winds are forecast that could potentially create fire behavior that would put communities or residences at risk, firefighters don't ignite piles.

Q: How long do the piles burn for?

A: Pile burn areas can remain active and smolder for days to weeks after they are ignited. In most cases the piles go out naturally, on rare occasions firefighters will suppress burns that have not gone out on their own.

Q: How do you ensure fire stays within your project area and doesn't threaten communities, landowners, residences, and infrastructure?

A: Patrolling and Monitoring:

We patrol and monitor our previous pile burns until they can be declared "out," or cold. When a change in weather occurs, we adjust the monitoring and patrolling schedule appropriately. Public and firefighter safety are our top priority. That said, we can't remove all risk associated with prescribed burning. We make decisions based on the best available science. We insure we have adequate resources and staffing available. Piles can burn for a longer duration than our forecast is reliable. Being prepared includes making sure we have the sufficient staffing, resources, and coordination with partners, including local fire departments.

Q: How many piles can you burn in one day?

A: We obtain smoke permits from the State of Colorado and these permits will have limitations on the number of piles we can burn in one day to minimize smoke effects. When conditions are favorable, it is not uncommon to burn more than 1,000 piles a day within a project area.

Q: Why are you killing trees when burning piles?

A: Standing live trees may be affected by our pile burning. It is common and acceptable to have "scorched" trees within our project areas. Many, if not most, of these trees will not die. Approximately 2/3 of a tree crown can be scorched without killing the tree. We take precautions when lighting piles to avoid this, but it is within our planning specifications to accept minimal tree mortality.

Q: What alternatives are there instead of burning the piles?

A: Pile burning is the most efficient option to reduce forest debris at the scale and speed needed to meet our goals and reduce wildfire risk. One alternative would be to leave piles, but it is unclear how that would affect the forest, it creates a visual problem, and it would not reduce hazardous forest fuels which is the intent. Other options for utilizing forest debris are slowly gaining traction in the Rockies. Still, there will always be piles that are too inaccessible to be transported, and so continued work for mitigating pile burn effects will remain relevant.