

NEWS from the Texas Forest Service

July 2, 2008 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recent rainfall not enough to end wildfire risk

LUFKIN – Recent rainfall varied widely this week in amounts and locations across the state. While some areas received significant rainfall, other areas received little or no precipitation. State fire officials caution that wildfires remain an immediate threat in areas that received little or no precipitation and a potential threat even where rainfall of one to two inches fell.

Any relief provided by recent light rains and higher humidity is likely to be very short term in nature, said Rich Gray, mitigation and prevention coordinator with Texas Forest Service.

“Even a short period of dry, windy weather will sap moisture from dead grass and weeds and quickly render this vegetation dry and fire-prone,” said Gray, “and obviously, vegetation in areas missed by rains will stay at high risk of wildfires.”

Areas with heavy accumulations of dead grass and weeds that received significant precipitation will get some immediate benefit from the precipitation, but dangerous fire conditions could return fairly quickly if dry, windy weather prevails, according to Tom Spencer, predictive services department head for Texas Forest Service.

“Significant rainfall will lead to vegetation green-up, but it could take an extended period of time before new green vegetation will reduce the wildfire risk posed by the presence of large amounts of dead grass and weeds,” said Spencer. “Until widespread green-up, the dead herbaceous fuels could still pose a significant wildfire threat.”

Gray enumerated a variety of human activities that can cause wildfires where grasses, weeds and other fine-textured vegetation are present.

- Sparks generated by mobile welding rigs when building fences, towers or other structures
- Faulty spark arresters or mufflers on agricultural equipment and off-road vehicles
- Mowers and bush hogs hitting rocks or metal
- Careless travelers who flip smoking materials out a window instead of disposing of these properly in the ashtray
- Towed vehicles dragging metal or chains that bump the road causing sparks
- Hot catalytic converters on vehicles parked or driven where grass and weeds are tall enough to come in contact with the pollution control equipment
- Careless burning of household trash, brush piles and other debris
- Unsafe use of fireworks around vegetation and structures.

The Texas Forest Service says that public cooperation to help prevent additional wildfires from occurring is absolutely essential to avoid additional losses of homes and natural resources.

Texas continues to have personnel and equipment mobilized from other states to bolster the state’s firefighting capacity. With growing competition for national firefighting resources from other states, most notably California, the likelihood of getting additional resources from other states is shrinking.