



Forest Service News Release

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

West Fork Prescribed Burn Planned This Week

Hamilton, MT, October 18 — The West Fork Ranger District is planning, weather permitting, to conduct a large-scale prescribed burn operation this week. Pending favorable conditions, the 2,500-acre Upper Nez Ecoburn could begin as early as Thursday, October 20th and will temporarily impact some roads and trails in the area for several days.

The burning will take place in the Nez Perce Fork of the Bitterroot, north of Fales Flat Campground, within Sheephead Creek, and west of Watchtower Creek. To provide for visitor safety, the area will be closed to the public starting today and extend until active burning has concluded. The area closure includes the Sheephead Creek Trail #142, Watchtower Creek Trail #699, Fales Flat Trail #12, along with Forest Roads 5638 and 5639. The Magruder Road Corridor and Fales Flat Campground are not impacted by the closure. See attached map for more details.

A helicopter will be utilized to conduct the burning. Aerial ignitions allow prescribed fires to be ignited in areas that can be difficult for firefighters on the ground to reach.

The objectives of the burn include:

- Reduce the amount and arrangement of fuels to affect behavior of future wildland fires at a landscape scale.
- Improve forage quantity and quality for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, big horn sheep and moose. Many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for wildlife.
- Re-introduce fire as a natural process on the landscape.
- Increase future fire management options within the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness.

The burn will only be ignited if operational safety, fuel moisture, weather conditions, and air quality parameters can be attained. Fire crews will monitor the burn after ignition to ensure it stays within prescribed boundaries until declared out. Forecasts are indicating a major weather pattern change this weekend with cooler temperatures, rain, and high elevation snow that will limit fire spread and reduce smoke duration. Fire managers hope to conduct the burning quickly, with limited impacts to recreational users and the general public.

Smoke will likely be visible this week from Valley locations including Darby, Sula, and Hamilton. Overnight there is potential for smoke to settle into the bottom of the West Fork and Nez Perce Corridors that may cause short term impacts for residents and travel.

The Forest Service works with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to identify good windows for burning based on when smoke will be dispersed. All prescribed burns are implemented in compliance with Montana air quality standards and coordinated with the Ravalli County Health Department to reduce the impacts of smoke.

Grant funding provided by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wild Sheep Foundation is covering a portion of the implementation costs for this project.

For more information or to be placed on a pre-burning notification list, please contact the West Fork Ranger District at 406-821-3269.

For the latest burn announcements, burn updates, maps, and photos of projects visit us at www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot or www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF.

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> .

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