

Joe Carrillo, District Forester, Addresses Questions from Homeowners

1. *Property owners need financial help to cut down large pine trees. We are able to remove the dead limbs and brush from our properties, but at a cost of \$3000 to cut down one tree this option is too expensive for the average property owners. Given that one of the stated reasons for the high fire danger is "overstocked forest" (in our case – private forest) what is the possibility of additional funds from the state or other sources to help with this situation. Can our fire danger status be reduced without the funding of pine trees.*

There are two methods. Defensible Space and Hazardous Fuels Reduction. Defensible space can be helpful in a wildfire situation and will provide the greatest opportunity for firefighters to make a stand to protect a residential structure, especially when multiple adjacent property owners have all done work to eliminate ladder fuels. Please note that this only pertains to ground fires. If a fire climbs into the canopy and is progressing through the crowns, then no firefighters will enter into that area until it is safe to do so. The focus becomes evacuations!

The volume of Hazardous Fuels Reduction that would have to take place within the Brazos is somewhere in the neighborhood of 60% of the trees cut and removed off site. Also known as a logging operation, when you have trees as large as you do up there. Due to the proximity of houses and infrastructure, topped with the small property size in the Upper Brazos POA in particular, this method is not exactly feasible. Doing this would leave everyone that sits on ½ acre lots with no trees. It is imperative that every individual landowner make it a priority to have their own personal evacuation plan in place. This is a high fire risk area and the greatest impact we can have is to target large tracts of property where we can remove large volumes of trees to reduce the opportunity for fire to reach the subdivisions within Brazos. The grant that the UCSWCD has with the Water Trust Fund Board is focused on Hazardous Fuel Reduction, not hazard tree removal. The difference being that a hazard tree is not necessarily considered a fire hazard if there is no path for the fire to climb into the canopy. Unit we can find a grant source that will allow us to focus on Hazard Tree Removal, we will have to continue our efforts to focus on maintaining defensible space. We will continue to partner with UCSWCD to see funding that will assist the WUI with Defensible Space Treatment.

2. *Can the forestry office assist the Soil and Water Conservation District with the allocation of current grant funds to make more monies available to smaller lots. Those of us who applied for the grant funds are getting the message from more than one source that the funds are for larger property owners. What would it take to change this approach before all the funds are allocated?*

Again, the partnership that Forestry Division has with UCSWCD is quite robust and we are continually seeking funding for forest treatments across the board within their respective

district. The WUI grant that was unfortunately not awarded was primarily for that purpose of helping those with smaller lots focus on defensible space treatments. The Water Trust Board Grant that the UCSWCD has currently is only for Hazardous Fuel Treatment and not for Defensible Space Treatment.

- 3. If we fully mitigated the residential property in the Brazos Valley subdivisions (using firewise standards) would that be enough to eliminate or reduce forest fires and change our fire risk classification?*

Fires in forests, particularly fire adapted forests like Ponderosa pine, is a natural occurrence or event. With over 100 years of suppression, forest density has increased and become unnatural and well beyond the natural range of variation. We have a homogenous stand that is thick, large, and tall. As stated above, to drastically change the environment we would have to physically cut and remove up to or around 60% of the biomass in this area. In a natural forest that sees regular fires on the landscape, a healthy harvest would be up to 30% removal. The other caveat is that when you remove so much volume and trees are grown so close together, they have not had the opportunity to harden the roots and become subject to wind fall.

- 4. What can the forest division do to clear some of the trees along 512 so that we have a better and clearer way to evacuate?*

Our plan is to continue discussions with NMDOT and eventually enter into agency-to-agency agreements that allows us to conduct treatments on the state highway rights of ways.

- 5. If there is nothing that the forest division can do, what other options do we have for a better and clearer 512 evacuation route?*

Have a personal evacuation plan and don't wait until someone tells you to leave. Sign up with the Rio Arriba County emergency notification site. ([http://www.ri-arriba.org/departments and divisions/fire_marshall/index.html](http://www.ri-arriba.org/departments_and_divisions/fire_marshall/index.html)) Stay informed and be aware of weather conditions that prompt red flag warnings or high fire danger days. The difficulty with what NMDOT is faced with is there is no clear ROW boundary and fence lines have encroached close to the highway. We tried this in 2006 and we would need a survey conducted along this route, after which you have archeological and biological surveys and clearances that have to be acquired before any semblance of treatment can begin.

As a formalized group, perhaps you can work with Chris Gallegos and find out how the priority of the condition of NM512 can be elevated within the state so improvements can be made to the road surface and what little shoulder there is.

- 6. This year, the Brazos is close to flooding some lower valley properties (e.g., like near the banks of the Brazos in Millstone). What would be the local and regional impacts of the*

water and water quality from a major fire in our watershed and to Santa Fe and ABQ water supply.

If you remember 2011 Conchas Fire, then you will remember the impacts that a large landscape wildfire can have on a watershed. By attempting to treat large tracts and large landscapes, the hope is that a fire that occurs will burn with low to moderate intensity and not decimate the watershed. Conversely, the impacts to the Rio Brazos and the Rio Chama would be harsh with the damage impacting the acequias and most likely destroying the fisheries up to El Vado. El Vado would most likely become a sediment trap much like Conchas Lake did in 2011. It is hard to quantify the direct impacts to Santa Fe or Albuquerque per se, but downstream users will be negatively affected.