

5-4-2005

Hot, Dry Conditions Threaten Fires in Much of Mexico

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Hot, Dry Conditions Threaten Fires in Much of Mexico." (2005). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4860>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Hot, Dry Conditions Threaten Fires in Much of Mexico

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2005-05-04

The threat of fire remains strong in a large area of Mexico this year because of dry conditions and higher-than-normal temperatures during the past several months. The Secretaria del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) said rainfall has been erratic in the western, southern, and southeastern areas of the country. In contrast, the northeast and the north central portions of Mexico have received ample moisture for the last several years, allowing Mexico to meet its obligations to the US under a 1944 water treaty (see SourceMex, 2004-04-28). The dry and hot conditions have already resulted in the loss of 71,000 hectares of grasslands, forests, and jungle to fire this year. This is twice the fire damage as there was a year ago, said SEMARNAT.

Environment Secretary Alberto Cardenas said more fires have occurred in Mexico so far this year than during the same period in the previous four years. The fire season could worsen in May, traditionally the month when subsistence growers and small-scale farmers burn fields to clear land for planting. In dry years, such as this one, the fire danger is especially high.

Campaign targets agricultural producers

To reduce planting-related fires, the Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganadaria, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentacion (SAGARPA) has launched a campaign to encourage producers to use methods other than fire to clear their lands. As part of the campaign, which is expected to cost about 324 million pesos (US\$29.5 million), SAGARPA has established more than 700 centers throughout the country to support producers during the spring planting season. "Let us not forget that May is one of the most difficult months for fire," said David Hernandez Gomez, a regional director of the Comision Nacional Forestal (CONAFOR) in north-central Mexico.

Hernandez called on the news media to help spread the message to farmers about the dangers of clearing the land by burning. Several states, including Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Sinaloa, and Zacatecas, have all reported significant fire damage already this season. In Zacatecas, CONAFOR declared a state of emergency in April because extremely hot and dry conditions have devastated many areas of the state. CONAFOR estimates that fires have destroyed more than 16,000 ha of grassland and forests in Zacatecas in the past three months.

In Chiapas, state authorities called on the federal Army in late April to help stamp out a fire that destroyed more than 2,000 ha in the Selva Lacandona. Chiapas has already lost more than 11,000 ha to fire this year. Fire damage has also been serious in Guerrero, which has lost more than 7,000 ha of forests and grasslands since the beginning of this year.

While most of the fires have caused damage to the countryside, some fire damage has also occurred in the wooded areas surrounding Mexico City. This has prompted some legislators to call for a special plan to fight fires near the capital. Forest fire spreads smoke over Guadalajara A high-intensity fire has also damaged a large portion of Jalisco's Bosque de Primavera Reserve, just east of

Guadalajara. The 35,000-ha reserve, which has served as the lungs for the Guadalajara metropolitan area, lost up to 5,000 ha to fire damage in late April. The blaze, thought to have been caused by a campfire, forced state and local authorities to declare an environmental emergency, with smoke blanketing the highly populated areas of Guadalajara and Zapopan.

The smoke created problems as far east as Leon in Guanajuato state, where authorities were forced to shut down the local airport for several hours, said environmental experts at the Universidad de Guadalajara (UdeG). Some UdeG experts said fire-devastated area in the Bosque de Primavera could take as long as 20 years to recover because reforestation efforts will not be able to be conducted for some time. "The damaged area was left very infertile," said Ulises Ruiz Sanchez, a researcher at UdeG's Instituto de Astronomia y Meteorologia.

The recent hotter- and drier-than-normal conditions have also raised some concerns about potential damage to crops, especially if the normal wet season does not arrive on schedule during June. Some crops in southern areas such as Campeche are already suffering weather-related damage.

In a recent report, the Confederacion Nacional Campesina (CNC) said the recent drought could devastate a large portion of the state's spring-summer corn crop, which had been projected at 250,000 metric tons. Only about 20% of the crops grown in Campeche are irrigated, said CNC leader Sergio Ramirez Gonzalez. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on May 4, reported at 10.98 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, 04/25/05; La Crisis, El Financiero, The Herald-Mexico City, 04/27/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 04/26/05, 04/28/05; El Universal, 04/27/05, 04/28/05; El Debate de Sinaloa, 04/29/05; El Siglo de Torreón, 05/02/05; Notimex, 04/26/05, 05/01/05, 05/03/05; La Jornada, 04/27/05, 05/03/05)

-- End --