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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**EMNRD Forestry Division & Interagency Partners Recognize
Wildfire Awareness Week
Commitment to Readiness During COVID-19 Pandemic**

Santa Fe, NM – The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department’s (EMNRD’s) Forestry Division (State Forestry) and interagency partners with the Southwest Coordination Center are recognizing March 29 through April 4, 2020 as Wildfire Awareness Week in New Mexico. Protocols are being implemented to ensure the highest degree of readiness and safety for firefighters and the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are taking every precaution to ensure that our employees and seasonal firefighters are taking the necessary steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19,” said EMNRD Cabinet Secretary Sarah Cottrell Propst. “Specific guidelines are now in place requiring best practice health screenings at State Forestry facilities during regular work hours and while on fire assignments.”

“While we are faced with unusual circumstances this fire season, we are still prepared with hundreds of firefighters at the ready across New Mexico,” said State Forester Laura McCarthy. “Together with our local, state, federal, and tribal partners we have developed wildfire response plans and have adjusted training practices to minimize physical contact during all work-related activities.”

This year’s Wildfire Awareness Week theme, “*When wildfire strikes will you be ready?*”, highlights the fact that as more and more people choose to live near our wildlands they must be proactive in protecting themselves, their families, neighbors, and firefighters.

“Wildfire Awareness Week reminds us that we all have a responsibility to help prevent wildfires and protect our communities,” McCarthy said. “Now is the perfect time to take action to create a 100-foot defensible space around your home. You can also prepare for when wildfire does come your way by familiarizing your family with the 5 P’s of evacuation – people, pets, prescriptions, important papers, personal needs, and priceless items like photos.”

Since January 1, 2020, more than 60 wildfires have threatened homes, burned lands, and put New Mexico's watersheds at risk. Approximately 72% of these fires were human-caused, which remains one of the leading factors for wildfire in the wildland-urban-interface (WUI).

Specific steps homeowners and landowners can take to make their homes and properties safer from wildfire:

- Clear leaves, pine needles and other debris from roofs, gutters and deck areas.
- Prune trees near structures, remove excess ground fuels such as fallen needles, cones and branches.
- Cut tall grass around your property.
- Pile firewood and other flammables away from your home and other structures.
- Take precautions when burning debris or using equipment and never leave a fire unattended.
- Follow burn restrictions and wind warnings – always check the weather.

While enjoying New Mexico's many forested private and public lands, it is suggested that residents and visitors:

- Build a campfire in established campgrounds with approved fire pits and grills.
- Never leave a campfire unattended; be sure it is dead out and cold to the touch before leaving.
- Never park vehicles in tall grass or shrubs where hot car parts may spark dry vegetation.
- Never toss lit cigarettes or e-cigarettes out of cars and abide by smoking restrictions in forested areas.
- Keep in mind that the use of fireworks is always prohibited on all public lands including state parks or national forests.

For more information on wildfire prevention and how to create defensible space, log onto: <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/>, <https://nmfireinfo.com/> or www.firewise.org. For more information on the 5 p's of evacuation and preparing your homes and families, visit the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management's Family Preparedness Guide: www.nmdhsem.org or Ready, Set, Go program at www.wildlandfirersg.org.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us>