



Forest Service News Release

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Spring Burning Planned on the Forest

Burns Could Begin Next Week

Hamilton, MT, March 26 —To reduce potential for large wildfires, maintain resilient landscapes, and improve overall forest health, the Bitterroot National Forest is planning to implement spring prescribed burning projects as early as next week.

Pending favorable conditions, underburning operations could begin this Wednesday, March 31st on the Darby/Sula Ranger District near Sula. Underburning, a type of prescribed fire treatment, ignites vegetation under the forest canopy or in open grassy meadows and focuses on the consumption of surface fuels. Over the next two months, the Bitterroot National Forest is planning to implement numerous prescribed burning projects. *Timing of the burns will be dependent on favorable weather conditions and good smoke dispersion.*

The treatments have been designed to put fire back into fire adapted ecosystems. “Our prescribed fire program is a targeted approach to meet the goals set forth in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy,” said Matt Young, Fuels Fire Management Officer. “Those goals include working collaboratively with stakeholders across all jurisdictions to produce resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response.”

Spring prescribed fire activities normally take place in April and May and burning is highly weather and fuels dependent. A mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas will remain after treatments.

All total, fire managers plan to burn approximately 4,500 acres this spring. Smoke will likely be visible from West Fork Highway, East Fork Road, or Highway 93. Treatment areas include:

Darby/Sula Ranger District – 2,300 acres are planned:

- Waddell Units, south of Lake Como
- Como/Horse Lick, south of Lost Horse and north of Lake Como
- Trapper Bunkhouse, SW of Darby between Little Tin Cup & McCoy Creeks
- Cameron Blue and Middle East Fork, along East Fork road near Guide Creek and Tolan Ridge
- Sula Ranger Station, horse pasture and ditches

West Fork Ranger District – 1,200 acres are planned:

- Lower West Fork Units, south of Trapper Creek and north of Lloyd Creek
- School Point Ecoburn Units, west of Boulder Creek and east of Halford Creek
- Soda Springs Ecoburn, east of Little West Fork, west of Halford Creek along Forest Road 5633B
- Frazier Interface, south of Pierce Creek and north of Baker Creek
- Horse Pasture north of confluence of Nez Perce Fork & West Fork Rivers at Lone Pine Helibase

Stevensville Ranger District – 1,000 acres are planned:

- Larry Bass Units, within the Bass Creek Recreation Area north of Stevensville
- Sweeney Creek Units, west of Florence
- Three Saddle Units, Sapphire Mountains east of Stevensville

The burns will only be ignited if operational safety, fuel moisture, weather conditions, and air quality parameters can be attained. Fire crews will monitor all burns after ignition to ensure that they stay within prescribed boundaries until declared out. Major roads in the area will be signed and local residents who have requested prior notification will be contacted in advance of burning.

Low and moderate intensity prescribed fires have several objectives including:

- Improve wildlife habitat – many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for wildlife.
- Reduce the potential of 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.

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 while crews are present, as well as trails and roads directly adjacent to the units. Please take caution 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 as quickly as possible to limit 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. The smoke is typically visible for a short duration, 1-2 days, and burns are approved in coordination with the Montana DEQ to minimize impacts to communities.

For more information about specific burns or to be placed on a pre-burning notification list, please contact your local ranger district. For burn updates, maps, and photos of project areas, visit us at www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot, <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7351>, or the *Discover Bitterroot National Forest* Facebook page www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF.

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