



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 1/8/2015

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Arkansas Forestry Commission Recaps 2015 Wildfire Activity

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. – In 2015, 14,652 acres burned in wildfires across Arkansas in 1,178 wildfire incidents reported to the Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) Dispatch Center. Months with the highest wildfire frequency and acreage burned were January, February, August, and October. For over a decade and again in 2015, the top two causes of Arkansas wildfires were the burning of debris (general outdoor burning activities including the intentional burning of leaves, brush piles, trash, etc.) and arson (the use of fire for malicious intent).

How does 2015 compare to 2014 and years before? As is made evident below, 2015 was another relatively low wildfire year in Arkansas compared to earlier trends:

- 2015: 1,178 wildfires 14,652 acres
- 2014: 1,240 wildfires 16,687 acres
- 2013: 787 wildfires 11,261 acres
- 2012: 2,148 wildfires 34,434 acres
- 2011: 2,435 wildfires 41,783 acres
- 2010: 2,222 wildfires 35,197 acres

Where are the most Arkansas wildfires occurring? Counties with the highest statistics for both wildfire frequency and acreage burned were Calhoun, Clark, Conway, Fulton, Saline and Searcy Counties.

- In terms of total reported wildfire incidents, the following 14 counties had the most on record last year: Saline (76), Grant (61), Miller (46), Union (41), Ouachita (40), Clark (39), Garland (34), Calhoun (29), Pike (29), Fulton (27), Conway (26), Drew (26), Searcy (26), and Columbia (25).
- In terms of total acreage burned, the following 17 counties had the largest amount of acreage consumed by wildfires: Searcy (1,875), Saline (765), Calhoun (662), Conway (538), Izard (508), Monroe (454), Baxter (450 acres), Lonoke (435), Stone (431), Benton (422), Fulton (392), White (385), Sharp (369), Pulaski (343), Clark (339), Scott (335), and Faulkner (313).

“Arkansas was lucky because of weather again last year with relatively low wildfire frequency. With the many intense wildfires in our western states, we were concerned in February and October that we might experience similar conditions. However, with highly trained staff stationed in almost every county and

the terrific work of volunteer fire departments and our citizens, together, we were able to keep Arkansas wildfire impact at a minimum,” says State Forester Joe Fox.

A final unique detail to point out about 2015: wildfire frequency is usually most common during the month of March because of lower humidity, higher temperatures, windy conditions, and generally dry vegetation. However, last year wildfires created highest statistics in January, February, August and October.

What does this tell Arkansans? “Wildfires can take place anytime, anywhere, based on weather variables,” says State Forester Joe Fox. “As we well know, Arkansas weather can change very quickly. The AFC and our partners are always ready to help, anytime of year. It’s hard to predict how wildfires will behave in 2016, with so much moisture predicted. Rainfall could keep frequency low again, however – with several years now of low wildfire frequency, there is also a heavy buildup of fuel on the ground that could cause risks should weather conditions dry out.”

Crews across Arkansas are prepared for the 2016 wildfire season with trained staff, and fully operational equipment. Single Engine Air Tankers are scheduled to arrive in February to assist ground crews with wildfire suppression. The AFC Dispatch Center remains a fully operational, 24-hour facility throughout the year (call 1-800-468-8834). AFC crews are also among the first agencies to assist communities during storm cleanup (for ice storms, tornados, etc.), flooding emergency response, and other incidents in local areas.

How can Arkansas residents prepare for the 2016 wildfire season?

- Always check the weather before you decide to burn outdoors. Humidity levels should be above 40%-50%. Wind gusts should be below 10 mph. Humidity and wind are the two largest factors involved with fire weather.
- Comply with local regulations. Contact your local fire department in advance of your prescribed burn, and, call the AFC Prescribed Burn line at 1-800-830-8015. Follow local Burn Bans, declared by your County Judge, listed at www.arkfireinfo.org.
- Always plan to remain with your fire, throughout the length of your burn.
- Choose a safe burn site. A safe site will be located away from structures, forested areas and overhanging limbs, other flammable vegetation, power lines, automobiles, and equipment.
- Create a ring around your burn site of space scraped down to mineral soil so that your flames stay within a designated area. It’s also smart to keep the surrounding area watered down during the burn.
- Have a water hose nearby, for an emergency.
- According to 5-year Arkansas wildfire trends, anticipate February through April and August through October as the highest wildfire frequency months. Use extra caution during those times.

Since 1935, the AFC has compiled wildfire data so that Arkansans and wildfire officials can track wildfire trends, causes, and frequency that are specific to the Natural State. Wildfires differ greatly by region, because their behavior and intensity is heavily tied to weather factors, terrain, and vegetation – including both forests and grassland.

The AFC compiles wildfire statistics according to documented wildfire responses by AFC county crews. Wildfire data presented here does not represent that collected other agencies. These statistics correspond to wildfires, which are considered out-of-control flames, located outside a municipality, on private or state land.

For more wildfire statistics, safety information, Burn Ban maps, prescribed burning information, forest management plans, AFC seedlings, and other forestry assistance, visit forestry.arkansas.gov. To report a wildfire, call 1-800-468-8834. To report a prescribed burn, call 1-800-830-8015. For local fire weather and Burn Ban declarations, visit arkfireinfo.org.

The mission of the AFC is to protect Arkansas's forests, and those who enjoy them, from wildland fire and natural hazards while promoting rural and urban forest health, stewardship, development, and conservation for all generations of Arkansans.

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