

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service Santa Fe National Forest



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Pile Burning to Begin in Santa Fe Watershed

(Santa Fe, NM)—Prescribed burning within the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed will begin Thursday if weather conditions permit.

More than 1,200 acres of the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed have been thinned since the project began in early 2002. There are roughly 600 acres of piles of thinned material that are now ready to burn. Proper weather conditions, and forecasted snowfall this week, would give fire personnel the optimum conditions for a safe burn. Smoke from the burns will be visible from the city of Santa Fe and surrounding areas.

“Now is a good time to start burning and reduce the fuel loading. We should remove the piles before the next fire season,” said Dave Isackson, fuel specialist with the Española Ranger District. The piles are at a point where they are dry enough to burn, and the temperatures are low enough for opportune burning conditions. The Forest Service is working in conjunction with the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe Watershed Association on watershed treatments. As winter weather conditions permit, burning could continue until the spring, or until all piles have been treated.

The Santa Fe Watershed Project was designed to reduce dense small-diameter tree stands in the watershed that pose a wildfire threat to both the watershed and the city of Santa Fe. As the primary source of water for Santa Fe, the watershed provides 40 percent of water to the city. In order to maintain the natural health of the watershed, 7,270 acres of small-diameter trees will be thinned over the next five to ten years.

During the planning process removal of the trees for personal-use firewood was considered, but due to safety hazards involved with adding haul trucks to narrow low-standard roads used by pedestrians and school children this option was too risky. There were other concerns about possible vibration damage from haul trucks to historic structures and adobe homes along the road. Within the watershed many of the thinned areas are steep and would be inaccessible. Access in and out of the watershed has been closed to the public by the City of Santa Fe since 1932 for protection of the area and the city’s drinking water.

For additional information on pile burning call Dave Isackson, (505) 753-7331 or Dolores Maese at (505) 438-7877. For additional information on programs to reduce wildfire threat to communities, visit <http://www.firewise.org/communities> .

