



Bitterroot National Forest

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News Release

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Fall Prescribed Burning Planned on the Bitterroot National Forest

Hamilton, Montana (October 16, 2020) – To reduce potential for large wildfires, reduce excess vegetation, and improve overall forest health, the Bitterroot National Forest is planning to implement fall prescribed burning projects as early as next week. Most of the planned burns include pile burning with some understory burns to reduce residual slash from thinning and timber harvest operations. *Timing of the burns will be dependent on favorable weather conditions and good smoke dispersion.*

“Our prescribed fire program is a targeted approach to reducing flammable vegetation on the landscape known as ‘fuels’ that build up on the forest floor and can feed large wildfires. Reducing these fuels can also reduce future smoke impacts to our communities,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “This year’s historic wildfire season out west has highlighted the importance of reducing risks in areas located near an urban interface.”

All total, fire managers on the Stevensville, Darby/Sula, and West Fork Ranger Districts plan to burn approximately 2,000 acres this fall. Smoke from the burns will likely be visible from Hamilton, south of Darby, and east of Stevensville. Prescribed fire produces smoke, but the smoke is typically visible for a short duration, 1-2 days, and managed to minimize impacts to communities. Treatment areas include:

Stevensville Ranger District – Up to 30 acres of pile burns are planned:

- Three Saddle Units east of Stevensville on Ambrose Road #428 in the Sapphire Mountains, *(21 acres of piles)*
- Larry Creek Group Site, Gold Creek Campground, Fred Burr Trailhead - hand piles from clearing and hazard mitigation at the sites, *(9 acres of piles)*

Darby/Sula Ranger District – Up to 896 acres of pile burns are planned:

- Canyon Creek, west of Hamilton, *(207 acres of piles)*
- Waugh Fuels Reduction, south of Sula near Waugh Ck, *(265 acres of piles)*
- East and West Tolan, 3 miles east of Sula up the East Fork, *(399 acres of piles)*
- Westside 18, west of the Charlos Heights area, *(23 acres of piles)*
- Cameron Blue, 8 miles east of Sula on the north side of the East Fork drainage, *(2 acres of piles)*

West Fork Ranger District – Up to 933 acres of pile burns are planned:

- Lower West Fork Unit 1, south of Pierce Creek, *(6 acres of piles)*
- Frazier 65A, north of Baker Creek, *(34 acres of piles)*
- Lone Pine, southwest of Ward Creek, *(18 acres of piles)*
- School Point Bravo/Charlie, between Wheeler and Nelson Creeks, *(66 acres of piles)*
- Nez Perce Ranch, along Nelson Creek, *(7 acres of piles)*
- Two Creek, east of Two Creek along FR 732 & 732A, *(202 acres of piles)*
- Tough & Mud Saddle, between Tough Saddle & Mud Saddle along FR 5644, *(149 acres of piles)*
- Painted Rocks West Units 1-3, south of Coal Creek, *(249 acres of piles)*
- Overwhich Units 1-4, along Overwhich Creek, *(202 acres of piles)*

The burns will only be ignited when fuel moistures, weather conditions, and smoke dispersion is favorable. Fire crews will monitor all burns after ignition to ensure that they stay within prescribed boundaries until declared out. Residual smoke is expected for a few days as fuels consume. Major roads in the area will be signed and local residents who have requested prior notification, will be contacted in advance of burning.

Prescribed fires have several objectives including:

- Maintain forest health and ecosystem restoration
- Improve wildlife habitat – many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for wildlife.
- Reduce wildfire risks to communities and the potential of future large, high intensity wildfires by reducing the amount of downed fuel to burn.
- Post-harvest slash treatment – reduce residual slash created by thinning operations and personal use firewood cutting.

Fall prescribed fire activities normally take place between September and November and burning is highly weather dependent. A mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas will remain after treatments.

For public safety, recreationists are asked to be aware of fire crews and vehicles in these areas. The public is also asked to avoid traveling in prescribed burn units as well as trails and roads directly adjacent to the units. Please be cautious as roads and trails used as control lines for the burn could be temporarily impacted by low intensity fire and smoke.

Fire managers plan to conduct the burning quickly, with limited impacts to recreational users and the general public. Overnight, there is potential for smoke to settle into the bottom of valleys and corridors that may cause short term smoke impacts for residents and travel. When smoke is present, motorists should reduce speeds and turn on headlights.

All prescribed burning activities are implemented in close coordination with county and state health officials and other local cooperators. Initial operations for the fall burning season will begin incrementally, and progress based on environmental and community health conditions. For more information on smoke and public health please visit: www.dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/airquality.

For more information on fall prescribed burning or to be placed on a day-of-burning notification list, please contact your local ranger station.

For the latest burn announcements, burn updates, maps, and photos of project areas visit: www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot or www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF.

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