



Forest Service News Release

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Wildland Firefighter Rappel Training Happening This Month

Hamilton, MT, May 4 — As the fire season approaches, recurring annual wildland firefighter and rappel training will be conducted in May on the Bitterroot National Forest, with continued safeguards for COVID-19.

“We are taking steps to minimize all risk of exposure in order to keep our wildland firefighters and our communities safe,” said Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson. “Rappellers provide a vital service as wildland firefighters trained and prepared to operate in helibase operations and as aerially delivered firefighters.”

During the week of May 3-8th, there will be 62 veteran rappellers, along with 12 additional support staff and two helicopters with flight crews on the forest. The training, including live rappels from helicopters, will take place at the Ruffatto Ranch on Bass Creek Road near the Bass Creek Recreation Area. No forest closures are anticipated, but please give firefighters plenty of space if you are in the area. Recreationists, including horseback riders, using the Bass Creek trails should expect to hear helicopter operations between 8am and 5pm, May 5-7th. Additional rappel training is scheduled at the Ruffatto Ranch May 27-29th.

The purpose is to train rappellers and spotters in accordance with the National Rappel Operations Guide; to strengthen leadership, teamwork, and communications within the rappel community, and to produce quality aerial delivered firefighters for use in fire and aviation operations.

The USDA Forest Service National Helicopter Rappel Program’s primary mission is initial attack. Rappel crews may be utilized for large fire support, all hazard incident operations, and resource management objectives.

For more information contact the Stevensville Ranger District at (406) 777-5461.

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