



## Forest Service News Release

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### Forest Seeks Comments on Fuel Break Projects

**Hamilton, MT, September 1** — The Bitterroot National Forest is inviting the public to review and make comments on four proposed fuel break projects aimed at protecting communities and critical infrastructure from catastrophic wildfires. The Rye Creek, Sleeping Child, Soda Baker, and Sula projects are located on the Darby-Sula and West Fork Ranger Districts.

All four projects are mainly within the Wildland Urban Interface, in some of the most at risk fireheds in the nation. The Montana Forest Action Plan has identified these areas as having high wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure and significant forest health concerns. Ravalli County has the highest risk to structures from wildfire of any county in Montana.

The projects are utilizing Section 40806 in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to reduce hazardous fuels in strategic locations. The law authorizes the construction of fuel breaks adjacent to existing features including roads, trails, powerlines, or similar infrastructure.

Shaded fuel breaks are linear control features that have been treated to moderate fire spread and intensity. Treatments in the project areas would consist of thinning the understory along roads to reduce ladder fuels and tree densities while leaving mature overstory intact. Mechanical, hand thinning, and prescribed burning may be used to reduce the vegetative fuel loads in the identified locations. Each fuel break may be up to 3,000 acres in size with a maximum width of 1,000 feet.

These treatments are intended to facilitate fire remaining near the ground and not readily spread into tree crowns if a wildfire was to occur. Fuel breaks also provide strategic access and defensible features for fire managers to utilize during a wildfire response while also reducing risk to firefighters on the ground. Proactive fuels management, such as implementing these fuel breaks, increases wildland firefighters' chances of success in controlling a wildfire that poses a threat to communities, private lands, and other values at risk.

Public comments specific to these projects are valuable in helping the Forest Service identify concerns and provide feedback. Comments are due by September 14<sup>th</sup> 2023.

To provide electronic comments, please navigate to the individual projects on the Bitterroot National Forest's Projects page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/bitterroot/landmanagement/projects>. After selecting a project, navigate to the "Get Connected" menu on the right side of the page, which provides an option to comment as well as subscribe to email updates.

Comments should include your name, address, telephone number and (if applicable) the name of the organization you represent.

If you wish to mail written comments, please address them to: Bitterroot National Forest, Attn: Emmet Pruss – Fuel Break Projects, 1801 N. First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840.

Comments may also be hand delivered weekdays 8:00 am -4:30 pm at the Darby-Sula and West Fork District offices.

For more information or questions concerning the projects, please contact Abbie Jossie, Darby-Sula District Ranger at (406) 821-3913 or Dan Pliley, West Fork District Ranger at (406) 821-3269.

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