



Forest Service News Release

Media Contact: Tod McKay

(406) 363-7122

tod.mckay@usda.gov

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

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>

Fire Danger Level Raised to High

Hamilton, MT, July 18 — Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest has increased 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.”

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.

The change in fire danger coincides with Ravalli County Commissioners decision to close outdoor debris burning and to suspend issue of burn permits Monday. Recreational and cooking fires up to 48 inches are allowed as long as fires are fully attended.

Forest officials ask the public to be extremely careful and to remember that it’s the responsibility of everyone starting a campfire to properly maintain and extinguish it.

Those planning visits or camping trips on the forest 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. Dispose of smoking materials in vehicle ashtrays or crush smoking materials and matches dead out on bare ground larger than 3 feet in diameter. 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.
- ✓ Ensure safety chains on trailers or other equipment do not drag, causing sparks.
- ✓ Make sure all mechanical outdoor equipment, such as chainsaws and off-road vehicles, are equipped with properly working mufflers, spark arresters, and bearings.
- ✓ 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 4 human-caused fires and 7 lightning fires.

Stay in touch with us at www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot and www.facebook.com/discoverbitterrootnf.

###

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.