

The National Fire Plan

Carson National Forest's Wildfire Prevention Program

New Mexico

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Smokey with 5th graders at open house, Penasco, NM

The Carson National Forest launched its “I’m Concerned About Wildfires” Prevention program in the Taos Zone thanks to a grant from the National Fire Plan. The program, which started April 12, educates the community about wildfire prevention and mitigation by going into schools, from pre-K through high school, and to community events, such as parades and festivals.

The program also engages people in “Prevention traplines,” according to Ignacio Peralta, Fire Information Officer at the Carson National Forest. In a “Prevention trapline,” information officers and other Forest Service officials identify key contacts and use those contacts to disseminate information to others. These key contacts can be persons or businesses. “We had an amazing level of support from the [Ranger] Districts,” Peralta said.

The program’s success can be measured, according to Peralta, by the number of human-caused fires started in the area served as compared to the remainder of the Forest. “We had the least number of person-caused fires in the Forest...We were the lowest in the region at 8,” he said.

The program was conducted at all 6 school districts nearby the forest, and nearly every school in each district, at the end of the last school year. The youngest children, in preschool and Head Start through 1st grade, saw a 15-minute Smokey Bear prevention message, along with education/ prevention packets. Children in 2nd through 6th grades received the “Fire and the Environment” curriculum developed by the National Interagency Fire Center, which covers such concepts as defensible space; prescribed fires; good vs. bad fire; fire prevention; fire science; the “fire triangle” of oxygen, fuel, and ignition; fire behavior; fire weather; and how fire affects vegetation.

In one elementary school, a group of 5th graders took a field trip to a wildland/ urban interface (WUI) site and observed the difference between the treated area and the untreated area, and see fuels reduction projects in progress, in addition to the regular presentation. “Next year they want us to do a lot more hands on,” Peralta said.



Penasco (NM) student trying backpack pump.



July parade, and the Taos Fiestas Historical parade. In August, the Fire Prevention program was at the San Juan County Fair.

In addition to its work with Prevention Traplines and in schools, the Fire Prevention program has also presented its message at community events, setting up a booth and handing out flyers and educational packets. Events they have participated in include the Chama Spring Fling, the Taos Ski Valley Fire Station Open House, the Angel Fire Kite Festival, the Elliot Barker Girl Scout Camp, the Taos Solar Festival, the Farmington Freedom Days parade, the Red River 4th of