



NEWS RELEASE

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PRC Wildfire Task Force Continues Push For Public Safety Awareness

SANTA FE, N.M. – With the summer season well underway, the state’s Wildfire Task Force, led by Public Regulation Commissioner Valerie Espinoza (District 3), is continuing to push for more public awareness of fire danger in New Mexico’s dry forests and grasslands.

Already, wildfires have popped up in places like Pecos and Las Vegas. In the past few months, the United States Forest Service has placed Stage 1 fire restrictions on the Jemez Ranger District, the Cuba Ranger District south of NM Highway 126, and in Sandoval County.

Stage 1 restrictions prohibit the following:

- Campfires, charcoal grills, and stove fires are prohibited except in established fire pits, in developed campsites and picnic areas.
- Pressurized liquid or gas stoves, lanterns, and heaters are allowed.
- Smoking is only allowed in enclosed vehicles or buildings, developed recreation sites, or in areas at least three feet in diameter that are clear of flammable material.
- Possessing, discharging, or using any kind of fire work or other pyrotechnic device.

Right now, the state is pouring resources into prescribed burns in watershed areas and projects to prevent flooding on fire-scarred hillsides and ash contamination to groundwater. Most notably, thinning has taken place in the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed area, which supplies the city with about 40 percent of its drinking water.

Another serious danger to parched forests continues to be downed utility lines, which sparked massive fires last summer that prompted evacuations and destroyed significant acreage in the northern part of the state.

Espinoza and the Wildfire Task Force, which includes State Rep. Luciano “Lucky” Varela, have called for more collaboration between federal and state agencies and utility companies to develop ways to potentially widen power line easements in fire-prone areas.

Since 2013, the group has held multiple packed-room meetings at the PRC to discuss easements with community representatives from places like Taos and Santa Fe, as well as local government officials and agencies like the New Mexico Environment Department.

“Due to the extreme drought our state is still experiencing, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission reminds the public to take steps to reduce wildfire risk,” Espinoza said.

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