



Preparing for Wildfires: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity

By Doug Cram, Extension Fire Specialist

Recently, 8 members from NM Cooperative Extension and 2 employees from NM Soil and Water Conservation Districts attended a [wildfire conference](#) in Tucson, AZ under the same title as this newsletter. As the title indicates, the principal focus of the workshop was identifying how the West, with particular help from the Cooperative Extension Service, can move away from allowing wildfires to wreak havoc across landscapes and in our personal lives and move toward a more predictable and prepared environment before, during and after fire. The workshop targeted Cooperative Extension educators from across the West, but also encouraged and welcomed attendance from potential collaborative partners, such as county emergency planners, fire chiefs, and stakeholder groups (e.g., fire safe councils) to name just a few. Insightful and engaged discussion characterized the three day event.

Where is the 'opportunity' in wildfire? Let us 'peel back the onion.' First, from the academic side, we live on a fire planet. In fact, earth alone (probably) supports fire. For example, there are 8.5 million lightning flashes across the globe each day. If one tenth of one percent of those started a wildfire, that would amount to 8500 wildfires each day. Since fuel and oxygen are also readily available on this planet, the Smokey Bear philosophy of preventing fires would seem to be a nonstarter. Here in the southwest, where hot, dry and windy are annually in the spring forecast the question is not if we will have forest and grass fires but when and where. Second, and maybe more meaningful, is that an individual can prepare for such events (or realities) and thereby reduce their risk to the hazard. In other words, an individual can take the opportunity to be prepared for wildfire, an opportunity that will yield better results than chance alone. Examples of individual preparedness include having a disaster/emergency supply kit (to include prescribed medications), and multiple and secure storage of important paperwork (e.g., last will and testament) and photos. Beyond individual or family preparations, there are approaches and actions that homeowners can undertake to further [prepare their homes and yards for wildfires](#). In particular, preparing the home and yard to withstand an [ember shower from an impending wildland fire](#) is recommended.

Where is the ‘opportunity’ for NM Cooperative Extension? Although ‘living with fire’ is not necessarily a traditional or typical ‘bread and butter’ type program found within NM Cooperative Extension, there have been and continue to be various efforts to educate stakeholders about ‘opportunities.’ One specific and rather unique example found in NM is Cooperative Extension’s participation in the ‘ag emergency conference calls’ that occur when wildfires are active or likely. These phone calls involve ag stakeholders at the local, county and state levels communicating information and coordinating efforts as they pertain to ag issues and wildfire (e.g., where can displaced livestock be sheltered, what allotments are threatened, who can volunteer to help, etc.). Additional opportunities to engage the wildfire issue include collaborating with ongoing efforts (i.e., no need to reinvent the wheel). However, in some cases, such efforts consist simply of a passive web-based clearinghouse of information. Because of Cooperative Extensions unique structure and location there is an opportunity to have a greater impact. For example, the grass roots tradition of Cooperative Extension could create an opportunity where none existed before, perhaps introduced through the 4-H program. Engaging the Master Gardner program would be another opportunity to tie into an existing network to educate homeowners on how to ‘Firewise’ their yards. Living with fire is an iterative process that is achieved through multiple steps over a number of years. For example, although the individual can prepare relatively quickly as noted above, preparing one’s home, yard, neighborhood, and community takes time, and is best achieved through a local, organized, and persistent effort. This is where the stability, trust, and consistency of Cooperative Extension can have measurable impacts.

Time and resources are limited especially when considering the prospect of adding a ‘new’ program. Contact Doug Cram to discuss opportunities to help NM live with wildfire.

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The 54th Annual Tucumcari Bull Test and Sale was a big success! We had 112 bulls on test representing 3 breeds and 14 seed stock producers from NM, CO, OK, and TX. The bulls demonstrated great performance, with a sustained average daily gain of over 4 lbs per day! We had beautiful weather on sale day that drew a crowd of over 100 people. The sale averages were as follows: Hereford bulls averaged \$4700 and the Angus bulls averaged \$5800. The New Mexico Beef Cattle Performance Association along with the NMSU Department of Extension Animal Sciences and Natural Resources would like to extend a big thank you to all of you who participated and helped with this great New Mexico tradition.

By Marcy Ward, Extension Livestock Specialist

NMSU offices will be closed Friday, April 3rd due to the Spring Holiday



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Horse Expo & Sale
NMSU Horse Center – Las Cruces, NM
April 18, 2015 - Joby Priest, Horse Manager

NMSU Bull Sale
NMSU Horse Center – Las Cruces, NM
April 25, 2015 - Neil Burcham

US Dairy Education & Training Consortium
May 18 – June 26, 2015
Clovis, NM
Information at usdetc@tamu.edu

NM Youth Ranch Management Camp
Valles Caldera, NM
May 31 – June 5, 2015

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