

423 acres to burn on purpose in Rincons

Tom Beal Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Thursday, June 24, 2010 12:00 am | [Comments](#)

If you see smoke rising from the Rincons today, don't panic. The National Park Service plans to set fire to 423 acres near Mica Mountain to burn up brush and downed trees.

A number of trails in the high country are closed as of Wednesday.

Comparatively speaking, the Rincon Mountains are in good shape in terms of built-up fuels that lead to very hot fires. Unlike the neighboring Santa Catalinas, the more remote Rincons have been allowed to burn when fires were ignited by lightning over the past 40 years.

These particular areas near Mica Mountain, however, could use a burn, said Michelle Fidler, communication and education specialist for the National Park Service, which manages much of the Rincons.

"We've had intermittent fire throughout the Rincons," said Fidler, "but this is one of those places that can benefit from prescribed fire."

If the weather cooperates, crews will ignite a test fire today and then burn the area in sections over the next four days.

A helicopter lifted supplies to the top Tuesday. Two 20-person hotshot crews and a seven-person group of "fire-use" specialists are hiking 10 miles to the summit.

Smoke will be visible from the east side of the mountains in Benson, Redington and the San Pedro Valley. The smoke could drift down drainages on the east side overnight as the air cools.

Smoke may be visible at times from Tucson as well, Fidler said.

The sections that will burn are enclosed by a trail system that may be "strengthened" to create fire breaks, Fidler said.

Ponderosa pine is the predominant tree in the burn area, at altitudes ranging from 7,950 feet to the 8,666-foot summit of Mica Mountain itself.

Fire managers had to wait until the understory had "cured," or dried out, before burning, Fidler said. They want a "low-to-moderate burn" that will consume downed trees and ladder fuels, but spare the moister living trees. Ponderosa pines, which shed their lower limbs, are adapted to fire, she said.

It's a busy fire season in Arizona, with blazes up north near Williams and Flagstaff and in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona.

Regionally, though, resources are not stretched, said Fidler. The 60 or so Park Service personnel monitoring this blaze are committed to it, she said.

On StarNet: for a video on the efforts against the wildfire, go to azstarnet.com/video

TRAILS CLOSED

These temporary backcountry closures in the Rincon Mountain District were effective beginning Wednesday. Trail closures include Italian Spring (south of Park boundary), Cowhead Saddle, North Slope, Fire Loop, Spud Rock, Switchback, Mica Mountain, Mica Meadow, Bonita, Devils Bathtub, East Slope, Deerhead Spring, Turkey Creek (west of Park boundary), Heartbreak Ridge (north of Happy Valley Lookout), and Manning Camp (east of Douglas Springs intersection). Campground closures include Manning Camp, Grass Shack and Spud Rock. All off-trail areas within Saguaro National Park east of Douglas Springs and Manning Camp Trails are also closed.

SOURCE: Saguaro National Park

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