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Arkansas Forestry Commission Recaps 2016 Wildfire Activity

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. – Annually, the Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) recaps wildfire activity, cause, and frequency for the previous year based on data collected from AFC officials and compiled through the AFC Dispatch Center. Data is also used to create a wildfire outlook for the year ahead.

Wildfire Statistics

- Total Acres Burned: 19,045 (compared to 14,653 acres in 2015 and 16,687 acres in 2014)
- Total Wildfires: 1,248 (compared to 1,178 wildfires in 2015 and 1,240 wildfires in 2014)
- Months with the highest wildfire frequency: February, March, and November
- Top Two Causes of Arkansas Wildfires: Debris Burning (unintentional wildfire caused by outdoor burning) and Arson (a fire set intentionally, with intent to cause harm or damages)

How did 2016 compare to previous wildfire history in Arkansas?

2016 was another relatively low year for wildfire frequency in Arkansas, with the most recent high wildfire frequency year still being 2012 when 34,434 acres burned in 2,148 wildfires. The most common months for wildfire frequency in Arkansas are February – April and August – October, due to low humidity, dry vegetation, and gusty winds common for those months. Higher wildfire frequency in December was related to drought conditions across most of Arkansas. The top two causes of Arkansas wildfires have remained the same for over a decade.

Where are the most and/or largest Arkansas wildfires occurring? The top counties for wildfire frequency and/or acreage burned in 2016 were: Ashley (31 wildfires, 425 acres); Baxter County (20 wildfires, 480 acres); Benton County (20 wildfires, 522 acres); Clark County (23 wildfires, 482 acres); Conway County (32 wildfires, 448 acres), Crawford County (41 wildfires, 402 acres); Drew County (17 wildfires, 649 acres), Franklin County (24 wildfires, 1458 acres), Fulton County (32 wildfires, 973 acres), Independence County (27 wildfires, 653 acres), Izard County (57 wildfires, 1383 acres), Madison County (19 wildfires, 459 acres), Nevada County (19 wildfires, 634 acres), Searcy County (34 wildfires, 1761 acres), Sharp County (30 wildfires, 429 acres), and Van Buren County (31 wildfires, 432 acres).

2017 Arkansas Wildfire Outlook

“For 2017, we are concerned about a heavy buildup of fuel on the ground due to a series of low wildfire years, and remaining drought conditions in NW Arkansas counties. If we experience several warm, low humidity days with gusty winds before vegetation is green again anywhere in the state, we have the potential for high wildfire danger,” says State Forester Joe Fox.

Crews across Arkansas are prepared for the 2017 wildfire season with trained staff, and well maintained equipment. Single Engine Air Tankers are scheduled to arrive in February to assist ground crews with wildfire suppression. The AFC Dispatch Center, as always, is a fully operational, 24-hour facility throughout the year (call 1-800-468-8834). In addition to wildfire suppression and response, AFC crews are among the first agencies to assist communities during storm cleanup (for ice storms, tornados, etc.), flooding emergency response, and other incidents in local areas.

For more wildfire statistics, safety information, Burn Ban maps (County Judges declare Burn Bans which are made available by AFC on an online map), reported prescribed burning information, forest management plans, AFC seedlings, and other forestry assistance, visit forestry.arkansas.gov. To report a wildfire, call 1-800-468-8834. To report a prescribed burn, call 1-800-830-8015. For local fire weather and Burn Ban declarations, visit arkfireinfo.org.

The mission of the AFC is to protect Arkansas’s forests, and those who enjoy them, from wildland fire and natural hazards while promoting rural and urban forest health, stewardship, development, and conservation for all generations of Arkansans.

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