

For Immediate Release
October 28, 2011

**EL PASO MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CAUSING “LAST
CHANCE FIRE” IN LINCOLN NATIONAL FOREST**

LAS CRUCES – This morning in Las Cruces federal court, **Rodrigo Ulloa-Esquivel**, 29, of El Paso, Texas, pled guilty to Count 2 of a three-count indictment charging him with the misdemeanor offense of leaving a fire unattended. At sentencing, Ulloa-Esquivel faces a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. Ulloa-Esquivel remains on conditions of release pending his sentencing hearing which has yet to be scheduled.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Ulloa-Esquivel was indicted on August 17, 2011 on criminal offenses arising out of a wildfire that burned through the Last Chance Canyon of the Lincoln National Forest in Eddy County, N.M. (Last Chance Fire) in late April and early May of 2011.

In his plea agreement, Ulloa-Esquivel admitted that, on April 24, 2011, he lit toilet paper on fire near a campsite at the Last Chance Canyon in the area known as the Guadalupe Ranger District in the Lincoln National Forest even though he knew that there were fire restrictions in place for that area. Because the wind was blowing hard, sparks from the burning toilet paper spread beyond Ulloa-Esquivel’s ability to control the fire. After Ulloa-Esquivel and his friends tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the fire, they left the area without calling the U.S. Forest Service or local authorities to report the fire. Ulloa-Esquivel also admitted initially denying knowledge of the fire or that he caused the fire, but later admitted to U.S. Forest Service personnel that he started the fire.

According to U.S. Forest Service reports, the Last Chance Fire burned for several days and was declared controlled on May 9, 2011. The fire consumed 53,342 acres and caused

damage to four structures in the Sitting Bull Falls Recreation area located in the Lincoln National Forest. The initial estimated cost to suppress the fire is \$2.3 million. The initial estimate to repair the damages to structures in the recreational area is \$67,500.

The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Las Cruces Branch Office, and was investigated by the U.S. Forest Service with assistance from the National Park Service and the Eddy County Sheriff's Office. The U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Queen Volunteer Fire Department participated in the fire suppression effort.

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