



Forest Service News Release

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Fire Danger Raised to Extreme

Hamilton, MT, July 12 — Just 6 days after going to “Very High” fire danger, the Bitterroot National Forest announced today that it is raising its fire danger level to “Extreme” due to our continued hot weather and record dry fuel conditions.

Extreme is the highest fire danger level possible. When fire danger is “Extreme” fires start quickly, spread furiously, and burn intensely. All fires are potentially serious and development into high intensity burning will be faster and occur even on smaller fires. Direct attack is rarely possible and may be dangerous except immediately after ignition.

The Bitterroot National Forest has not reached “Extreme” fire danger levels since August of 2018. Forest officials are asking the public to be especially careful when camping and visiting the forest. “I don’t believe we’ve ever gone to this fire danger level this early on the forest,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “Last week, I said our high temperatures and dry fuel conditions were ‘unprecedented’ and ‘record-setting’. You can now add ‘historic’ to the 2021 fire season, which is already shaping up to be one of the hottest and driest on record.”

Current conditions across the forest are matching the record conditions of 2017 and are already drier than average August conditions.

“People really need to be more careful, because it’s just getting drier and drier out there,” said Brad Mohn, Ravalli County Fire Warden. “Another problem we deal with often is the improper disposal of cigarettes, especially along the highway. Cigarette butts should never be thrown from vehicle windows.”

Those planning camping trips should follow these fire safety tips:

- ✓ Pay extra attention to those items that can cause a spark, such as chains on a trailer. Any spark has the potential to ignite a wildfire.
- ✓ 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.

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Firewood cutters should operate in the cool morning hours and keep a shovel and fire extinguisher nearby. All chainsaws must be equipped with a muffler and spark arrester. Temporary firewood cutting areas that opened on the forest back in June are also closing due to increased fire risks.
- ✓ 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 this week. Stage 2 fire restrictions would prohibit all campfires along with operating motorized vehicles off designated trails. Firewood cutting would also be restricted after 1pm under stage 2 restrictions. Visit www.mtfireinfo.org to learn more about current fire restrictions in place throughout Montana.

The ridge of high pressure that is bringing our hot temperatures is also transporting smoke from wildfires in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington causing widespread hazy skies and smoke impacts. For the latest air quality information visit <http://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair>. This site displays particulate concentrations and health effects including a daily 'Wildfire Smoke Update'.

Wildfires are a *No Drone Zone*. If you fly, we can't. Flying a drone near a wildfire can shut down all air operations. To learn more visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/aviation/uas/responsible-use>.

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.

This summer, there have been 32 wildfires on the Bitterroot National Forest; 13 human-caused and 19 lightning fires.

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