**Agenda Item Number: 2009-3-3A**

# BERNALILLO COUNTY
# BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

**Meeting Date**: March 5, 2009

**Department**: Commission **Staff Contact**: John Dantis, Deputy County Manager for Public Safety
John H. Garcia, Chief of Fire & Rescue
Frank Barka, Deputy Chief
Chris Gober, Fire Marshal

## TITLE:

Public Hearing to consider adoption of a Resolution banning the use of open fires, campfires, and smoking

## ACTION:

Conduct a public hearing to determine if the extreme or severe drought conditions continue to exist within the specified Fire Districts of the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County.

Motion to:

1. Declare that an extreme or severe drought condition exists pursuant to evidence presented at the hearing.
2. Approve a Resolution **AR -2009** banning the use of open fires, campfires, and smoking in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County

## SUMMARY:

The County has the authority to ban the use of open fires, campfires and smoking in the unincorporated area. The proposed Resolution will ban the use of open fires, campfires, and smoking, in the following areas of the County:

1. Fire District #5: All of the wildlands in the unincorporated areas east of Louisiana Boulevard to the west face of the Sandia Mountains and from San Antonio north to the Sandia Indian Reservation.
2. Fire Districts #6, 10, 11 and 13: East Mountain Area, north, south, and east to the County line.
3. Fire Districts #1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9: Portions of the unincorporated areas to include the Rio Grande bosque and wildland areas extending 1000 feet from the outer edge of the Bosque.

The fire danger across some areas of the Southwest Area is expected to be above average during an overall normal length fire season. This is due to continuing long-term drought, a better than even chance for above normal temperatures, low amounts of winter snow pack at the mid-elevations, and widespread vegetative dieback due to insect and disease damage. The following highlights are based on a consensus "most likely" scenario. The complete seasonal outlook follows this summary below.

Key factors for the 2009 season are:

- Expect a rapid escalation to critical fire danger conditions from late March through mid April. Conditions are expected to remain critical through the remainder of May and June, primarily across parts of Arizona and the western third of New Mexico.
- Due to underlying drought conditions, fire danger will increase quickly during normal warm and dry periods of even one week or less.
- Large fire potential is expected to be normal through March and then increase rapidly to above normal during April through July, such that overall large fire potential for the March-July time period is above normal.
- Critical (100th percentile or higher) area average ERC values are expected to occur from April through early July (8-10 weeks). Large fire occurrence is statistically most likely during this time period. .
- Resource needs for initial attack, extended attack and potential project fires will be greater than usual from May to the start of the monsoon. (6-8 weeks)
- There are no indications that the monsoon will begin early or late, or be especially weak or strong.

This ban is necessary to reduce the risk of Wildland fires, which pose a threat to timber, vegetation, and property. Fighting the fires exhausts the resources of the County Fire and Rescue Department. The National Weather Service indices and the New Mexico State Forestry Division report that due to the lack of precipitation, high winds, and low humidity, Wildland areas throughout the entire state are at a hazardous risk level for burning. Consultation with the State Forester supports this conclusion. The County may issue succeeding Resolutions if extreme or severe drought conditions warrant. A Resolution may be modified or rescinded within its thirty-day period by the County upon conducting an emergency hearing to determine if weather conditions have improved.

### ATTACHMENT:

1. Administrative Resolution **AR -2009**

## FISCAL IMPACT

None.

## STAFF ANALYSIS SUMMARY

### COUNTY MANAGER

I recommend the Board approve the Resolution banning the use of open fires, campfires and smoking in the areas presented in this agenda item. Fire dangers are still very high and the County Fire Department is concerned that unless this ban is implemented, potentially dangerous conditions exist. TL 3/3/2009

### DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

In an effort to minimize the possibility of wildland and bosque fires this summer season, the Fire and Rescue Department is recommending adoption of the attached Resolution. Weather conditions and the lack of moisture have placed areas in Bernalillo County at high risk. I recommend approval of this item. Jdantis 3/3/2009

### LEGAL

The proposed actions are within the Board's authority. JSL 3/3/09

## ELECTED OFFICIAL/OTHER

**Fire and Rescue Department**

The present condition of the Wildland fuels and the weather we have been experiencing has made for a very high fire danger in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County according to the United States Forest Service Sandia Ranger District. There have already been major fires in the parts of New Mexico and Arizona. It is important for the Fire and Rescue Department to control any potential ignition sources for wild fire. This Resolution will help us accomplish our goal.

The potential for a more severe than usual primary fire season is above normal and currently predicted to be the worst in 60 years. This is based on continued long-term drought, a deficiency in current seasonal moisture and existing snowpack, and a prediction for generally below normal precipitation for the remainder of the winter months. The predicted scenario would lead to an early onset of the primary fire season, with both live and dead fuel components being drier than usual and more readily available for combustion. Additionally, the total area of deforestation by drought and insect impacts has continued to increase, further adding to the dead fuel loading. I recommend approval of this item.