



## ■ Wildland Fire Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The purpose of this document is to address questions regarding wildland fire prevention and response. Information contained in this fact sheet is current as of March 27, 2013. If there are any questions concerning the status of this information, please contact the ND Department of Emergency Services at (701) 328-8100.

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**BURN BANS/FIRE RESTRICTIONS**

**Q1. Who has the authority to issue a burn ban/fire restrictions?**

A. Local governments, as well as the Governor, have authority to issue a burn ban under the Emergency Services chapter of the ND Century Code.

- **A local burn ban may only be issued upon a declaration of a local emergency or disaster pursuant to NDCC 37-17.1-10**
- **Examples of local fire declarations and burn bans/restrictions can be found in WebEOC**

In addition, state and federal land management agencies have the authority to implement restrictions on their lands. In the event multiple burn bans/restrictions are implemented, the more restrictive should be followed.

**Q2. What is the penalty for violating a burn ban?**

A. First offense of a burn ban is a Class B misdemeanor: up to 30 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

**Q3. What is the purpose of burn bans/fire restrictions?**

A. The purpose of burn bans and fire restrictions is to reduce the risk of human-caused fires during unusually high fire danger and/or burning conditions and for the protection of human life and property. Burn bans and fire restrictions impose many limitations on the general public and therefore should be implemented only after all other prevention measures have been taken (i.e. public awareness campaigns, media outlets, etc).

**Q4. What factors should be taken into account before issuing a burn ban/fire restrictions?**

A. Burn bans and fire restrictions should only be considered when:

- High to Extreme fire danger is predicted to persist
- Frequency of human-caused fires being experienced has increased
- Firefighting resources are diminished
- Potential high risk occasions (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> of July, etc)
- Large fire activity occurring within your jurisdictions
- Persistent drought conditions exist

**Q5. Who should I coordinate with when considering issuing a burn ban/fire restrictions?**

A. When making a determination to implement a burn ban/fire restrictions, it is recommended county and/or city officials collaborate with local, state and federal entities, such as:

- Local/tribal fire officials
- Local/tribal emergency management
- Local/tribal law enforcement
- National Weather Service (NWS)
- ND Forest Service

- State Fire Marshal's Office
- State and Federal agencies with land in your jurisdiction (i.e. ND Game and Fish, ND Parks and Recreation, US Forest Service, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, etc.)

**Q6. Who do I need to notify when a burn ban/fire restriction is implemented?**

A. A variety of means (i.e. websites, social media, media – newspapers, TV, radio, etc) should be leveraged to ensure the public is aware of burn bans/fire restrictions. In addition, minimum notifications should be made to appropriate local responders, agencies having land within your jurisdiction and the ND Department of Emergency Services (NDDDES). Since issuance of burn bans/fire restrictions impose many limitations on the public, implementation of burn bans/fire restrictions for an entire year or season is not ideal. However, if doing so it is important that ongoing outreach and public awareness actions are in place to ensure those moving into or visiting your jurisdiction are aware.

**Q7. How long is a burn ban in effect?**

A. A burn ban is only in effect for seven days if initial documentation is signed only by a principal executive officer of the county or city commission in the absence of a majority of commission members. It may not be continued or renewed for a period in excess of seven days except by or with the consent of the governing board of the county or city.

- ***A burn ban/fire restrictions should be rescinded when fire danger conditions have improved and/or previously diminished fire response capabilities have been restored. Consultation with appropriate local, state and federal partners is recommended. At a minimum they should be rescinded at the end of the fire season and be revisited the following year and appropriate outreach conducted.***

***Note:*** *If tying a burn ban/fire restrictions to the daily Fire Danger Index (FDI) issued by the NWS during fire season and the product is discontinued for the year, technically your burn ban/restrictions are null and void because there is no longer anything to tie them to.*

**Q8. What is the process for rescinding a burn ban/fire restriction?**

A. Jurisdictions should follow the same process to rescind a burn ban/fire restriction as they did to put one in place.

**Q9. What is the Rural Fire Danger Guide?**

A. The guide (<http://www.nd.gov/des/uploads/resources/154/brochure-ruralfiredangerguide.pdf>) is designed for landowners, equipment operators and outdoor enthusiasts. When fire danger reaches the VERY HIGH or EXTREME categories, certain guidelines are recommended. During severe, extended dry conditions or drought, the Governor may issue a proclamation mandating these guidelines. Fines and other penalties may be assessed for failing to comply. Local governments may institute a burn ban regardless of the fire danger.

## **FIRE WEATHER PRODUCTS**

### **Q10. What is the Fire Danger Index (FDI) and how is it calculated?**

A. The ND FDI ([http://www.crh.noaa.gov/bis/?n=fire\\_weather\\_public](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/bis/?n=fire_weather_public)) is issued daily by the National Weather Service (NWS) during fire season; typically from April 1 to October 31, and provides an indication of rural fire potential for grasslands, including its ability to spread. The FDI is forecast for non-agricultural grasslands to carry fire and is an indication of the probability of a fire growing beyond initial attack response, not necessarily the frequency of fires. Should a fire ignite, it is more likely that it would grow or spread during higher index days. It is based on the temperature, humidity, wind and the estimated “greenness” of the fuel. The highest threat period for grassland fire danger is usually before the spring green-up and again in the fall.

### **Q11. What is the difference between a FIRE WEATHER WATCH and a RED FLAG WARNING and how are they calculated?**

A. The National Weather Service issues FIRE WEATHER WATCHES and RED FLAG WARNINGS to alert land management agencies about the onset of critical weather and fuel moisture conditions that could lead to rapid or dramatic increases in wildland fire activity.

- FIRE WEATHER WATCH – issued when the potential for Red Flag conditions are expected in the next 12 to 72 hours
- RED FLAG WARNING – issued when Red Flag criteria are expected to be met within the next 24 hours, are imminent or are occurring

A Red Flag event is defined as weather conditions which could sustain extensive wildland fire activity and meet one or more of the following criteria in conjunction with VERY HIGH or EXTREME fire danger:

- Sustained surface winds, or frequent gusts, of 25 mph or higher
- Unusually hot or dry conditions (e.g. Relative Humidity (RH) less than 20%)
- Dry thunderstorm activity is foreseen during an extremely dry period
- Anytime the forecaster sees a change in weather that would result in a significant increase in fire danger (e.g. very strong winds associated with a cold front even though the FDI is below the VERY HIGH category, extensive lightning, etc.)

## **DECLARATIONS**

### **Q12. When should issuance of a declaration be considered?**

A. Following is information regarding local and state declarations:

- Local Declaration
  - When local government has determined an emergency/disaster has exceeded or is expected to exceed local capabilities, the governing body can issue an emergency/disaster declaration.
  - Issuance of a local declaration allows:
    - Activation of the Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP)
    - Use of local emergency funds
    - Authorization to request additional resources
- State Declaration

- If conditions warrant, the Governor can issue a State Fire Declaration accomplishing the following:
  - Activation of the State Emergency Operations Plan
  - Authorizing state agencies to utilize and employ state personnel, equipment and facilities; this includes the National Guard.
  - Enables the state to request additional resources through the ND Dispatch Center, Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), etc.

## **ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Q13. What is the role of the Local Emergency Manager (EM)?**

A. The EM's role is not that of a first responder but that of a coordinator. The EM is responsible for coordination of preparedness activities (to include declarations and associated burn bans/fire restrictions as well as public awareness/information) local response and recovery efforts and liaison to the NDDDES State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). The EM coordinates resources in support of the local Incident Commander (IC) and ensures proper coordination is taking place between departments and logistical needs are met. Depending on the size and complexity of the incident the EM may conduct coordination activities from their office or from the local EOC. The EM is the primary contact and coordinates with NDDDES to obtain state and/or federal assistance and provide situational awareness.

### **Q14. What is the role of the ND Department of Emergency Services (NDDDES)?**

A. The NDDDES is a coordinating agency and provides 24/7 emergency communications and resource coordination with state agencies in support of local governments during an emergency or disaster.

- Maintains a 24 hour notification capability through the NDDDES Duty Officer system (701-328-9921; request the NDDDES Duty Officer be paged)
- Notifies appropriate state agencies and other agencies
- Provides overall situational awareness to the Governor's Office and those agencies providing support to the incident
- Activates, as necessary, and manages the SEOC to coordinate state response
- Coordinates directly with the ND Forest Service regarding availability and acquisition of state and/or federal firefighting resources as outlined in the Fire Annex of the State Emergency Operations Plan (SEOP).

### **Q15. What is the role of the ND Forest Service (NDFS)?**

A. The NDFS is the jurisdictional agency for wildland fire in ND and can provide assistance under their own authority through the second operational period or up to the point that additional firefighting resources are necessary.

- Primary Mission
  - Support local jurisdictions in a mutual aid capacity. The NDFS will work with local jurisdictions to establish a unified command or act as additional firefighting resources under the command of the Incident Commander. The unified command structure will also be implemented on multi-jurisdictional fires with local, state and federal participants. Mutual aid support is not limited to fire suppression but also includes planning, logistics, training and preparedness. The fire management program also

provides assistance to rural fire departments through training, Federal Excess Property programs and Cooperative Fire Grants.

- Secondary Mission
  - Provide support to incidents outside the boundaries of the state. The NDFS fire resources are nationally listed resources. When conditions allow, they can be dispatched around the country to assist in firefighting efforts.

**Q16. What resources are available through the ND Forest Service and how do I request them?**

A. The ND Forest Service can provide the following assistance upon request through the NDDDES Duty Officer via State Radio. Following is a comprehensive list of resources stationed at the NDFS Field Office in Bismarck; which may or may not be available at any given time.

- Technical Assistance
  - Wildland fire tactics, staging and logistical planning, etc.
- Resources
  - Fire Suppression Equipment
    - 5 Type VI Wildland Engines (400 gal. tanks)
    - 1 Type IV Water Tender (1000 gal. tank)
    - 2 UTV Firefighting Units
    - 1 Type II Initial Attack (IA) Handcrew (20 person crew)
  - Fire Planning and Logistics Support
    - 4 Full-Time NWCG qualified staff (on staff year-round)
    - Portable Radio Repeater System
    - Radio Cache
- Response Time
  - Depending on availability, response time for dispatch is typically 30 minutes plus travel time.

**Q17. What additional state resources may be available through NDDDES?**

A. Additional state assistance, to include the following, may be made available to local jurisdictions responding to incidents/emergencies when local, mutual aid and private sector resources have been or are expected to be exhausted, are unavailable or cannot be deployed in time:

- Reconnaissance surveillance of fire impacted areas
- Surveillance with Forward Looking Infra-Red (FLIR) equipped aircraft to help locate hotspots
- Aerial fire suppression
- Communications assets
- Equipment and personnel for construction of fire breaks
- Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT)

A local declaration is necessary when requesting state resources; verbal notification of a declaration will be accepted, however, a signed declaration must be submitted as soon as possible. Requests for resources should be made to the NDDDES Duty Officer via State Radio by the local EM or designee in coordination with the Incident Commander (IC) and/or local EOC, if activated. Assets will be allocated on a priority basis depending upon the extent and duration of need, lack of local availability and delivery time.

## REPORTING

### **Q18. Why do I need to notify the local EM?**

A. The local EM plays a key role in obtaining additional assistance beyond mutual aid. When an EM is notified of a fire, they are expected to notify the NDDDES Duty Officer regardless of whether assistance is requested or not. This notification provides situational awareness regarding the level of statewide fire activity and helps determine if subsequent actions are necessary (i.e. staging of resources, issuance of state fire declaration, etc). If you have a large fire that has the potential to exceed your local capabilities it is critical that an early “heads up” report is provided to the NDDDES Duty Officer as it takes time to mobilize state resources. Early notification allows state agencies to begin preparing to mobilize state resources, thus reducing the time it takes to activate resources for response time, in the event those resources are officially requested by the local IC.

### **Q19. What guidelines should be followed for reporting fires to NDDDES?**

A. Local responders should coordinate directly with the local EM regarding fire activity within their jurisdiction and establish local protocols for notification and reporting. The following is guidance provided to local EMs for notification to NDDDES:

- Large fire (multiple mutual aid requests, fire unable to be controlled, structures/communities threatened or have the potential to do so, etc.)
- Multiple fires during Red Flag Warning or high wind conditions
- Evacuations have occurred or are being considered
- Potential need for state or federal assistance
- Deaths or injuries have occurred

Smaller fires that do not meet the above criteria can be reported on a weekly basis via WebEOC for situational awareness and fire tracking purposes.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### **Q20. How do I obtain a Temporary Water Permit?**

A. The N.D. State Water Commission (SWC) requires that a temporary water permit is obtained any time surface or ground water is used during an emergency response (***North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) §61-04-02.1 and North Dakota Administrative Code §89-03-01-10***). The local incident command/unified command, or local EOC, is responsible for coordinating with the SWC (701-328-2754) to obtain verbal approval. If unable to reach the SWC, contact the NDDDES Duty Officer via State Radio for assistance.

Verbal requests must include the following:

1. Name of the responding agency.
2. A contact person.
3. A phone number where the contact person can be reached.
4. The source from which the water will be taken.
5. The approximate location of the point of water withdrawal (approximate location of use can be in general terms, such as 2 miles upstream from the bridge on Highway 10 west of Mandan).

6. The planned rate of withdrawal (if known). Often the rate of withdrawal is dependent upon the type of pump used, so the pump type is often given.

Following verbal approval, permit procedures outlined below, must be completed as time allows.

- After the incident, the responding agency representative must follow up with a written application. The temporary water permit application is on the SWC website (<http://www.swc.nd.gov/4dlink9/4dcgi/GetContentPDF/PB-235/SWCForm%20247.pdf>).

**Q21. How do I request a Spot Weather Forecast?**

A. A Spot Weather Forecast for prescribed burns or wildland fires can be requested through your local National Weather Service (NWS) office.

- Bismarck NWS – <http://spot.nws.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/spot/spotmon?site=bis>
  - Bismarck Spot Forecast Guide (<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/bis/images/Users-Manual-BIS.pdf>)
- Grand Forks NWS – <http://spot.nws.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/spot/spotmon?site=fgf>
  - Grand Forks Spot Forecast Guide (<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/fgf/forecast/Users-Manual-GFK.pdf>)

**Q22. Is the Aerial Applicator Fire Suppression Assistance Program through NDDDES still available?**

A. **No.** Effective November 1, 2008, the NDDDES terminated the reimbursement program and no longer accepts requests for payment of aerial applicator fire suppression. Costs associated with deployment of this type of asset are a local expense.

**Note:** A current listing of all aerial applicators in the state can be obtained through the ND Aeronautics Commission.

**Q23. What are some of the common fire definitions I should be aware of?**

A. Following are common fire terms/definitions:

- **Contained** – The status of a wildfire suppression action signifying that a control line has been completed around the fire, and any associated spot fires, which can reasonably be expected to stop the fire's spread.
- **Controlled** – The completion of control line around a fire, any spot fires there from, and any interior islands to be saved; burned out any unburned area adjacent to the fire side of the control lines; and cool down all hot spots that are immediate threats to the control line, until the lines can reasonably be expected to hold under the foreseeable conditions.
- **Control Line** – A comprehensive term used for all the constructed or natural fire barriers and treated fire edges used to contain the fire.
- **Extended Attack** – The phase of the incident when Initial Attack capabilities have been exceeded. The incident is not expected to be contained/controlled in the first operational period. All planned actions must consider firefighter and public safety as the number one priority.
- **Fireline** – Any cleared strip or portion of a control line from which flammable materials have been removed by scraping or digging down to mineral soil.
- **Initial Attack** – The action taken by resources that are first to arrive at an incident. All wildland fires that are controlled by suppression forces undergo initial attack. The kind and number of



resources responding to initial attack varies depending upon fire danger, fuel type, values to be protected and other factors. Generally, initial attack involves a small number of resources and incident size is small. Normally limited to one operational period, at least the containment phase. Mop up/control may extend into multiple periods.

- **Mop Up** – Extinguishing or removing burning material near control lines, felling snags, and trenching logs to prevent rolling after an area has burned, to make a fire safe, or to reduce residual smoke. Final extinguishment of a fire after it has been lined.