



Office of the Governor

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Nora Meyers Sackett
Press Secretary, Office of the Governor
nora.sackett@state.nm.us
(505) 690-7313

June 21, 2022

Governor condemns missteps identified by Forest Service review of prescribed burn that caused Hermits Peak Fire

SANTA FE – Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued a statement on Tuesday following the release of the U.S. Forest Service review of the April 6, 2022 prescribed burn that resulted in the Hermits Peak Fire, the largest fire in the state’s history.

“I am deeply frustrated by the numerous missteps within the Las Dispensas burn identified by this review. It is very difficult to understand how a plan crafted several years ago could be repeatedly re-approved without adjustments or considerations for updated drought conditions, as well as how that plan could be put into place without any immediate data for weather conditions during what New Mexicans know to be a particularly windy time of the year. In addition, it does not appear that anyone involved in this burn was held to account for the significant mistakes made during this burn.

“It is critical that moving forward, the U.S. Forest Service takes every identified opportunity to ensure forest management activities do not result in the devastation of hundreds of thousands of acres and dozens of New Mexico communities. I will continue working to hold the federal government accountable for making New Mexicans whole after the extreme hardship caused by the Forest Service’s negligence.”

Among the findings of the review of the April 6 Las Dispensas Prescribed Burn are:

- The plan was approved in 2019 and re-approved each year thereafter without adjustments for extended drought conditions.
- The review found that numerous details regarding situational awareness of weather in the fire environment were overlooked or misrepresented, including remote automated weather stations availability and representativeness, handheld electronic weather observations, and documentation.
- The planners used a fuel model that did not match the actual conditions on the ground, resulting in an incorrect fuel model and miscalculation of the contingency resources that would be needed on site during the burn to suppress an escape.

- While there is evidence that the burn planners knew there was no water on site to put out a spot fire, they failed to include water resources or logistics to get water to the site in their prescribed burn plan.

###