



Forest Service News Release

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Firefighters Prepare for Fall Prescribed Burning

Burns Could Begin This Weekend

Hamilton, MT, September 12 — As wildfire season slows down, firefighters across the Bitterroot National Forest will shift their focus to prescribed burning operations to reduce hazardous fuels, restore wildlife habitat, and better protect communities from future wildfires.

“This is the time of year when we have the opportunity to be proactive and meet our forest-wide goals of reducing hazardous fuels in key areas near communities,” said David Tingley, Bitterroot National Forest Fuels Specialist. “Over the coming weeks, we will be burning on days that maximize safety and minimize smoke impacts to restore healthy forest conditions.”

Prescribed burning is one of the most important tools the Forest Service uses to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk. Through a written burn plan, prescribed burns are carefully planned and implemented. Burn plans identify – or prescribe – the best conditions under which trees and other plants will burn to get the best results safely. Prescribed burning operations will only be conducted if weather conditions are favorable. Favorable conditions include temperature, humidity, wind, vegetation moisture, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. When prescription criteria are met, firefighters implement, monitor, and patrol each burn to ensure it meets forest health and public safety goals.

This fall, in predetermined treatment areas, both underburning and pile burning will be conducted. Underburning, a type of prescribed fire treatment, is a planned fire ignited under a forest canopy that is intended to burn surface and ladder fuels but not the overstory trees. Frequent, low-intensity underburning is essential for improving habitat conditions for wildlife by regenerating fire-adapted vegetation and encouraging new growth of forage for wildlife. Fuels that can carry a fire burning in low-growing vegetation to taller vegetation are called ladder fuels. Ladder fuels allow a surface fire to move into the tree canopy creating a crown fire. Crown fires are more difficult for firefighters to control during a wildfire.

All total, fire managers will be monitoring conditions on multiple areas across the forest totaling 10,194 acres of potential prescribed fire treatment this fall. Smoke will likely be visible at times from West Fork Highway, East Fork Road, or Highway 93. Treatment areas include:

Stevensville Ranger District – 2,184 acres are planned:

- Big Creek North, Bitterroot Mountains, five miles northwest of Victor
- Three Mile Units, east of Florence in the Three Mile Wildlife Management Area

Darby/Sula Ranger District – 2,183 acres are planned:

- Como/Horse Lick, south of Lost Horse and north of Lake Como
- Trapper Bunkhouse, SW of Darby between Little Tin Cup & McCoy Creek
- Cameron Blue, south of Cameron Creek and northeast of Guide Saddle
- Pile Burning: Tabor, north of Darby, east of Hwy 93
- Trapper Bunkhouse, SW of Darby between Little Tin Cup & McCoy Creek
- Westside Collaborative, north of Lost Horse along Lost Horse Road
- Lost Trail Ski Area, hazard tree clean-up
- Downing Mountain Lodge, west of Hamilton
- Tepee Face/Trail Ridge Landings, north of East Fork Rd. & east of Bertie Lord Creek
- Hog Trough Landings, along 75 Road in Skalkaho Creek

West Fork Ranger District – 5,827 acres are planned:

- Lower West Fork, north of Boulder Creek and south of Pierce Creek
- School Point Ecoburn, east of Halford Creek, west of Nelson Creek
- Soda Spring Habitat Improvement, east of Soda Springs, west of Halford Creek
- Upper Nez Ecoburn, within Sheephead, Watchtower and Flat Creeks, north of Magruder Corridor and Fales Flat Campground
- Piquett Creek, east of Piquett Creek and southeast of West Fork Highway
- Pile Burning: Piquett Creek, within Violet Creek, Piquett Creek and East Piquett Creek

Fall prescribed fire activities normally take place between September and November and burning is highly weather and fuels dependent. A mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas will remain after treatments.

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 will be implemented in compliance with Montana air quality standards and coordinated with the Ravalli County health department to reduce the impacts of smoke. Smoke may settle in the valley bottoms overnight, but it is expected to dissipate.

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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