



For Immediate Release

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Consortium Fires up Information Exchange between Land Mangers and Scientists for Healthier, Safer Ecosystems

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – As the ashes continue to smolder from one of the biggest and most visible fires to strike northern Arizona in the last decade, scientists, land managers and fire fighters are working to spread knowledge about fire more effectively with each other and create on-the-ground results for a healthier ecosystem.

With more than \$350-thousand in funding awarded this summer from the Joint Science Fire program, those working in fire will be able to ask their burning questions and ignite useful research projects through the Southwest Fire Science Consortium.

With field trips, workshops, meetings and Webinars, Northern Arizona University School of Forestry fire ecologist Dr. Andrea Thode is developing the consortium as a mechanism to bring scientists and land managers together to share new research findings and management ideas, and to facilitate the funding of those ideas.

A Webinar on managing forest carbon is scheduled for noon on Wednesday, July 28 when Forest Service research ecologist Dr. Mike Ryan discusses the role of forests in the U.S. carbon balance.

“In the past, the best science available did not always make its way into practical results on the ground,” said Thode. “But with the loss of lives, forests and wildlife habitat, along with the exorbitant cost of fire suppression in recent years, the consortium will benefit all those involved in wildland fire and lead to healthier ecosystems.”

Consortium partners include: NAU, University of Arizona, Ecological Restoration Institute, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, the Forest Guild, National Park Service Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona State Forestry, and the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center.

“Whether it’s forests, grasslands or deserts, fire plays a huge role in all of these ecosystems and there is a wealth of information out there that can contribute to resilient wildlands and their ability to survive and benefit from natural fire,” said ERI Director of Research and Development Dr. Pete Fule. “Land managers need information in a practical and useful setting and scientists need to know what problems managers are facing in key sites. But the two don’t always know about each other’s work.”

In addition, an important goal of the consortium is to cultivate future fire professionals.

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“We are seeing a lot of retirement among our seasoned fire professionals and with that, a loss of expertise,” said Thode. “We are looking at ways to train people with practical experience as well as a deeper academic education.”

An interagency fuels workshop is being planned for this fall and a regional Fire Science and Management Conference for early 2011. The consortium currently is looking for people interested in sitting on the review board and soon will be soliciting proposals for workshops and other activities.

“The Southwest Fire Science Consortium couldn’t come at a more relevant time as climate forecasts are indicating drier conditions with a La Niña weather pattern for the Southwest,” said Fule. “This likely will translate into a more active fire season next summer.”

For more information about the Southwest Fire Science Consortium, visit the Web site at <http://www.forestguild.org/SWconsortium.html> or contact SW Consortium coordinator Molly Hunter at 928-853-8380.

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