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Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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New Mexico State Forestry Division and Interagency Partners Kick-Off Wildfire Awareness Week 2018

Albuquerque, NM – At a news conference today, New Mexico State Forestry, a Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, kicked-off Wildfire Awareness Week, (March 25-31, 2018) with state leaders and interagency partners at the Open Space Visitors Center with a strong reminder how important wildfire awareness is in New Mexico.

“New Mexico is experiencing below-normal precipitation, wind, seasonally higher-than-normal temperatures and an abundance of fine fuels,” said State Forester Donald Griego. “This makes wildland areas across the state increasingly vulnerable to severe wildfire conditions.”

Griego called upon all New Mexicans and visitors to be vigilant and do their part to help prevent wildfires in the Land of Enchantment. “Currently, there are 746 communities in our state that have been identified as “at risk” from wildfire as part of the New Mexico Fire Plan. This underlines the importance of New Mexicans working together with their local fire departments and local leaders to ensure the safety of our communities and especially our families,” Griego said.

Since January 1, 2018, New Mexico has experienced more than 140 wildfires burning nearly 32,000 acres on state and privately-owned land. Of those, 80 were in the month of March, and more than 90-percent were human-caused. The considerable risk of wildfire still lies ahead as we move into the warmest months of the year.

“I urge all New Mexicans, and visitors, to take the challenge to protect themselves, their families, property, wildlife, our precious watersheds and the many other natural

resources we all love and enjoy,” said Secretary Ken McQueen. “We must remember that when it comes to wildfires, it’s not a matter of if, but when. Prepare now.”

Touching on the week’s theme of, “*Wildfire: It’s not a matter of if, but when. Prepare now,*” partners at today’s news conference emphasized the importance of communities’ engagement against escalating risk of wildfire in our state. Local, state, and federal agency representatives discussed how residents can best prevent wildfires through communication, planning, and individual action.

Fire response agencies expect this to be an active year for wildfire and there are steps state residents and visitors can take to reduce the potential for loss of life and property:

- Create a minimum 30-foot defensible space zone around your home;
- Pile firewood and other flammables well away from your home and other structures;
- Keep access roads free of debris and vegetation to improve access for firefighters and escape in case of wildfire;
- Clean needles, leaves and other debris from roofs and gutters;
- Consider constructing or renovating with fire resistant building materials;
- Prune trees near structures and remove excess ground fuels such as fallen needles, cones and branches.

While enjoying New Mexico’s many forested private and public lands, it is suggested that residents and visitors:

- Know Before You go: Call the statewide toll-free Fire Restriction Hotline at 1-877-864-6985 or log onto FireRestrictions.us;
- Build a campfire in established campgrounds with approved fire pits and grills;
- Never leave a campfire unattended; be sure it is dead out and cold to the touch before leaving;
- Never park vehicles in tall grass or shrubs where hot catalytic converters may spark dry vegetation;
- Never toss lit cigarettes or e-cigarettes out of cars;
- Abide by smoking restrictions in forested areas;
- Keep in mind that the use of fireworks is always prohibited on all public lands including state parks or national forests.

For more information on wildfire prevention, how to create defensible space to protect lives and property, log onto: www.nmforestry.com, www.nmfireinfo.com or www.firewise.org. For more information on preparing your homes and families, visit the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management’s Family Preparedness Guide: <http://www.nmdhsem.org/>.

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