

Wildfire season is here

August 18 2015, by Steve Byrns



The recent Head of the River Ranch fire, attributed to a lightning strike, devours forage near Christoval. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Dr. Morgan Russell

Wildfire season is here and there's fuel to burn.

That's the assessment of Dr. Morgan Russell, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service range specialist at San Angelo. She said during the week of Aug. 9, the Texas A&M Forest Service responded to 68 fires on 22,519 acres. Large fires were reported in Kimble, Edwards, Tom Green and Crockett counties.

"Extremely hot temperatures, low humidity, large amounts of dry grass and increasingly windy conditions are the perfect recipe for cooking up a very busy fire year," Russell said.

Russell said the National Preparedness Level that monitors [fuel](#) and [weather conditions](#), fire activity and resource availability for the Texas Interagency Coordination Center at Lufkin was increased to Level 5, the highest level, on Aug. 13.

"Given the continuing hot and dry weather and the major increase in [fire activity](#), the decision to move to Preparedness Level 5 shows the complexity fire managers are facing to assure adequate firefighting resources are available to protect life, property and our state's natural resources," she said.

Russell offered the following "watch-out" potential wildfire situations to keep in mind over the coming months if dry weather lingers:

- Watch for fires starting in bar ditches along roadways, often

caused by cigarettes or idling vehicles. Report the fire immediately to local authorities and clearly state the location.

- Watch for dragging trailer safety chains that can easily spark roadside fires.
- Watch for sparks coming from tire rims running on flat tires.
- Keep all firefighting resources such as slip-in pickup pumper units and sprayers filled and ready.
- Be aware of active county burn bans in your area.
- Be careful when welding and when using a chainsaw.

"Hunting season is about to start and with it will come an onslaught of off-road vehicles," Russell said. "When driving anything – pickups, utility task vehicles or UTVs and ATVs through pastures, be aware that idling the vehicle in tall, cured grass can quickly spell disaster. Also, know that grass seed heads impacting the exhaust manifold can start fires.

"If conditions remain as they are, there will probably be some fires set by Mother Nature, but as a rule, most fires start from human carelessness," she said. "Or, simply not realizing that some common practices, given the right conditions, can actually spark a fire.

"If we all remain vigilant and observant, hopefully we can stay safe until this wet El Nino weather system that's been talked about so much arrives this fall."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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