



Forest Service News Release

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Fire Danger Level Raised to High

Hamilton, MT, July 18 — Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest has been raised to “High” today due to extremely hot weather and dry fuel conditions.

When fire danger is “high” fires will start from most causes. The fires will spread rapidly, and short-distance spotting is common. All fine dead fuels ignite readily, and unattended brush and campfires are likely to escape. High intensity burning may develop on slopes or in concentrations of fine fuels. Fires may become serious and their control difficult unless they are hit hard and fast while small.

“We had cool spring weather, but conditions are drying out quickly due to increased temperatures, gusty winds, and low relative humidity,” said Dave Tingley, Fuels Specialist. “Vegetation is drying out quickly this year, and spring rains resulted in a good crop of grass that can feed a wildfire. Continued hot and dry weather is predicted for the next several weeks,” he said.

Fires at lower elevations are more likely to spread in valley bottoms as grasses begin to cure. As the fuel moistures in the larger forest fuels start to dry out people need to be careful when camping, driving in the backcountry, and cutting firewood.

Forest officials are asking the public to be extremely careful and to remember that it’s your responsibility to properly maintain and extinguish campfires.

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.

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Fireworks are illegal on public lands: every forest, every campsite, every day. Never light fireworks in the woods.
- ✓ 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.

We can all make a difference in reducing human-caused fires this season. Remember, One Less Spark Means One Less Wildfire. For the latest on fire restrictions and local fire information across the state visit www.mtfireinfo.org.

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 6 human-caused fires and 17 lightning fires.

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