

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
FOOD, AND FORESTRY**

2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4912

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Incident Management Red Team Transfers control of NW OK Wildfires

Local firefighters, with the support of Oklahoma Forestry Services, will continue fire suppression activities on the Northwest Oklahoma Complex Fires, as the Southern Region Incident Management Red Team transitioned command back to the local fire departments. The team was ordered by Oklahoma Forestry Services and arrived on March 9th to manage the large fire complex due to the scope of the incident. The fire complex, which consists of the Starbuck, 283, Selman and Beaver fires, is nearing 100% containment and is no longer in need of the team's services.

"Bringing in the Red Team to manage the NWOK complex allowed our Oklahoma Forestry Services Incident Management Team to concentrate on managing other large fires across the state," said George Geissler, State Forester and director of Oklahoma Forestry Services. "They are one of 16 teams in the nation uniquely qualified to handle wildfires of this magnitude and complexity. They did an amazing job helping the people and fire departments of northwest Oklahoma."

Oklahoma Forestry Services will continue to have firefighters and aircraft prepositioned across Oklahoma until wildfire danger subsides. Fire weather is near critical today and forecast for critical on Friday, with winds gusting to 50 mph. There is some rain in the forecast, but it will take significant rainfall to end this extended period of fire activity. Oklahoma has experienced 133 large fires, burning 835,220 acres, since January 1, 2017. Large fires are defined as those exceeding 100 acres in timber and 300 acres in grass.

Oklahoma Forestry Services, working with the National Weather Service, Southern Area Coordination Center and with input from interagency and local fire resources, monitors fire conditions daily for the state and informs the firefighting community with a Fire Situation Report, which is available on its website. In addition to the daily report, Oklahoma Forestry Services provides fire updates throughout the day on its Facebook page.

"Oklahoma typically has a winter fire season while grasses and trees are dormant," said Geissler. "This year is shaping up to be one for the record books, with the Starbuck Fire being the largest in state's history and there is no relief in sight."

The public is urged to continue being vigilant with fire prevention tactics, such as heeding burn bans, avoiding any activities that can spark a blaze, not allowing chains to drag from vehicles and not parking on dry grass.

Additionally Oklahoma Forestry Services is asking the public to report any wildfires immediately through 911, avoid the vicinity of wildfires to allow firefighters faster access for initial attack and to heed all evacuation notices. Families are advised to have a plan for wildfire incidents. Homeowners can also make their home more defensible by moving trash, debris and other flammable items like firewood piles or portable propane tanks a safe distance away from their home.

Oklahoma Forestry Services is the state's lead agency related to wildland fire prevention and protection. For additional information about wildfires, visit www.forestry.ok.gov/wildfire-information.

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Note to Media:

For the latest Oklahoma "Daily Wildfire Situation Report" visit www.forestry.ok.gov and click the link on the homepage (green box on right hand side.) The report contains information about recent fire activity, predicted fire weather and a link for current burn bans.

About Oklahoma Forestry Services

Oklahoma Forestry Services, a division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, is committed to conserving, enhancing and protecting Oklahoma's 12.5 million acres of forests and woodlands. Since 1925, Oklahoma Forestry Services has worked with individuals and communities throughout the state to create resilient landscapes, fire-adaptive communities and provide wildfire response. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the division also has regional offices in Broken Bow, Wilburton and Tahlequah. For more information, visit <http://www.forestry.ok.gov>.