



### Bitterroot National Forest

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# News Release

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Tod McKay

## Free Personal Use Firewood to Continue, Permits Now Required

Hamilton, Montana (May 29, 2020) – The Bitterroot National Forest will continue to offer free firewood for personal use for the remainder of 2020, but starting Monday, June 1<sup>st</sup> the forest is requiring the public obtain a free permit before harvesting. Forest officials are asking that the public call their local Forest Service office to obtain a hard-copy permit in order to track harvesting and communicate important wildfire safety and collection information.

“As the impacts from COVID-19 continue to be felt across the country, we remain committed to providing services on our public lands and doing what we can to help our neighbors and local communities,” said Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson. “Although these permits are normally offered with a nominal fee, we feel it is important to continue offering free firewood this year during these difficult times.”

Those interested in collecting firewood need to first contact the Bitterroot National Forest by phone and provide their contact details, and a free, hard-copy permit will be issued by mail. In-person pickup at Ranger District offices may also be available, depending upon location, and will comply with CDC requirements for social distancing. The permit will be valid between June 1 and December 30, 2020.

The free permits allow for the removal of downed timber or the cutting of standing dead trees for personal firewood under most conditions on National Forests and Grasslands within Montana, Northern Idaho and portions of North and South Dakota.

They do not allow for the collection of more limited post and poles/rails or for any commercial harvesting. Those permits will still require a fee. They also do not apply to collecting products on other public lands such as Bureau of Land Management lands. All permits -- whether free or paid -- help the USDA Forest Service track usage and ensure important information is conveyed to permittees regarding wildfire safety, suitable locations, collection amounts, and other restrictions.

Woodcutters can obtain permits for up to 12 cords of firewood for their personal use. A cord is the amount of tightly piled wood in a stack four feet high by four feet wide by eight feet long.

Those collecting firewood should use caution while driving on Forest Service roads this time of the year. Many roads at higher elevations remain snow covered and icy. Roads at lower elevations may be wet and muddy and the soft roadbed can easily be damaged by vehicle traffic. Following strict wildfire safety practices outlined in the permit is also required.

Woodcutters must have their firewood permit with them while harvesting wood, keep their vehicles on designated roads and trails, have an approved spark arrester on chainsaws and splitters, and carry a shovel and fire extinguisher. No wood can be cut or gathered within 150 feet of streams, creeks, or waterways. Firewood gathering is also prohibited in all developed recreation areas, campgrounds and along Wild and Scenic River Corridors.

Forest officials would also like to remind woodcutters of slash piling requirements and are asking the public for help in keeping ditches clear of woody debris. Piling requirements include:

- Pile slash away from roads, ditches, power lines, or telephone lines.
- A rake should be brought along for cleaning road surfaces of debris.
- Locate piles 15 feet away from the base of live trees, and keep them 6 to 10 feet in diameter and a minimum of 5 feet in height.
- Do not build piles on top of down logs or rotten stumps or have objects that extend more than 3 feet from piles which will be burned by Bitterroot National Forest crews during the appropriate conditions.

The Forest plans to temporarily open several roads later this summer for the public to access personal use firewood. These designated areas on each Ranger District will be announced later in June in an effort to provide more easily accessible firewood. Stay tuned for more details.

The collection of many other forest products outside of firewood does not require a permit. For example, up to five gallons of mushrooms can be gathered without a permit on all National Forests throughout the Northern Region.

For more information and to obtain your free 2020 Personal Use Firewood Permit, please contact your local Bitterroot National Forest office.

Supervisor's Office – Hamilton, (406) 363-7100  
Stevensville Ranger District, (406) 777-5461  
Darby/Sula Ranger District, (406) 821-3913  
West Fork Ranger District, (406) 821-3269

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