



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

ADMINISTRATION

3200 East Highway 34
c/o 500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501-5070
Phone: (605) 773-3478
Fax: (605) 773-3194

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CONTACT: Michael Winder, SD DOC (605) 773-3478

DOC, Forest Service working together to prevent future fires

Pierre, S.D. – While awaiting their next call to respond to a fire in the Black Hills, state prison inmates are working to help prevent more fires in the future.

Inmates from the Rapid City Trusty Unit are reducing the risk of another major forest fire by cutting dead, dying and broken trees and thinning overgrown stands of brush pine on United States Forest Service land. The areas being targeted in this project include two areas of the Black Hills, including along Highway 14A in Spearfish Canyon near Savoy and in Beaver Park southwest of Sturgis.

"Our partnership with the Forest Service on this project is vital to the prevention of large scale fires," said Darwin Weeldreyer, Director of Community Services for the Department of Corrections. "The progress of the inmate crews has been well received."

The largest, best-formed pines are retained. Only those needled trees that are 14 inches and smaller as well as dead and or downed hardwood stems are being cut. The timber is then cut and piled. The slash piles will be burned during the winter months once the timber has dried.

Inmates assigned to the project are trained and certified firefighters. They have fire-fighting equipment readily available in case they are needed to respond to a fire call. Inmate crews are often among the first respondents to wildfires in the Black Hills.

Because of the location of the projects, several restrictions were applied. No activity was scheduled within 300-feet of Highway 14A until after Labor Day. Ground cannot be disturbed within a 100-foot buffer zone around a known archeological site near Highway 14A. No activities are scheduled within a defined two-year floodplain of Spearfish Creek and no slash piles are constructed within 100-feet from the top of the creek's stream bank.

Inmates have worked for several years to reduce the fire danger in the Black Hills, including in Custer State Park.