



NEW MEXICOTREE FARM ALERT APRIL 2006

The November 05' to February 06' period was the driest in New Mexico since 1903. Some areas, Santa Fe and Albuquerque for instance, were the driest since the 1800's. This lack of winter moisture coupled with a very productive growing season last year, which generated a lot of fine fuels, is resulting in a worrisome fire season. As the predictions of a severe fire season become more frequent, Tree Farmers need to think about how fire safe their property is at this point. Most Tree Farmers understand they live in fire adapted forests, primarily piñon/juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine forests. However, because of generations of mistaken management practices (typically fire suppression activities) our forests are no longer adapted to the cool ground fires of days past. While Tree Farmers and other private forest land owners and public agencies have made progress in trying to restore these forest and woodlands while also making homes fire safe, there is still more that needs to be done. In terms of protecting structures such as homes and barns, the critical area is the zone near the home usually 30 to 100 feet depending on fuels loads (forest type and condition) and topography. If you already put in defensible space make sure you take the time to clean this area as a wildfire will have a harder time burning your home if the potential for ignition is reduced. If you haven't put in defensible space yet, you should. If you need information on defensible space or some how-to help try and visit the Firewise Communities website at www.firewise.org or contact your local State Forestry Office or Tree Farm Chairman Harry Morrison (1.505.983.2064 or forester4life@aol.com) or John Harrington at the New Mexico State University Mora Research Center (1.505.387.2319 or joharrin@nmsu.edu). several years on defensible space projects. Others have yet to start.

Time and weather permitting the next step a Tree Farmer can do to reduce the likelihood of a wildfire burning their homes is getting their forests and woodlands immediately around their defensible space to the appropriate stocking levels (density of trees). This step takes some time, but it is never too late to start. The size of this area will vary like the defensible space depending on the terrain and forest condition. A challenge with forest thinning in this area is you will probably generate a lot of slash which itself can become a hazardous fuel source. There are a lot of different ways to handle this and if you are uncertain please contact those folks mentioned above. Piling, chipping or scattering are the typical means of dealing with slash. Each has its pro's and con's for both fire reasons and for forest health reasons.

All Tree Farmers have already begun the third step the need to take to protect their homes from wildfire and that is developing a management plan for your forests. Hopefully you have been making progress in implementing the management plan, but if not, it is never too late. Following the guidance of your management plan will not only result in a healthier forest, but in most cases a more fire tolerant forest.

(Tree Farmers – I apologize for the less than professional letterhead for the Alert this month, but hectic schedule and the need to get this Alert out in a timely fashion limited the amount of time I could apply to this effort. Hopefully next month's Alert will be in the appropriate format. If you would like to send me a suggestion or example please do at joharrin@nmsu.edu - John Harrington)

