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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Prescribed Fire Planned for Blue Hole Cienega *Pecos sunflower treatment scheduled as early as Nov. 14*

Santa Fe – The New Mexico Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department’s [Forestry Division](#) is planning a prescribed burn at the Blue Hole Cienega Nature Preserve, in Santa Rosa, to take place next week, as early as November 14, 2023.

Crews will treat 115 acres on the preserve, which is bound by Blue Hole Rd., Reilly Rd., State Highway 91, and El Rito Creek. The goal is to help protect and regenerate the population of the Pecos sunflower, which is a state and federally endangered plant in New Mexico.

Protecting the Pecos sunflower

The Pecos sunflower grows on Forestry Division-owned land within the municipality of Santa Rosa. Monitoring earlier this year found that the sunflower’s population had decreased significantly. Unlike other prescribed burns that seek to mitigate fire hazard, this use of fire as a natural process will help encourage the growth of this rare species of sunflower by removing overgrown and accumulated vegetation on the soil surface. This plan is a continuation of a decades-long effort to monitor and improve the health of the Cienega, which was last treated with prescribed fire seven years ago.

“Protecting plants like the Pecos sunflower is important to sustain the population of this unique New Mexico plant,” said State Forester Laura McCarthy. “This controlled burn will reinvigorate the sunflower plant and help to keep the Cienega colorful for years to come.”

Logistics

Ignitions will last only one day. Weather, relative humidity and wind speeds will be monitored closely prior to commencing ignitions. If conditions are not favorable, the burn will be postponed until conditions line up with safety guidelines. Once those guidelines have been met, the burn will be allowed to proceed. The Cienega abuts private land, wells and utility lines, and crews will create fire breaks around these areas by clearing grass beforehand.

Forestry Division staff will conduct the burn and will have staffed fire equipment on site. Backup firefighters and engines will be available in the event of an escape. Monitoring of the area will continue after the burn is declared secure.

Safety

Notices will be posted in the area. Smoke will be visible from I-40, Highway 91, and within the city of Santa Rosa. Forestry Division will coordinate with Guadalupe County as well as Santa Rosa police and emergency management officials to increase public awareness before and during the burn. Safety of the public and firefighters is the first and last concern, and all implementations will follow strict safety guidelines.

Public information officers will post updates on [Inciweb](#), [X](#) (formerly Twitter), as well as [Facebook](#) and [NM Fire Info](#).

More information is available about the [Pecos sunflower](#) and the rest of New Mexico's [rare and endangered plants](#) on the Forestry Division's website.

(Photo: The Pecos sunflower on the Blue Hole Cienega, as seen from the air.)

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