

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Southwestern Texas and Western Oklahoma,

Date Advisory takes affect – May 1, 2018

Subject: Exceptional fine fuel loading and persisting drought have combined continue to create dangerous fire behavior conditions across southwestern Texas and western Oklahoma. Overall fuel conditions have moderated in the eastern extent of the Advisory; however drought influence on above normal fuel loading and stalled green up have resulted in persistent concern. Extreme fire behavior has been observed under moderate fire weather conditions, and fires have shown a complete resistance to control during critical fire weather events.

Discussion: Above normal rainfall during the 2017 growing season has produced an abundance of fine fuel loading across the grass dominant fuelscape of the southern Plains. This exceptional crop of grass is supporting above normal significant fire occurrence and fires that are highly resistant to control. The current fire effective weather pattern has produced drying that has pushed ERC values above the 90th percentile. This same fire effective weather pattern produces frequent critical and at times extreme fire weather in the pre frontal and post frontal environments. The fire environment described here can produce fast moving fires that quickly out pace suppression efforts and are capable of threatening communities.

Difference from normal conditions: Fine fuels loadings are 130-150%+ of normal, with 2-4 foot tall grass observed in some areas. The above normal grass loading can effectively lower fire weather and fuel dryness thresholds for significant fire occurrence or fires highly resistant to control. These grass fuel beds will support rate of spread from 2-4 mph with critical fire weather present. Extreme fire weather will produce rate of spread up to 6-7 mph. Portions of the advisory area have received less than 10% of normal precipitation over the past 90 days. The April 12th Rhea Fire, west of Rhea Oklahoma, produced rate of spread up to 5 mph in heavy drought-stricken vegetation and cedar. The Rhea Fire shown here produced significant flame lengths and rates of spread.



Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Extreme to unprecedented fire growth and intensity is to be expected with any new or ongoing fires, especially under critical fire weather conditions. This is to be expected on all areas of fire perimeters, including the normally less active flanks and heel.
- Typical barriers to fire spread and behavior cannot be depended on, including roadways and areas burned earlier in the year.
- Fire spread and behavior may not abate substantially during cooler, more humid periods as they typically do...including the overnight hours.
- The public will need to be advised to avoid areas in the vicinity of ongoing fires, monitor the media, and heed evacuation notices should fires occur near their homes or places of employment.

Mitigation Measures:

- Fire managers should be prepared to support periods of more frequent fire occurrence as well as complex, longer duration wildfire incidents; Firefighters should expect to construct wider control lines than typical in all fuel types; Dozers and maintainers will be best utilized in tandem; Wet-lines in fine fuels will require frequent patrol and intensive mop-up; Contained fires will require longer periods of patrol to prevent escape.

Area of Concern: Southwestern Texas and western Oklahoma.

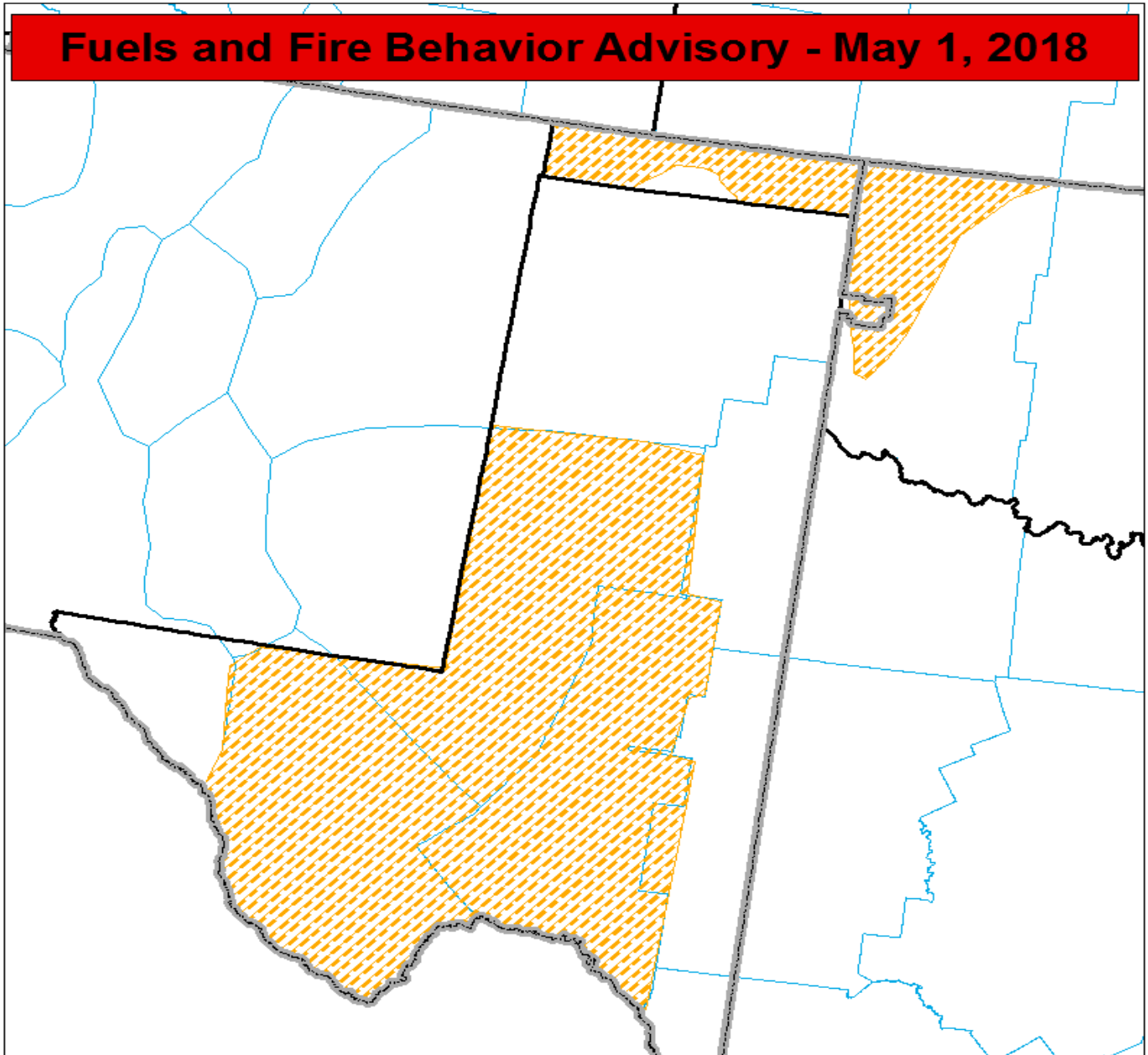
Issued By: Allan Hepworth, R8 USFS, with all-hands interagency coordination between wildland fire experts from the SW, RM, and SA Geographic Areas.



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-  Geographic Areas
-  Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory Area
-  Predictive Service Areas

