

Controlled Burns on Kirtland Air Force Base Grasslands Along the KAFB / FHV Joint Fence Line

Rusty Goetz

February 27, 2023

This report reflects my understanding of the status, conditions, and proposals for the upcoming series of controlled or prescribed (abbreviated “RX” by the Kirtland AFB Wildland Module staff) grassland burns on Kirtland Air Force Base

On January 26, FHVA Board President, Andrew Lipman, received an email notice from Jimmy Melek, Deputy Chief of Operations Albuquerque Fire and Rescue (AFR), notifying the FHVA Board about the Kirtland proposed prescribed burn. This letter included a written notice from the office of Clyde Burris, Assistant Lead, Kirtland Wildland Support Module. Mr. Burris’ note was to inform the AFR department of their intent and to request notification of the neighborhoods along the base fence line of the upcoming prescribed fires. The letter stated that there might be a burn on the weekend of February 11-12.

On Friday, January 27, I sent a letter to both Mr. Melek and Mr. Burris raising questions about the process. This letter, and the lack of permits, effectively postponed the Feb 11-12 burn.

We received a written responses from Jimmy Melek that answered many of our questions but raised other (the original letter, including Deputy Chief Melek’s responses embedded within it, is attached to this report). The response from Assistant Module Lead, Kirtland Wildland Support Module, Clyde Burris, was to arrange for, and invite Andrew Lipman and me, to a technical briefing on base on Tuesday, February 7, 2023, which Andrew and I both attended.

Subsequently, several representatives of the Kirtland Wildland Fire Management team and Civil Engineering groups, Kirtland Fire Battalions chiefs, NM Game and Fish Department, AFR officers, and the City of Albuquerque attended our February 21 FHVA Board meeting, to further update us on procedures, line up contacts to work with us on the FHV western emergency exit gate choice, and present the board with a large reflective bright yellow metal sandwich board sign to be placed in front of the FHV entrance sign when a KAF controlled burn is to take place.

February 7, 2023 Proposed Kirtland RX Burn Meeting Results

In a nut shell, we were pleased with the steps the Base has taken. The meeting was held especially for Four Hills Village as no other HOAs or neighborhood associations sent in comments or questions. They did a good job getting the key players face to face so we could all discuss our issues in 2-hour meeting at the Air Force Civil Engineering Center, where the Air Force Wildland Management Team has been based for the last 3 years.

The goals of the burns are to build a wide, healthy grassland fire stop or “fire catchment area” along our fence line because our dominant SW surface and 20 ft winds (which can carry embers and sparks) would most likely drive a grass/brush fire straight at FHV. We came away understanding that they had covered virtually all our questions with state-of-the-art mapping and techniques. The Air Force RX Burn team has extensive experience working burns across the US. It was clarified that this is Kirtland Base’s first controlled burn in its 85-year history, not the Air Force Wildland Fire Management Burn Team’s. The

confusion about the experience level of the KAFB fire staff was in the way the proposed burn notice was written. We were also taken out to the FHV/Kirtland fence line where the first burns will be scheduled, all conditions permitting (and they are numerous.) KAFB personnel had already bladed a 25-30-foot-wide firebreak and removed all the scrub juniper trees along the fence. The Base did not yet have a burn/air quality permit from the city but expected its delivery within the next few weeks.

A couple of the other important takeaways were that we would work together on holding public meetings to get more information out on why and how these burns will be operated. We also learned that there will be fire equipment stationed onsite within FHV during the adjacent burns to handle any chance of sparks setting brush on fire here. We discussed having the emergency exit gates open during the burns. That was tentatively agreed but the various fire units did not want to hand over gate keys yet. Their suggestion was we work together to select one gate to Juan Tabo Blvd. and have it cleaned up and ready for use. That would make traffic control and firefighting logistics easier. It falls on us to get hold of City Planning and The City Council to approve and install proper signage identifying emergency exit routes.

Other items of interest: the city and county fire and emergency departments are ready to use reverse 911 in case an evacuation is needed. Bernalillo County Emergency Management also uses a voluntary sign-up communication system. The emergency announcement system called "Everbridge." It is a system used for emergency notifications regarding disasters, evacuations, weather and or fire emergencies. It is tuned to your individual local and will use either your cell or land landline. The link is <https://member.everbridge.net/index/167346099244371>. or you can go out to the Bernalillo County Emergency Management website.

Burn Meeting Attendee List

Gary Schneider, Base Civil Engineer
Melissa Clark, Installation Management Chief
Jaime Jimenez, Kirtland Fire Chief
Terrance Eaton, Kirtland Fire Battalion Chief
Clyde Burris, Kirtland Wildland Support Module Lead
David Sanchez, Kirtland Wildland Support Module Assistant Lead
Cass Palmer, Deputy Regional Fire Management Coordinator
Todd Decker, Regional Prescribed Fire Specialist
James "Jimmy" Melek, Deputy Chief of Operations, Albuquerque Fire Rescue
Joseph Kandel, Albuquerque Wildland Coordinator
Robert Rose, Deputy Chief of Operation, Bernalillo County Fire Rescue
Eva Blaylock, Kirtland Public Affairs
Ashley Palacios, Kirtland Public Affairs
Oneika Banks, Kirtland Public Affairs
Andrew Lipman, President., Four Hills Village Association
Rusty Goetz, Board member, Four Hills Village Association

Status of FHV Western Emergency Exit Gates

Currently none of three western Emergency gates have city signage on Wagon train dr. to indicate their existence. On Thursday, February 9, 2023 I checked the 3 FHV western emergency exits to Juan Tabo Blvd. from the Juan Tabo Hills and Volterra Village neighborhoods side. My reference for distance measuring was the Juan Tabo Blvd/ Southern Ave intersection. From this intersection you can either continue to the east on Juan Tabo to the Central Ave or turn west to join Eubank Blvd and continue to Central Ave.

- The Via Posada exit is along one of widest and best maintained roads in FHV and is the most easily accessed western emergency exit route for the entire FHV neighborhood. On the FHV side the entrance to Via Posada is a three way stop on Wagon Train Dr. There is one exit road (Monachos Rd SE) located on the north side of the Volterra Village and Juan Tabo Hills neighborhoods. This is the shortest link to Juan Tabo Blvd, has no stop signs and the exit route is 1.2 miles to the Juan Tabo/Southern Ave intersection. However, it has a second steel pipe gate on the Volterra Village side and needs to have the gravel road between the two neighborhoods cleaned up and the deep uncompacted gravel tamped down or paved, so vehicles do not sink, stall, and block the exit route.



View to east of 2nd pipe gate on Via Posada Exit



View to east of gravel road link to Via Posada gate from Volterra Village

- The Rio Arriba Ave exit is in the next best shape and is currently the only exit that can be used easily, but it is at the end of one of the worst roads in FHV and has no stop signs on Wagon Train Dr. In addition, you must drive a good distance through the Juan Tabo Hills neighborhood to get to Juan Tabo Blvd and then out to the Juan Tabo/Southern Ave intersection. This section of Juan Tabo Blvd divides the Juan Tabo Hills and Volterra neighborhoods and intersects several roads from these neighborhoods. This route has 2 stop signs and is 2.1 miles to the Juan Tabo/Southern Ave intersection. There are two exit roads from the gate (Pocono Rd SE and Pompano Rd SE) which are located on the south side of Juan Tabo Hills, right along, or close to the Kirtland AFB fence. This could be a problem if there is a serious disaster on the Base and emergency vehicles are trying to access the area. In early March the Albuquerque Fire and Rescue changed out the gate lock for an "Open Space lock" that both AFR and the Albuquerque Police Department can open.



View of Rio Arriba Ave Exit gate looking east



Rio Arriba Exit ramp condition

- The Raton Ave exit has no stop signs on Wagon Train Dr. and has a large asphalt covered berm across the road on the Juan Tabo Hills side of the gate. Furthermore, the one exit road (Gallant Fox Rd.) runs through the middle of Juan Tabo Hills, has multiple side street entrances, and from the gate to the Juan Tabo Blvd./Southern Ave intersection, it runs 1.8 miles with 1 stop sign. So, for multiple reasons, it is not in the running to be the best emergency exit for FHV. In early March the Albuquerque Fire and Rescue changed out the gate lock for an “Open Space lock” that both AFR and the Albuquerque Police Department can open.



Raton Emergency Exit Gate from Juan Tabo Hills side. Part of the berm shown on the left.



View of berm and gate looking eastward



View of erm looking westward

Letter sent to Albuquerque Fire and Rescue and Kirtland Air Force Wildland Fire Management Module from the FHVA on February 27, 2023.

Responses from Deputy Chief of Operations AFR, Jimmy Melek embedded and highlighted in yellow. The response from Assistant Module Lead, Kirtland Wildland Support Module, Clyde Burris, was to arrange for, and invite Andrew Lipman and myself, to a technical briefing on Base on Tuesday February 7, 2023.

I am Lisa “Rusty” Goetz, a Four Hills Village Association (FHVA) board member with responsibilities for interactions with the agencies in charge of Open Spaces, city parks and the roads within and around Four Hills Village (FHV). I have been asked to be our point person and to respond to you on behalf of the FHVA Board and its president, Andrew Lipman, who is currently traveling in South America. We deeply appreciate being informed about the upcoming proposed Feb 11 and 12 Kirtland AFB RX Burn and will do our best to work with you and to disseminate accurate information to as many of our neighborhood’s 1400+ households as possible.

As you can imagine, after the Calf Canyon Fire debacle and the more recent and very close Tijeras Canyon/Carnuel fire, we have significant questions that were not covered in your email. One of the most pressing questions is: are you relying on this map for fire control? **This map was sent by Kirtland Fire in their email. AFR would not rely on this map.** It is extremely out of date and shows only a fraction of the FHV roads and neighborhood home density adjacent to the base. Also, the map does not show any of the large Voltera community additions west of FHV and the road location indicated in the Manzano/Four Hills Open Space is inaccurate.

I have attached a PDF of a detailed map of FHV showing the roads, emergency exit gates, and house locations plotted on a CABQ ArcGIS map base.

Questions concerning the burn on Kirtland property;

1. As you state this is the first RX Burn to be attempted on the Kirtland Base property, what expert help will be brought in to assist base personnel? **This is not our jurisdiction so we do not have the authority of oversight. We would be able to offer our assistance, but they are not required to accept it.**
2. In your email, there is no mention of coordination with CABQ Open Space Division, whose lands abut the proposed burn area. As a CABQ Open Space trail and fire watch volunteer, I know they will want to be informed about all the related activity in advance. **We communicate and coordinate with APD, APD Open Space, and BCFD on these types of events. We would do the same with this event.** and, the only vehicular entrance to the adjacent portion of the Manzano/Four Hills Open Space is at the southeastern end of Stage Coach Rd SE where there are locked steel bar gates. Within the south western corner of the Open Space, only the roads along the berm and to the water tank are still in good shape. **Thank you for letting us know.**
3. You mention the importance wind direction in making the go forward decisions. What will be your cutoffs for soil moisture, ambient humidity, and expected duration of wind direction and speed. **This is not our operation or our jurisdiction so we do not have decision making authority. This would all be determined by Kirtland Fire.** We who live in Tijeras Canyon and appreciate just how fast wind direction can change and how strong these winds can become. **Agreed**
4. What time of day will the fires be started? **Unknown. This information has not been provided from Kirtland AFB.** We were not provided this information. **As previously stated, all information would be sent as it is received.** Will there be a warning siren sounded? **Unknown. The city does not have access to a siren or public announcement system that covers all of four hills.** Will the fires burn through the night? **Unknown. This information has not been provided from Kirtland AFB.** How will we know when the fires are out and the area is safely contained? **This would be determined by Kirtland AFB who would be conducting the operation.**

Questions Concerning RX Burn Hazard Management with Four Hills Village Proper:

FHV is in a situation very similar to that of the community of Superior, Colorado, which was destroyed by a forest fire triggered in the adjacent Open Space in January 2022. Like Superior, FHV is directly up against the wild areas of Open Spaces and Kirtland Air Force Base on three sides, with only one way in and out and it has only two-lane roads that wind complexly through the hills. Fire danger is further enhanced by the large well vegetated lots and the wind-channeling effect of adjacent Tijeras Canyon.

I have checked all the potential emergency gate exits from FHV. There are five potential exits. They are indicated on the attached pavement quality “Traffic Light Map” by orange chevrons facing outward that are posted along the northern and western edges of FHV. Only two, Calle Verde and Rio Arriba Avenue, are in reasonable shape for driving through. The Via Posada exit road is gravel and both the gate and the road are choked by large weeds. The Martingale Lane/ Winterwood Way connecting dirt road is badly rutted and blocked by permanent barriers that do not open. The Raton Avenue exit gate is blocked by a tall asphalt-coated berm on the far side of the gate. This berm is tall enough that it could high-center long wheel base vehicles (firetrucks etc.). The only lock that had an identifying owner on it belonged to the Albuquerque Fire Department. No emergency contact numbers were posted on any of the gates.

The importance of having ready access to these gates was highlighted by the near approach of the Carnuel/Tijeras Canyon brush/forest fire that occurred on June 16, 2022. The resultant closures of Rt. 66 and I-40 caused a backup of traffic that completely blocked the only open

entrance to (and exit from) FHV, Four Hills Road. The traffic mess was further complicated by many panicked residents trying to get in or out of all the neighborhoods along Four Hills Rd. Traffic jams around Central Avenue, Juan Tabo Boulevard, and Tramway Boulevard lasted for over four hours, with the residents of FHV unable to leave or enter the community during that time. The FHVA board has made several requests for keys to these gates against the potential event of similar future catastrophes and resulting traffic jams that could block access for city officials to open these gates. AFR does not have the ability to distribute these keys. All AFR Units have keys and are able to open the gates for emergency evacuation. APD and Open Space have these keys as well. In the last two months, FHVA board members have met in person with City Council member, Renee Grout, State Representative, Meredith Dixon, CABQ Department of Municipal Development, Jennifer Morrow, and Bernalillo County Commissioner, Eric Olivas to discuss the actions needed to make our emergency gates operational, properly marked, readily available. From an emergency and safety perspective, I believe the best option is to create a permanent road in this area so all citizens are aware of its location and usability as an alternate means of egress from the community. This would need to be completed through city planning and zoning. This initiative could be led by City Administration and City Council.

1. Will our emergency gates be open and usable during the Kirtland AFB RX Burn? This is possible and is a great idea. This would need to be evaluated and communicated prior to a final decision. The three most critical gates for this operation will be Rio Arriba Ave, Raton Ave, and Via Posada Ave as they are the closest to the Base and all ultimately tie into Juan Tabo Blvd. It would be best to have one single location/gate to ensure it is monitored, controlled, and smooth flow of traffic.
2. Will there be traffic control officers available and/or posted to help with evacuation routes should the fire escape its intended boundaries and enter FHV? This would need to be requested to APD. AFR does not have the resources, and is not trained to provide this type of service. One area that probably needs to be watched is the Villa Serena Townhomes which are located directly across the road from Kirtland AFB proposed burn area (shown by lavender-colored roads on the accompanying map). Understood. These are the homes of many elderly individuals who may not be able to drive themselves out of the neighborhood. Understood
3. Will there be AFD or Kirtland AFB vehicles parked within FHV? If so, where? Yes. AFR would have Wildland brush trucks, pickup trucks, and other trucks as established by the AFR Wildland Coordinator.
4. Have you contacted the Canyon Club for possible use of their facilities? No. This is a great idea. The Sheriff's Department helicopter used the club's golf course pond as water source for fighting the Carnuel/Tijeras Canyon fire.
5. Would it be possible for Kirtland AFB staff to deliver written notices to the homes directly adjacent to the Base Fences prior to the burn? Unknown. This would need to be requested to Kirtland AFB. We will post information on our home website, FHVA.org, on our neighborhood entrance sign, and by several electronic means. However, it has been our experience that many of our older residents only pay attention to mail delivered to their door.

We look forward to your answers and will provide the information to our neighbors. Most of our neighborhood residents are military, retired military, or current or retired Sandia Lab staff who are vested in the success of Kirtland AFB. However, given the serious fire events of last year, we

are concerned that all safety steps are considered. If I can be of further help, please contact me directly.

Why Controlled or Prescribed (RX) Burns Are Now Necessary

During the past several summers, many grassfires on KAFB have started up along the flanks of the Four Hills and the dominant southwesterly winds have pushed the brush fires towards the northeastern borders of the Base. Although the Base fire crews were able to contain them and put them out before they reached the neighborhoods or Open Spaces, the Kirtland Wild Fire Module Team believes the situation will continue to worsen unless mitigation steps are taken. The goal of the Air Force Wildland Fire Management Team Module and Kirtland Air Force Base is to build a wide fire break and create a “fire catchment area” to protect the adjacent neighborhoods and Open Spaces.

There is a real need for controlled burns going forward. Before the arrival of Europeans, the Native Americans routinely burned forest and meadow areas across North America to promote healthy vegetation growth and maintain attractive feeding areas for game animals. Trees grow bigger in the thinner forest areas and there is a very diverse understory of vegetation because the sun and rain can penetrate to the ground. Also, fires are less likely to spread very quickly or far in a thinner forest, as it is more difficult for fires to spread by jumping through the tree tops (crown fires) or by consuming densely accumulated dead brush and duff on the forest floor. Another difference is that in a thinner forest, the fire temperatures stay much lower and typically do not damage the soil as the big NM fires did this last year.

Back in the beginning of the last century, before the Forest Service “Smokey the Bear” campaign started in 1944, to encourage all firefighting entities to put out all forest fires (including natural ones) and before all the Sierra Clubs and other groups blocked the forest service from thinning the trees in overgrown forest areas, there were about 10-15 fully grown trees per acre. Now there are about 100 per acre. This tenfold increase in tree density has caused several serious issues. First the concentration resinous wood has increased the temperature of the fires and lengthened fire durations. Second, the density of trees and related brush buildups basically blocks ground access for attempts to put out any fires. Third, many studies have shown that native wildlife is now having a hard time making their way through the forest because the game trails and flyways are so overgrown. Fourth, there is now a major loss of diversity among forest vegetation because only a few tree species do well in such a crowded environment (also, disease and insect-caused kills now spread much more rapidly) and those trees and brush that do survive grow so densely together that they block sunlight from reaching the ground, further reducing the types of plants for wildlife to feed on.

The same prohibition against fires on grasslands has led to increased growth of scrub juniper trees, cholla, tumble weeds and other noxious weeds. In many areas, the years of unburned grassland growth has increased the available “fuel load” (dry dead vegetation buildup) and has slowed the nutrient turnover, exhausting the soils, and thus, reducing the diversity and health of native plants. Again, this has also led to a pattern of hotter and more damaging fires when they do get out of hand.

In the last several years the FHVA board has pushed our FHV residents to pay attention to the drought and the increased risk for fire, and wind damage. We continue to ask FHV residents to remove dead vegetation from around their homes and to trim up living trees and remove dead ones in order to reduce the risk of wild fires within our neighborhood.

Conditions and Limits for Scheduling a RX Burn on Kirkland Base

The KAFB RX fire crew has mapped out 10 burn units, surrounding the northern half of the Four Hills and extending to the Base fence line boundary with Four Hills Village, Juan Tabo Hills, and the Manzano-Four Hills Open Space. The size of the units ranges from 37.1 acres to 458.4 acres for a total of 2,322 acres

(3.6 sq. mi.) to be burned during the next several years. The first RX burns will be located along the joint neighborhoods/Base fence line. These are burn units 1-4 on the map. They are the four smallest units in the program. Units 1-4 are respectively 37.1, 42.3, 136.7, and 130.7 acres in area. Each of the burn units is already surrounded by dirt roads. An additional 25-30-foot-wide fire break has already been bladed along our joint fence line and all the juniper and cholla brush on the Base side of the fence has been removed.



Topographic Map of Proposed KAFB RX Burn areas (shaded in blue) and KAFB roads (shown in heavy black lines) provided by KAFB Wildland Support Module

Schedule

long term scheduling for these burns is not possible as so many conditions must come together. The Base's Burn Plan allows spring, late summer, fall and winter burns, providing that all prescription parameters are met. However, their focus will be on early spring and late fall.

Conditions and Restrictions for a RX burn on Kirtland AFB:

The Air Force Wildland Burn Team is tailoring their work to create the least impact on the residents of the adjacent communities. These restrictions include:

- No RX burns will be initiated if the National/Regional Fire Preparedness Level 4 is reached. Level 4 means that three or more geographic areas are experiencing large, complex wildfires requiring IMTs (Incident Management Teams). Multiple geographic areas are competing for wildland fire suppression resources and about 60 percent of the country's IMTs and wildland firefighting personnel are committed to wildland fire incidents. This is to ensure sufficient manpower and equipment are available to deal both with the local burn itself and with any possible emergency contingencies. Besides trained personnel from the Base, support from Albuquerque and Bernalillo County fire and rescue departments will be available. Staff from the NM Game and Fish Department will be available with dirt moving equipment. Additional personnel and equipment from the BLM, US Forest Service, and other Air Force Burn units will be ready if needed. No RX burns on Kirtland base will be initiated if these resources are already dealing with other fire around the country and manpower/equipment availability is locally insufficient.
- All burn and smoke permits must be in place. The city of Albuquerque must issue a burn permit to Kirtland Base and burn bans in the county or in adjacent counties must be observed. Smoke dispersion parameters set by the city will be adhered to.
- No large special events are or soon will be occurring in the area (i.e., the Balloon Fiesta).
- Special weather conditions must be met:
 - No southerly component winds, especially in the first burns, which will only take place if the winds are out the north or northwest to keep smoke and possible blowing embers away from the adjacent neighborhoods and Open Space.
 - Wind speed limits must be met and maintained over the expected duration of the burn. These are 20-foot winds of 0-25 mph with mid flame length winds of 0-10 mph (20-foot winds are measured 20 feet above ground level or obstacle level, mid flame length winds are measured along the flame's slant at a height mid-way between the flame's base and its tip).
 - Maximum local air temperature of 90 and minimum of 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - Maximum relative humidity is between a maximum of 70% and a minimum of 40%.
- Ground cover must be dry enough to allow the prescribed fire to consume the targeted living vegetation and dead vegetation debris.

Projected Duration:

Each of the first four burn units is 37 to 130.7 acres in area with an expected burn duration of 1-3 days for each unit. The smaller units (1-4) along the FHV fence that will be burned first with probable fire duration 2-3 hours to a day.

Process of Executing a Prescribed Burn

The initiation and management of an operational prescribed burn may occur only if all the safety conditions are met and all supporting agencies are notified of the impending burn. The first step is to again verify weather conditions from three different sources, including measurements made on site immediately prior to starting the pre-operational test fire. If these conditions are all positive, then a pre-operational test fire will be made on site. If the test burn confirms that it is safe to run the operational prescribed burn and that the goals of mitigating future potential wildfires can be met, then the operational prescribed burn is initiated.

Pre-operational Test Fire

A minimum of seven total trained personnel is required. These include a Burn Boss (overall burn coordinator), a Firing Boss (manages the actual operation and control of the burn), and a Holding Boss (manages a crew that faces away from the burn to spot any possible fire flare-ups outside of the burn perimeter and suppress them immediately). In addition, two type 6 engines (off road brush fire truck

with F-150 type truck beds mounted with 300-gallon water tanks or foam retardant system), each with two personnel minimum crews will be on site. A small control fire is initiated within the proposed prescribed burn site to measure flame height, intensity, and behavior. The prescribed burn will proceed only if the test fire confirms that the larger fire can be controlled safely and will burn off the targeted vegetation and duff satisfactorily.

Operational Prescribed Burn

A minimum of twelve total trained personnel is required. The pre-operational test burn crew is augmented with additional ground personnel and an additional two type 3 (brush fire truck carrying 500 gallons of water) or type 6 engines with two personnel crews. The burn areas on Kirtland Base are all ringed by dirt roads where the Wild Fire Unit engines will be stationed. Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Fire and Rescue will have engines stationed along the on the neighborhood side fence as an additional ring of defense. The process starts downwind along a firebreak (a creek, a body of water, or a bladed dirt road). A low intensity fire is started into the wind (and preferably downhill) to create a "blackline" which is a wide burned-out zone that will both arrest the forward progress the main operational fire and then starve it of fuel.

Once the blackline is established and the fire front (back fire) is moving upwind into the designated operational burn area, secondary low intensity fires are started along the sides (flanks) of the operational burn site while the "handline" crew patrols the margins of the fire, making sure the fire stays within the designated bounds. Finally, the main, upwind, "headfire" is started by successive ignitions. This is a more intense fire front used to consume the targeted fuel load within the burn area. Wind and the flank fires will push the headfire back into the blackline zone where it will starve and go out. Fire crews will move in to extinguish any remaining hotspots and the site will be actively monitored until the burn area is completely cold, usually within a few hours.

KAFB Controlled Burn on March 9, 2023

Our first Controlled burn on the KAFB grass lands went according to plan. The base sent out notice of the burn and Andrew Lipman got the new bright yellow "KAFB Controlled Burn" sign up by the FHVA announcement/entrance sign on Wednesday. FHVA board member, Julia Vertrees, put out an email blast to the FHVA members on Wednesday evening.

The burn was started by late morning on Thursday, 3/9. I drove throughout the neighborhood around noon when the light-colored smoke was obvious to the southwest of the neighborhood. I checked both the Rio Arriba Ave. and Raton Ave. emergency gates and found them locked but each had a new lock in place. I then drove up Wagon Train Dr. and turned up Soplo Rd. to check the smoke drift. No smoke was blowing over the neighborhood.

At the top of Soplo Rd. I found an AFR EMT/Rescue truck with a crew of four watching the fire which was clearly visible from that location. I checked in with them and learned that they were assigned to be our watchdogs. I also learned that earlier this week the AFD had changed the locks to the new "Open Space Locks" on both the Rio Arriba Ave. and the Raton Ave. emergency gates. These new locks are key locks that allow both AFD and APD to open the gates. The new locks are also outside of the old protective housings and could be cut with bolt cutters. I had learned earlier from Jimmy Melek, that instead of posting signs on the gates with contact info, AFR prefers that we call 911 in case of an emergency. That will allow them to locate the trouble and assign appropriate manpower and equipment more quickly.

I then checked both upper entrances to the Open Space and visited with a couple folks watching the fire. One had gotten the email burst and the other "doesn't do computers" but said her husband had seen an

announcement somewhere. From the berm trail in the Four Hills Open Space, I could see that the fire was moving up hill and away from FHV. I could also see at least four offroad fire trucks moving about the fire and the junipers going up in goutts of flame when the fire front came up to them. Here are a couple of pictures of the burn that I took from the Open Space.



AFR EMT truck parked at the top of Soplo Rd.



The controlled burn in progress. The bright flame is where the fire reached a juniper tree. Because they are dry and full of resin, they burn quickly like fireworks.



The controlled burn ending at about 3 PM and in progress of being tamped out.

If you are concerned about health risks related to smoke...

The requirement of winds out of the north for the proposed Kirtland Prescribed burns kept most of the smoke away from FHV. Smoke from a grass or brush fire is usually white or light colored as opposed to the darker colored forest fire smoke and the oil-looking black smoke of structural or chemical fires. In general, brush fire smoke is also less irritating than the latter types of smoke as it usually is composed of fewer chemical compounds and it generally disperses more quickly.

The CDC has published the following guide lines for dealing with smoke in your area.

Eight Tips for Protecting Yourself from Breathing Wildfire Smoke

If possible, limit your exposure to smoke. Here are eight tips to help you protect your health:

1. **Pay attention to local air quality reports and the [US Air Quality IndexExternal](#)** . When a wildfire occurs in your area, watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Pay attention to public health messages and take extra safety measures such as avoiding spending time outdoors.
2. **Pay attention to visibility guides if they are available.** Although not every community measures the number of particles in the air, some communities in the western United States have guidelines to help people estimate air quality based on how far they can see.
3. **If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors, and keep your indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is very hot outside. Run an air conditioner (*forced air*) if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside (*if possible, install HEPA-rated filters prior to any nearby burn event*). Seek shelter elsewhere if you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed. (*If you have a swamp cooler make sure it is turned off as it pulls in unfiltered outside air. RG*)
4. **Use an air filter.** Use a freestanding indoor air filter with particle removal to help protect people with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory conditions and the elderly and

children from the effects of wildfire smoke. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on filter replacement and where to place the device.

5. **Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles and fireplaces. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke tobacco or other products, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
6. **Follow your doctor’s advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease or cardiovascular disease.** Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
7. **Do not rely on dust masks for protection.** Paper “comfort” or “dust” masks commonly found at hardware stores trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An “N95” mask, properly worn, will offer some protection. If you decide to keep a mask on hand, see the [Respirator Fact Sheet](#) provided by CDC’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.
8. **Avoid smoke exposure during outdoor recreation.** Wildfires and prescribed burns—fires that are set on purpose to manage land—can create smoky conditions. Before you travel to a park or forest, check to see if any wildfires are happening or if any prescribed burns are planned.