

## Use of Prescribed Burning in the Strontia Springs Zone of Concern

Over the last 10 years, 25,490 acres in the Strontia Springs Zone of Concern have been planned for prescribed burning to reduce wildfire hazard and restore ecosystem dynamics. This project has identified and additional 1,741 acres (see *Table 3: Potential Treatment Data for Strontia Springs (CWP)2*) of forested area that will benefit from prescribed burning. The added acres are more than ½ mile from subdivisions and are bounded by good ridge tops and or roads.

Only 393 acres (or 1.5% of planned area) have actually been prescribe burned in the Strontia area. Given the significant gap between planned and accomplished prescribed burns, is it reasonable to anticipate the burn program will ever accomplish the desired level of treatment?

There are a number of reasons prescribed burns have not kept pace with planned actions. First, there was a significant period of drought in the early 2000s. Second, smoke management considerations have reputedly reduced the number of days burns can conducted. Third, prescribed burning has not been elevated to a high enough priority so that all good burn day opportunities are recognized and used. Fourth, risk aversion on the part of many agency personnel neutralizes the few prescribed fire advocates and practitioners. Fifth, a bias for action to accomplish plans does not coexist with the ability for impressive planning. The list goes on.

The schism between planned and accomplished prescribed fire treatments begs the question – Is prescribed burning a viable tool that can reasonably be expected to mitigate wildfire hazards and restore ecosystems in the Strontia Springs Zone of Concern? OR Is it a bogus solution given the factors mentioned above?

A dramatic change in performance is needed to accomplish the task before us. It can be accomplished IF it becomes an expectation instead of another unquantified priority amongst the many. Is there enough support and gumption to make it happen?

It is time to reconsider the use of prescribed burning as a landscape management tool and focus substantial resources to make it happen if it remains part of the strategy in CWP<sup>2</sup>.