

Middle Elk Fire
Blanco Ranger District, White River National Forest
Update as of 4:00 PM, Tuesday, September 25, 2012

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The Middle Elk Fire started on Thursday, September 20, 2012, the result of an unattended campfire. The case remains under investigation by Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers.

The fire is located west of the Buford-New Castle Road (Forest Road 245) near Hiner Springs on the Blanco Ranger District of the White River National Forest. The fire is located in Rio Blanco County.

The fire is burning in mixed spruce/fir timber with some open areas and groves of aspen.

As of Tuesday, September 25, the fire has been estimated at 257 acres. This is an increase from the previously reported 224 acres and is largely the result of more accurate mapping.

The Forest Service and Upper Colorado River Fire Management Unit (UCR) fire managers have established a confine/contain suppression strategy for the fire. This decision is based on a concern for firefighter safety and the nature of the threatened resources.

Over night Monday/Tuesday, the fire area received approximately 0.6 inches of rain as recorded by a temporary remote weather station. Recent rains and cooler temperatures have resulted in a reduction of fire activity. A forecasted drying and warming trend later in the week may result in an increase in fire activity.

Concern for public safety has prompted the Forest Service to consider an area closure of National Forest lands for the area west of the Buford-New Castle and north of the fire. No road closures are being considered at this time.

The Forest Service recognizes the impact such a closure would have on hunters during the upcoming hunting season. The first rifle season opens on Saturday, October 13. The Forest Service and UCR fire managers will work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife along with other information services providers to accurately communicate this information.

UCR fire crews continue to respond to a significant number of unattended or abandon campfires. These fires threaten public and firefighter safety as well as resources, especially wildlife habitat and watersheds. Land managers urge all recreationists to follow these guidelines:

- Build only those fires that are absolutely necessary. Consider a stove or other approved propane fueled heater as an alternative to a campfire.
- Have a shovel and a minimum of five gallons of water available for use when it comes time to put the fire out.
- When putting the fire out, apply water and stir the ashes. Repeat this process several times.
- You should be able to put the palm of a bare hand flat on to the ashes and feel no heat.

Very dry (drought) conditions are expected to continue across the UCR into the foreseeable future, effecting lands managed by both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. These conditions could continue until winter snows arrive. Please exercise extreme caution with all fires.