

Great Basin Coordination Center

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Updated September 8, 2017

Subject: Extraordinary fine fuel loading and continuity, along with low fuel moisture contributing to extreme fire behavior and high resistance to control across Northern and Western Nevada, Northwest Utah and Idaho.

Discussion: A very wet winter across Western and Northern Nevada into Northern Utah and Southern Idaho has produced tremendous fine fuel loading and continuity in the lower elevations, with multiple cheat grass crops reported. Fine fuel loadings are 200-300% above average across much of the advisory area. Recent large fires in Northern Nevada, Southern Idaho and northern Utah have displayed extreme fire behavior and high resistance to control.

Hot and dry conditions in late August allowed fuels to rapidly dry out. Lightning will affect the Great Basin through early September, and after recent hot and dry weather will increase the likelihood of problematic large fires. **Energy Release Components (ERC) across Northern Nevada and Idaho have increased to well above normal, with near record ERCs for the time of year in the Central Idaho Mountains and Northern and Northwest Utah. Recent fires have shown rapid growth in the absence of wind and have been resistant to control due to the very high grass load.** Wetter weather may move across the advisory area by the mid to late portion of the week of September 11th, which would moderate fuel conditions. However, this pattern change is still uncertain.

Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Anticipate rapid rates-of-spread, even in the absence of slope and wind. **You can't out run it!**
- Anticipate flashy fine fuels and pinyon-juniper to ignite easily and exhibit **advanced rates of spread, elongated flaming fronts and increasing fire brands; expect more long range spotting.**
- Anticipate dust devils and fire whirls to develop in hot, dry and unstable conditions, especially in fine flashy fuels, that may jeopardize control lines and contribute to erratic fire behavior.
- Anticipate large areas to be consumed in a short time periods, even in low slope and low wind conditions.
- Expect longer burn periods at mid to higher elevations.
- Fine fuel loadings are dense and continuous and will support extreme rates of spread regardless of fuel heights.
- **Anticipate a matted grass component which can burn under retardant, increase rates of spread and increase resistance to control.**
- Fire behavior will burn the fine flashy fuels leaving some shrub components or perennials until the live fuel moisture values drop below critical levels. **Watch out for re-burn situations even in grass fuels!**
- Thunderstorms may produce strong outflow winds that may rapidly increase fire behavior and change spread direction.

Mitigation Measures:

- Ensure thorough briefings for all fire resources, especially those from outside the local area.
- Modify tactics to account for potential high rapid rates of spread and high resistance to control.
- Communicate retardant drop effectiveness and modify as necessary; higher coverage levels or altered tactics may be required.
- Park all vehicles in clean, cold black; avoid driving or parking in unburned fuels.
- Ensure solid anchor points – keep one foot in the black.
- Constantly re-evaluate LCES – Lookouts – Communications – Escape Routes – Safety Zones.
- Monitor weather for thunderstorms that may produce strong outflow winds.
- Consult the latest weather and fire danger information at <http://gacc.nifc.gov/gbcc/>.

Area of Concern: Areas of concern include Northern and Western Nevada, Northern and Northwest Utah, and Southern and Central Idaho especially in the low to mid elevations in heavy and continuous fine fuel loading and sagebrush.