



Bitterroot National Forest

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News Release

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Forest Returns to Very High Fire Danger

Hamilton, Montana (September 14, 2020) – Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest has returned to “Very High” today, after being lowered last week. Continued hot and dry weather is predicted this week along with gusty winds. Extremely low humidity will also create critical fire weather conditions across SW Montana today.

“Even though we are experiencing cooler nights and mornings, conditions are extremely dry right now across the forest,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “Our overnight relative humidity recoveries are as low as 15% and during the day are dropping to extreme RH levels around 5%. Recent frost has also killed a lot of vegetation adding even more fuel to the already dead, dry fuels. If conditions continue to dry and deteriorate, we may reach extreme fire danger (highest level) by the end of the week.”

Smoke conditions are also making it difficult for fire lookouts to see new fires, and aviation resources may be limited due to poor visibility. As of 11am today, air quality in Hamilton is listed as ‘Unhealthy’. A westerly flow is bringing smoke in from neighboring states and the pattern is expected to continue or worsen, throughout the week.

There are currently two active wildfires burning on the forest. The 12 Mile Fire is located in the Lost Horse drainage on the Darby Ranger District. It is currently estimated at 25 acres (including all spot fires) and is burning in extremely steep, inaccessible terrain. Fire growth continues to be from individual tree torching, spotting and rolling debris in the very steep terrain which limits effectiveness of constructed fire lines. Helicopters with water bucket drops are being utilized to check fire spread to the south. See attached photo from the weekend.

The Sweathouse 2 Fire is burning in the Bitterroot Mountains west of Florence. It is currently estimated at ¼ acre and has not grown or been visible in several days. The Lake Como Fire was 100% contained last week.

Fire managers are asking hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts, to make sure all campfires are completely out prior to leaving. Remember, if it’s too hot to touch, it’s too hot to leave; pour water and add dirt to your campfire until it is cold. One spark is all it takes to start a wildfire. Never leave a campfire unattended.

Fall firewood cutters should operate chainsaws equipped with spark arresters in the cool morning hours and keep a shovel and fire extinguisher nearby. Keep vehicles on established roads and trails and avoid driving over dry grass and brush that could easily be ignited by hot exhaust systems. Pay attention to those items that can cause a spark, such as chains on a trailer. Cigarette butts should never be thrown from vehicle windows and refrain from smoking in wooded, grassy, or brushy areas.

Open burning is currently prohibited in Ravalli County. Camp and cooking fires are still allowed. Visit www.firerestrictions.us/mt to learn more about fire restrictions that are in place throughout Montana.

When fire danger is “very high” fires will start from most causes. The fires will spread rapidly and have a quick increase in intensity, right after ignition. Small fires can quickly become large fires and exhibit extreme fire intensity, such as long-distance spotting and fire whirls. These fire can be difficult to control and will often become much larger and longer-lasting fires.

To date, there have been 47 wildfires on the forest this summer; 14 human caused and 33 lightning fires.

Help do your part to keep our safe places safe by recreating responsibly and preventing wildfires, visit www.BeOutdoorSafe.org to learn more. The public can find further information on smoke including hourly concentrations at www.TodaysAir.mt.gov.

For more information about fires in Montana and other fires across the country, visit <http://inciweb.nwcg.gov> or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF for local fire information.

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