



Forest Service News Release

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Prescribed Burning Plans on the West Fork Ranger District

Hamilton, Montana (October 12, 2022) – Starting tomorrow, the West Fork Ranger District of the Bitterroot National Forest will be implementing a prescribed burning project in the Lower West Fork - Units 5 & 6. This treatment area is 59 acres off the Trapper Peak Road 5630A. Expect some short delays along the Trapper Peak Road if you are going up to or down from the trailhead.

For public safety, recreationists are asked to be aware of fire crews and vehicles in these areas. The public is also asked to avoid traveling in prescribed burn units as well as trails and roads directly adjacent to the units. Please take caution as roads and trails used as control lines for the burn could be temporarily impacted by low intensity fire and smoke.

Over the next couple of weeks, the West Fork Ranger District is planning to implement *several* prescribed burning projects to reduce forest fuels, improve conditions within the Wildland Urban Interface and restore characteristics of a fire-adapted ecosystem. *Timing of the burns will be dependent on favorable weather conditions.* A mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas will remain after treatments.

All total, fire managers on the West Fork Ranger District plan to burn between 1,000-3,700 acres this fall. Smoke from the burns will likely be visible while traveling along the West Fork Highway and Hwy 93 between Darby and Conner. Treatment areas include:

- Lower West Fork Units 5 & 6 (59 acres), south of Lavene Creek along FR 5630A (Trapper Peak TH Road)
- Lower West Fork Unit 1G & 34 (50 acres) south of Pierce Creek and north Baker Creek.
- Lower West Fork Unit 2 (98 acres), north of Lloyd Creek and south of Baker Creek along FR 363.
- Lower West Fork Unit 3 (53 acres), north of Lavene Creek along FR 5630.
- Lower West Fork Unit 8 (116 acres), south of Troy Creek along FR 5630A (Trapper Peak Road)
- Upper Nez Ecoburn (500-2,500 Acres), east of Sheephead Creek, west of Watchtower Creek, north of Fales Flat Campground

The burns will only be ignited when fuel moistures, weather conditions, and smoke dispersion is favorable. Fire crews will monitor all burns after ignition to ensure that they stay within prescribed boundaries until declared out. Residual smoke is expected for a few days as fuels consume. Major roads in the area will be signed and local residents who have requested prior notification, will be contacted in advance of burning.

Prescribed fires have several objectives including:

- Maintain forest health and ecosystem restoration
- Improve wildlife habitat – many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for wildlife.
- Reduce the potential of large, high intensity wildfires within the Wildland Urban Interface by reducing the amount of downed fuel to burn.
- Reduce fuels within the Wildland Urban Interface to improve firefighter and public safety and limit the potential negative impacts to private land from future wildfires.
- Post-harvest slash treatment – reduce residual slash created by thinning operations

Fire managers hope to conduct the burning quickly, with limited impacts to recreational users and the general public. Overnight, there is potential for smoke to settle into the bottom of the West Fork and Nez Perce corridors that may cause short term smoke impacts for residents and travel. For more information about the specific units or to be placed on the 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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