



Forest Service News Release

Media Contact: Tod McKay - (406) 363-7122

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

Forest Service Offers Tips to Hunters

Hamilton, MT, October 13 — The Bitterroot National Forest would like to wish a safe and successful season to all hunters looking for that trophy bull elk or other game animal this fall. The Forest Service hopes you have a good hunt and offers some tips for making your experience even more enjoyable.

- All hunters during the general rifle season must wear "hunter orange" (hat, cap, vest, jacket, or rain gear) above the waist. It must be the outermost garment and be visible from all sides. This is also a good idea for non-hunting Forest visitors this time of year. Consider putting an orange vest or bright bandana on pets (dogs, horses, etc.) that will be accompanying you as well.
- Regulations can change yearly and from drainage to drainage. Know the regulations for the area that you will be hunting. Printed copies are available anywhere that licenses are sold and can be found online from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Dumping carcasses on public lands is illegal, unethical and can spread diseases like Chronic Wasting Disease. For more information on preventing the spread of CWD and carcass disposal guidelines visit <http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd>.
- Hunters should treat every firearm as if it were loaded and always point the muzzle in a safe direction. Be sure of your target, and beyond, and know where your hunting partners are at all times. Never assume you are alone in the woods.
- Leave a trip itinerary with family or friends. If hiking by yourself and don't have family or friends in the area with whom you could leave an itinerary with, leave an itinerary in the vehicle.
- Every hunter should carry these "ten essentials": map, compass, flashlight, extra food and water, extra clothes, sunglasses, first-aid kit, pocketknife, waterproof matches, and fire starter.
- Shooting and/or hunting is prohibited in developed recreation sites and trailheads including Lake Como and Bass Creek Recreation Areas.
- Be aware that there may be bears in the area, store food properly. Also, carcasses should not be closer than 100 yards to your sleeping area.

- Your cell phone can save your life, but don't depend on having sufficient coverage, particularly in remote parts of the Bitterroot National Forest.
- Follow the 'Pack It In, Pack It Out' and 'Leave No Trace' principles while camping.
- Campers, hunters, and others are not allowed to camp for more than 16 consecutive days in one location. New camps must be located five air miles from the previous camp.
- Choose a site for a campfire carefully, near water if possible, and clear it of any combustible material. Remember, just because it's cold in the morning doesn't mean fires can't spread quickly! NEVER walk away from a smoldering campfire. ALWAYS make sure a fire is dead out.
- Be sure to call one of our offices to get a Bitterroot National Forest map. Our maps are sold in two parts, split into the North and South half of the forest. Maps are \$14 each. Office hours are 8am to 4:30pm, Mon-Fri. Forest Service offices are located in Hamilton, Stevensville, Darby, and West Fork. Some offices are currently operating 'virtually' due to COVID 19. Please call our office and we would be happy to assist you. Maps can be mailed out or in-person pickup may also be available, depending on location. Forest Visitor Maps can also be purchased online at www.fs.fed.us/recreation/nationalforeststore/
- You can also download Forest Visitor Maps onto your phone or tablet using the Avenza PDF Maps App. Avenza makes navigating your National Forest easy, as it tracks your location on the map using your device's internal GPS. The app also allows you to measure distances or areas, and records waypoints so you can find your way back to that new secret spot. To learn more, head to the App Store (Apple Devices) or Play Store (Android Devices) on your mobile device and search for the free "Avenza PDF Maps" application.

In order to protect our public lands and natural resources, the Forest would like to remind visitors of the importance of using designated routes. To that end, there have been a number of changes to our road system as a result of the Travel Management Plan. The travel plan designates 2,246 miles of forest roads and trails open to motorized use. These areas are designated on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) now available free of charge at all Bitterroot NF offices and online at www.fs.usda.gov/main/bitterroot/maps-pubs. MVUMs are also available for free at the Avenza Store. The maps identify which areas are open to motorized use, the types of vehicles allowed and any seasonal restrictions that apply.

All forest recreators are responsible for knowing which roads are open to motorized use. A road without a gate, barrier or sign does not imply that the road is open. Seasonal use restrictions are important for wildlife. Please do not ruin another user's experience to enhance yours.

All vehicles must stay on existing routes and not drive cross-country. Many seasonal use restrictions include the period from October 15 to December 1. These types of restrictions help to reduce hunting pressure on big game animals and allow Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain desired elk numbers and herd structure. Do not drive around barricades, gates, or snow drifts. Barricades and gates are meant to close a road, frequently for the benefit of wildlife. Violations of these closures can result in fines. Check the MVUM for the travel rules in your areas of interest.

Please notify the Forest Service if a violation or resource issue is observed (example, driving behind a locked gate, camping for more than 16 days, tree blocking road, washout, etc.) If you witness a hunting violation, call (800) TIP-MONT. In case of emergency, dial 911 or contact Ravalli County Sheriff's Office at 406-363-3033.

If you use horses, mules, goats, or llamas anywhere on National Forests, you're required to bring in only certified weed free hay, cubes, pellets, or grain. In the past, contaminated feed introduced invasive weeds to many prime wildlife backcountry areas. Help stop new invaders from getting started.

Power wash the undercarriage and inside/outside of the bumpers of your trucks, horse trailers, ATV's, or other vehicles you drive into the hills. Invasive weed seed can travel over a thousand miles on vehicles and bounce out at the wrong time on our rough mountain roads.

In Montana, outfitters and guides must be licensed to operate on federal, state, as well as private lands unless it's their own. Be sure your guide or outfitter is licensed. Call the Montana Board of Outfitters at (406) 841-2304 or Idaho Outfitter and Guide Licensing Board at (208) 327-7380 for more information.

Finally, beginning this fall, you may see Bitterroot NF employees wearing bright orange vests and working in recreation sites and along Forest Service roads. They are conducting National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) Program surveys which are done every five years. The surveys provide forest managers with an estimate of how many people recreate on federal lands and what activities they engage in while there. All information you give is confidential and the survey is voluntary.

Good luck to our local hunters! Stay in touch with us through www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF and www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot. Please contact your local District office for updates and more information.

Stevensville Ranger District, 406-777-5461
Darby/Sula Ranger District, 406-821-3913
West Fork Ranger District, 406-821-3269
Supervisor's Office – Hamilton, 406-363-7100.

###

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.