Project Description

After the Waldo Canyon Fire, Colorado Springs Utilities (Utilities) has been actively engaged with several partnering entities to advance forest management activities in the Pikes Peak Region. Through a strong collaborative effort between federal, state, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and private land owner’s forest treatment work has fostered efforts to help improve forest health conditions and lower the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Along with Utilities, these efforts are being coordinated in conjunction with the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP), Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to expand the effectiveness of these treatments across a larger landscape area on and near the North Slope watershed. With the increase in fuels mitigation activities, this letter is to inform you Utilities will be conducting slash pile burning operation in early 2015 on the North Slope watershed.

This project is aimed at eliminating approximately 500 slash piles on some areas located near South Catamount Reservoir. In 2013, a 180 acre hand treatment project was completed of which approximately 2,000 slash piles were generated as a result of the treatment work. In our best effort to mechanically treat these piles, approximately 500 still remain due to the inaccessibility to mobilize a masticator in that part of the watershed. The burning of these piles is necessary as they present a fuel load that needs to be properly mitigated before the onset of the wildfire season.

As Utilities and our partners continue to expand treatments within the local watersheds and on private lands, slash pile and other burning operations are expected to increase in the area of the North Slope and Pikes Peak Region. As for Utilities 2015 North Slope Pile Reduction Project, burning operations are planned to begin in late February into early April based on the required snow cover and weather conditions to safely conduct these operations. The use of prescribed fire for this project is in alignment with Utilities Forest Management Program to utilize the managed fire as necessary to meet the following objectives:

• Safely implement projects where prescribed fire is necessary to meet targeted fuel reduction and forest health objectives;
• Utilize prescribe fire where it can safely be managed to minimize the increasing risk of wildfire for the long-term protection of the Utilities water supplies, system infrastructure, and surrounding communities; and
• Utilize prescribe fire where it can be safely utilized, at the appropriate frequency, to maintain treated areas and first entry investments.

Implementation of Burn Plan

In order to conduct this burn, Utilities has completed a burn plan following the requirements of the 2014 Colorado State Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Policy Guide. Utilities has acquired all required Colorado State smoke permits and is compliance with all other local burning permits and approval processes. Utilities Wildland Fire Team will be conducting this burn in partnership with various local fire agencies to ensure the safe implementation of this project. Currently, we have targeted the month of March to burn, but exact dates will be dependent on snow cover and weather conditions.

Given the location of the pile burn area (see attached maps), this burn will be low complexity operation and will have the benefit of the project area surrounded by South Catamount Reservoir. As required per the burn plan and permits, the appropriate authorities will be notified each day that burning operations commence. Utilities will be working in close coordination with CUSP given similar burn schedules and proximity of pile burn operations occurring on private lands near the North Slope watershed.

Utilities is committed to safety for its employees and the safety and well being of the public. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact ______________ at ____________.

Sincerely,

Gary or Wayne for CSU

Jonathan for CUSP