



Forest Service News Release

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Fall Prescribed Burning on the Bitterroot National Forest

Hamilton, MT, October 6 — The Bitterroot National Forest is preparing for fall prescribed burning operations to reduce hazardous fuels, restore wildlife habitat by promoting new growth in the ecosystems, and better protect communities by preventing and mitigating wildfire. Prescribed burning could begin as soon as this weekend across the Forest.

Dependent upon favorable weather, the West Fork Ranger District plans to kick off fall burning this weekend, starting with the Lower West Fork Units 5 & 6 (58 acres), south of Lavene Creek along Forest Service Road 5630A (Trapper Peak Trailhead Road). Smoke from this burn will likely be visible while traveling along West Fork Highway and Hwy 93 between Darby and Conner.

“Prescribed burning allows us to mimic the effects of natural wildfire in a controlled method,” said David Tingley, Bitterroot National Forest Fuels Specialist. “As we watch for favorable conditions and weather, we will be burning on days that allow us to do it safely and minimize smoke impacts to the valley.”

Prescribed burning is one of the most important tools the Forest Service uses to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk. Through a written burn plan, prescribed burns are carefully planned and implemented. Burn plans identify – or prescribe – the best conditions under which trees and other plants will burn to get the best results safely. Prescribed burning operations will only be conducted if weather conditions are favorable. Favorable conditions include temperature, humidity, wind, vegetation moisture, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. When prescription criteria are met, firefighters implement, monitor, and patrol each burn to ensure it meets forest health and public safety goals.

This fall, in predetermined treatment areas, both underburning and pile burning will be conducted. Underburning, a type of prescribed fire treatment, is a planned fire ignited under a forest canopy that is intended to burn surface and ladder fuels but not the overstory trees. Frequent, low-intensity underburning is essential for improving habitat conditions for wildlife by regenerating fire-adapted vegetation and encouraging new growth of forage for wildlife. Fuel that can carry a fire burning in low-growing vegetation to taller vegetation is called ladder fuels. Ladder fuels allows a surface fire to move into the tree canopy creating a crown fire. Crown fires are much more difficult for firefighters to control during a wildfire.

The Forest Service works with the Montana Department of Environment Quality (DEQ) to identify good windows for burning based on when smoke will be dispersed. All prescribed burns will be implemented in compliance with Montana air quality standards and coordinated with the Ravalli County health department to reduce the impacts of smoke. Smoke may settle in the valley bottom overnight, but it is expected to dissipate.

For additional information about these projects, you can visit the interactive map at <https://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7b743b38029e4973b2e6523c976b097b> or use <https://tinyurl.com/3dm8n2yz>

To stay up to date on all our projects, follow the Bitterroot National Forest on Facebook at www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot.

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