



**TEXAS A&M**  
**FOREST SERVICE**

## News Release

Office of Communications

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### **Area of extremely dry vegetation expanding, increasing potential for wildfire activity near populated areas**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLLEGE STATION, Texas—Dry air will persist over the state through the weekend, contributing to increased rates of drying in vegetation. Activity and fuel dryness is continuing to expand north and east into higher population centers.

#### **Fire environment—weather, fuels and current conditions**

Critically dry wildland vegetation currently observed across the landscape is very receptive to any source of ignition. This critically dry vegetation will cause wildfires to burn more intensely making these wildfires much more resistant to control. With activity and critically dry fuels expanding closer to highly populated areas, there is an elevated risk of human-caused wildfires.

A risk of dry lightning over areas in the Hill Country with critically dry vegetation on Friday night into Saturday, will increase wildfire potential.

“The potential for increased wildfire activity through the weekend is very high in the Hill Country and along the Interstate 35 corridor from Waco to New Braunfels,” said Brad Smith, Texas A&M Forest Service Predictive Services Department Head. “Areas of critically dry vegetation is merging with high population centers along and near Interstate 35.”

For current conditions and wildfire outlook, check out the Texas Fire Potential Outlook:

<https://bit.ly/3kemhbG>.

#### **Fire activity**

Due to significant fire activity occurring in multiple geographical areas across the country and heavy commitment of shared resources to large fires nationally, the National Multi Agency Coordinating Group has raised the National Preparedness Level to Level 5.

Preparedness Levels are dictated by fuel and weather conditions, fire activity, and fire suppression resource availability throughout the country. Level 5 is the highest level of wildland fire activity and indicates heavy resource commitment to fires nationally. The state of Texas is currently at a Level 3 with increased resource commitment and wildfire activity statewide.

According to Les Rogers, Texas A&M Forest Service Chief of Fire Operations, state wildland firefighters have been extremely busy responding to the increase in wildfire activity across the state. Numerous out-of-state resources are currently in Texas working together with state personnel to contain wildfires that are burning statewide.

“Texas A&M Forest Service remains dedicated to protecting Texas’ citizens and natural resources from wildfire, even as national activity increases,” said Rogers. “It is crucial that all residents take care to prevent wildfires and to take measures around their home to reduce wildfire risk.”

Over the past seven days, state and local resources have responded to 150 fires that have burned 69,897 acres. This includes many large, multi-day fires including the still-burning McMean Fire in Sutton County at 3,921 acres and 60% contained, the Lockhart Mountain Fire in Llano County at 422 acres and 90% contained, and the Poverty Canyon Fire in Coke County at 300 acres and 80% contained. Activity increased across the state with multiple fires in the West, Northwest, North, and Central portions of the state.

Many of the recent wildfire starts have been attributed to human activities—such as equipment use and debris burning—and are preventable. So far in 2020, at least 1,850 wildfires that have burned 69,897 acres were human-caused. This includes at least 80 fires that have burned 2,395 acres over the past week.

Aviation resources continue to assist ground crews with water and retardant drops to slow forward progression of fires and douse hotspots across fire areas. Fire suppression aircraft have logged approximately 245 hours of flight time over the past week.

Efforts involved dropping 143,650 gallons of water and 94,066 gallons of retardant on multiple fires including the McMean Fire in Sutton County, the Lockhart Mountain Fire in Llano County, the Poverty Canyon Fire in Coke County, the Turkey Creek Fire in Palo Pinto (247 acres, 100% contained), the Glover 2 Fire in Archer County (300 acres, 100% contained), and the 8 Mile Fire in Terrell County (625 acres, 100% contained).

Aviation resources staged in state include two Type 1 helicopters, two Type 3 helicopters, nine single engine air tankers, one heavy air tanker and two air attack platforms.

Since January 1, 2020, state and local resources have responded to 3,692 fires that have burned a total of 184,774 acres. Aviation resources have flown 1,755 hours, dropping 1,754,867 gallons of water and retardant on Texas wildfires so far this year.

If a wildfire is spotted, immediately contact local authorities. A quick response can help save lives and property.

For frequent wildfire and incident updates, follow the Texas A&M Forest Service incident information Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/AllHazardsTFS>.

## **Prevention and Mitigation**

Many areas of the state are experiencing triple-digit temperatures and critically dry vegetation, increasing wildfire potential. These critically dry fuels are highly susceptible to ignition from any spark. Texans should be mindful of any outdoor activity that may cause a spark.

- Always check with local officials for outdoor burning restrictions in your area. Obey local burn bans or other restrictions. Do not conduct any outdoor burning in hot, dry, or windy conditions.
- Vehicles may cause wildfires. Secure trailer safety chains to ensure they do not cause a spark and ignite a roadside fire.
- Avoid parking or idling in tall, dry grass. Catalytic converters underneath the vehicle can become hot enough to ignite grass under the vehicle.

- Many outdoor activities may produce sparks and ignite nearby vegetation including welding, grinding, mowing, or shredding. If possible, postpone these activities until fuel dryness conditions improve. If not possible, take extra precautions by having a water source or fire extinguisher nearby.

Successfully preparing for a wildfire requires everyone to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves, their families and their properties.

“It is the responsibility of each individual resident to prepare their home for wildfires,” stated Kari Hines, Texas A&M Forest Service Firewise Coordinator. “Just this week, there were dozens of examples of homes that survived wildfires unaided or allowed firefighters to operate safely to protect them. And this was due to the landscaping and building choices made long before the fire ever started.”

Texas A&M Forest Service encourages Texans to take the following steps around their homes today to reduce the risk of wildfire:

- Creating defensible space around your home allows for low intensity, slow-burning conditions in the event of a wildfire.
- Within the first 30 feet of your home, use non-flammable landscaping materials. Within the first five feet, water plants, trees and mulch regularly, and consider xeriscaping if you are affected by water restrictions.
- A healthy, well-maintained landscape is important to the survival of homes during a wildfire. Make sure your plants are carefully spaced, low growing and free of resins, oils and waxes that burn easily.
- Remove dead vegetation from under the deck of your home and within 10 feet of the house.
- Prune your trees six to 10 feet up from the ground.

“Even simple things such as moving flammable material away from wooden structures such as decks and steps, pruning shrubs in front of windows and under mature trees, and cleaning out gutters can be done with a limited amount of time if a fire is in the area,” said Hines.

Taking simple steps to help maintain your property could save it during a wildfire. For more information on how to create defensible space around your home, visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/ProtectYourHome/>.

Residents should pay attention to county burn bans and avoid all outdoor burning until conditions improve. Burn ban information can be found by contacting local fire departments or by visiting <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/TexasBurnBans/>.

For media resources, including public service announcements, posters and audio and video files, visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/mediaresources/>.

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