



Forest Service News Release

Media Contact: Tod McKay

(406) 363-7122

tod.mckay@usda.gov

Facebook: [@discoverbitterrootnf](https://www.facebook.com/discoverbitterrootnf)

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>

Fire Danger Raised to Very High

Hamilton, MT, July 6 — Just 7 days after going to “High” fire danger, the Bitterroot National Forest announced that it is raising its fire danger to “Very High” beginning tomorrow due to our extremely hot weather and dry fuel conditions. Continued hot and dry weather is predicted this week and into the weekend including a chance of thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty winds.

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 fires can be difficult to control and will often become much larger and longer-lasting fires.

Forest officials are asking the public to be extremely careful when camping and to properly maintain and extinguish campfires. “For us to move from High fire danger to Very High in just a matter of days is really unprecedented,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “The big concern right now is our high temperatures and things are drying out much quicker than normal with these record conditions. Even in the timbered stands, heavy fuels like standing dead trees and logs are already extremely dry. We are matching the record setting conditions of 2017 and are already drier than average August conditions.”

Last year, the forest did not reach “Very High” fire danger levels until August 19th and was only in that danger level for 28 days before conditions improved.

Those planning camping trips should follow these fire safety tips:

- ✓ Keep campfires small and completely extinguish them before leaving camp. The best method is to douse the fire with water, stir the ashes and douse again, making sure that all ashes are cold to the touch. It is illegal to have unattended campfires.
- ✓ Leaving a fire without completely extinguishing it is prohibited, and violators face substantial fines including potentially paying fire suppression costs -- which can easily run into the thousands if an unattended fire starts a wildfire.

- ✓ Smokers should light up only in areas cleared of all flammable debris. Cigarette butts should never be thrown from vehicle windows.
- ✓ Those exploring the forest and backcountry in vehicles must stay on established roads and trails and avoid driving over dry grass and brush that could be ignited by hot exhaust systems.
- ✓ Firewood cutters should operate chainsaws equipped with spark arresters in the cool morning hours and keep a shovel and fire extinguisher nearby.
- ✓ Recreational shooting? Take precautions! Never shoot into dry vegetation and always make sure you're shooting in a safe location, away from roads, trails, campsites, and occupied areas. Be aware that shooting exploding targets is prohibited on National Forest System lands. For more information visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/visit/know-before-you-go/shooting>.
- ✓ Know before you go. Always check with your local Ranger Station prior to your trip to get the most up-to-date information on fire danger and fire restrictions for the area.

Open burning is currently prohibited in Ravalli County. Camp and cooking fires are still allowed. Fire managers expect to see some form of fire restrictions implemented in the area soon, possibly as early as next week, if conditions do not improve. Visit www.mtfireinfo.org to learn more about restrictions that are in place throughout Montana.

We can all make a difference in reducing human-caused fires this season. Remember, One Less Spark Means One Less Wildfire.

Unmanned aircraft systems should never be flown near or around wildfires. To learn more about Forest Service policy regarding unmanned aircraft systems visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/aviation/uas/responsible-use>.

This year, firefighters on the Bitterroot National Forest have extinguished 11 human-caused fires and 13 lightning fires.

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.

###

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.