



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Sand Dunes National Park
and Preserve
11500 State Highway 150
Mosca, CO 81146

719-378-6395 phone
www.nps.gov/grsa

Great Sand Dunes News Release

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Kathy Faz, 719-378-6341

Prescribed Burning Planned At Great Sand Dunes National Park

As part of Great Sand Dunes National Park's hazardous fuels reduction efforts, fire managers from the park in partnership with Rio Grande National Forest are preparing to conduct a prescribed burn on up to 3,300 acres near the park's northern boundary. The project area is located south of Baca Grande Subdivision, and approximately three miles south of Crestone, Colorado.

The fire operation will remain west of Liberty Road. Temporary closures along Liberty Road may occur during the operation to ensure public health and safety when firefighters are working along the road. Two burn windows are being proposed, October 26-29 or November 8-12, if favorable weather and fuel conditions permit. These dates occur between hunting seasons and were selected to reduce impacts to recreational users on adjacent public lands where hunting is allowed. Hunting is not allowed within the national park where the prescribed burn will take place.

"Prescribed fire is a proactive tool used to achieve a number of purposes," said Mike Lewelling, Great Sand Dunes Fire Management Officer. "The primary purpose of this prescribed burn is the reduction of hazardous fuels (overgrown vegetation). It helps decrease the threat of high-intensity, high-severity wildfires and reduce the risk of wildfire danger to nearby communities.

Prior to and during prescribed burns, fire managers closely monitor weather conditions with multiple weather forecasts generated by the National Weather Service. Forecasts are customized to the burn location with frequent on-site weather measurements. Fire personnel at the scene are constantly monitoring conditions during a prescribed burn and adapt accordingly. If at any time conditions are outside of predetermined acceptable levels, the operation will be halted. All burns are monitored until they are declared completely out.

Smoke will be visible from the Crestone and Baca Grande Subdivision, Colorado State Highway 17, and other locations in the San Luis Valley. Air quality considerations are an important part of prescribed fire, and each fire prescription is planned to disperse smoke rapidly and reduce lingering haze. However, smoke may still have adverse effects on some people's health. For more information on how to mitigate health risks, visit <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health>.

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“It is impossible to burn without generating smoke,” noted Lewelling. “The targeted prescribed burn area will be subdivided into smaller sections and potentially burned over several days to limit daily smoke production.”

Neighbors and towns adjacent to the park should be aware that the prescribed burning may temporarily generate large plumes of smoke and that some burn units have the potential to smolder for several days. Signs will be posted along major roads during the operation. Fire information updates including anticipated daily smoke impacts will be posted on <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov>. Any neighbors or individuals that may require special consideration or assistance if unplanned smoke issues arise are encouraged to call Dale Culver, Chief Ranger at (719) 588-2014.

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