

Fire threat addressed in state disaster declaration

(MSC News)--Gov. Laura Kelly issued a State of Disaster Emergency Monday morning due to a high risk of wildland fires and red flag warnings in several Kansas counties. Elevated to critical fire weather is expected over the next four days. The greatest concern is for Tuesday and Wednesday as a storm system is forecast to move across the state bringing strong winds that make fire more challenging and dangerous to control. Fuels are extremely dry across the state. Fire behavior has been erratic over the last several days, making suppression difficult.

"It is because wildfires can spring up so suddenly under these conditions that I have put this disaster declaration in place," Kelly said. "Placing resources such as these helicopters and other resources on standby help the state respond more quickly if a fire begins to spread."

The declaration authorizes the use of state resources and personnel to assist with response and recovery operations in affected counties that meet certain criteria.

"As we are faced with multiple days of dangerous fire weather conditions, we are focusing our resources on supporting local fire departments," Jason Hartman, Kansas State Forester, said. "Please take extra precautions to eliminate the risk of sparking a wildfire to keep those firefighters and our communities safe."

"Kansans should remain vigilant about preventing fires," Angee Morgan, deputy director of Kansas Division of Emergency Management, said. "Avoid any activity that could create a spark and touch off a fire. Do not drive on or stop your car on dry or tall grass and do not throw cigarettes on the ground."

At the direction of the KDEM State Emergency Operations Center, the Kansas National Guard is prestaging firefighting assets for a rapid response in the event any counties need assistance with fire suppression operations. These assets will include four UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters with collapsible water buckets with joint terminal attack controller support and a water tender team.

Kansas Forest Service has Tanker 95 on standby, and is checking availability of agriculture pilots. The Kansas Forest Service is also checking the availability of firefighting resources in cooperating states through the Great Plains Interstate Fire Compact - a cooperative plan allowing the movement of state resources across state lines.

With several days of fire weather concerns throughout Kansas, resources will be limited. Kansas Forest Service staff is dispersed across the state to monitor fire

conditions and behavior and available to provide assistance as requested.

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