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CERRO GRANDE FIRE

Park Service tightening policies on prescribed burns

◆Peer review for risky circumstances, go/no-go checklist, and contingency resources are recommended precautions for a prescribed fire

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There were lessons to be learned following the Cerro Grande Fire, and as a result the National Park Service is taking

steps to fix weaknesses in its prescribed fire policy, said Karen Wade, director of the Park Service's Intermountain Region in Denver.

"We're proud of our prescribed fire program," said Wade in Albuquerque last week. "The Cerro Grande Fire was the Park Service's first catastrophe in that program, and we're reeling from it. We are humbled, and a bit chastised, and that's healthy. We will continue to go about doing our job, but with a little humility."

Wade said the NPS is imple-



menting recommendations given in testimony by Barry T. Hill of the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health of the House Committee on Resources late last summer.

Wade said the testimony details some of the difficulties in dealing with complex prescribed burns, and provides recommendations on how the Park Service's prescribed burning program could become better. "The report has a good perspective," she said.

Both the U.S. Departments

of the Interior and of Agriculture generally agreed with the facts, conclusions and recommendations in Hill's testimony. Hill is the Associate Director of Energy, Resources, and Science Issues for the Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division of the GAO.

"As a result of the Cerro Grande Fire, we identified three important lessons to be learned about the planning process that could improve the management of future prescribed burns," stated Hill in his testimony.

"First, prescribed burn plans need to be 'peer-reviewed' by independent, knowledgeable individuals. Second, clarifica-

tion is needed on how to get additional firefighting resources — called 'contingency resources' — for a fire once it has begun and when to make these additional resources available for prescribed fires. And third, federal agencies and nearby jurisdictions need more effective coordination and cooperation before a prescribed burn is started."