



Forest Service News Release

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Forest Partners with National Wild Turkey Federation on Project

Hamilton, MT, July 25, 2023 — The Bitterroot National Forest is partnering with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) on implementation of the West Central project. This project aligns with the USDA Forest Service's [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) that works with partners to protect communities and improve the resilience of America's Forests. This crisis is being driven by declining forest health in the West, which is due to a combination of overgrown forests following a warming climate with record-breaking drought.

The project area is located outside of the towns of Victor and Stevensville, Montana. The work includes approximately 8 miles of Forest Service Boundary between the Sharrot and Silverthorn Watershed to the North and the Sweathouse Watershed to the South.

The overall objective of the West Central Project is to reduce the risk of stand replacement wildfire by diversifying forest structure, reducing tree densities, reducing ground ladder fuels, and increasing canopy base height. Currently, the lands are susceptible to uncharacteristic wildfire that is likely to threaten residences in the nearby Wildland Urban Interface. Treatments would move the forest in a positive trajectory of restoring forest structure, composition, function, and initiate the re-establishment of fire adapted, resilient, diverse, and sustainable forest ecosystem. These improvements would support the growth of forage for wildlife and help ensure the area stays resilient to wildfire and provides quality habitat in the future.

"We are very excited at the opportunity to be working with NWTF on getting this important work done on the forest", says Stevensville District Ranger Steve Brown, "their help is integral to our being able to address the Wildfire Crisis in a timely and efficient manner. We sincerely appreciate their support throughout this project."

The NWTF received funding to aid in the performance of this project, which will be delivered through the NWTF's Big Sky Forestry Initiative. This initiative aims to address several critical objectives. These include reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, enhancing wildlife habitat, ensuring clean water sources, preserving access to recreational opportunities and reducing wildfire risk for communities in wildland areas.

"As a longstanding conservation partner with the Forest Service and the longest-serving stewardship contractor working on our National Forests, the NWTF is excited to be able to assist the Bitterroot National Forest in this crucial endeavor," Collin Smith, Wildlife Biologist for NWTF. "Montana's wildlife enthusiasts will also be pleased to know that the work being performed on these forest stands not only

results in reduced wildfire threat and intensity, but also enhances habitat for a diverse array of popular game and non-game wildlife species.” The NWTF will be overseeing the thinning treatment being completed on the ground.

Please use caution in the project area. Work will be conducted along the following Forest Service Road systems through Sept 30, 2023:

- FS 1321 (Glenn Lake Road)
- FS 1323
- FS 1319 (St. Mary’s Road)
- FS 739 & 739D

Please do not remove logs from created piles. Please visit Forest Service Office locations for firewood collecting permits.

For more information or questions concerning the project, please contact Steve Brown, Stevensville District Ranger at (406) 777-5461.

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