

WDFW urges caution on Washington wildlife areas

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA — As people head outdoors for the Fourth of July weekend, land managers at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) ask that they be careful to avoid sparking a fire on wildlife lands. "Hot weather and dry vegetation are a dangerous mix," said Clay Sprague, WDFW lands manager. "We've already had several wildfires on department lands, and the fire season is just getting started." The largest fire, which erupted in early June, burned nearly 2,500 acres at the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Fireworks are prohibited at all 32 WDFW wildlife areas and 700 water access sites around the state. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has also issued a summer burn ban that prohibits campfires in all WDFW forested areas. Campfires are also prohibited on other WDFW lands, particularly on the east side of the Cascade Mountains. For example, no campfires of any kind are allowed at the four WDFW wildlife areas in Yakima and Kittitas counties until Oct. 15 due to the high risk of wildfires. Current campfire restrictions are posted in campgrounds and at the gates of each wildlife area. More information on DNR's summer burn ban is available at <http://goo.gl/5jyKD>

"A lot of campers we talk to don't realize just how volatile the situation is in these tinder-dry conditions," said Mike Cenci, WDFW deputy chief of enforcement. "One spark can ignite a fire that can quickly race out of control." According to wildfire experts at DNR, people cause 85 percent of Washington's wildfires. Common causes include unattended campfires, fireworks, hot vehicle mufflers on dry grass, target shooting and careless disposal of cigarettes. "Following fire restrictions and exercising common sense are the most important steps people can take to preserve public recreation lands and wildlife habitat," Sprague said. DNR offers six safety tips for anyone recreating outdoors: Never start a campfire when wind is strong or local fire danger is high. Use a screen over and around a campfire to minimize sparks. Keep fires under three feet high and wide. Keep five gallons of water and a shovel nearby. Never leave fires unattended. Extinguish a fire by drowning it thoroughly with water, stirring until cold, and then drowning it again. DNR's summer burn ban is posted at <http://goo.gl/5jyKD>. Local fire-danger levels and burn-ban information is available at <http://fortress.wa.gov/dnr/firedanger/BurnRisk.aspx>. To report a wildfire or untended campfire, call 1(800) 562-6010 or 911.