



## Forest Service News Release

**Media Contact:** Tod McKay - (406) 363-7122

### West Fork Prescribed Burn Planned Next Week

**Hamilton, MT, September 15** — The West Fork Ranger District is planning, weather permitting, to conduct a large-scale prescribed burn operation next week. Pending favorable conditions, the 1,500-acre Upper Nez Ecoburn could begin as early as Monday, September 18th and will temporarily impact some roads and trails in the area for a few days.

The burning will take place within Watchtower and Flat Creeks, north of the Magruder Corridor and Fales Flat Campground. To provide for visitor safety, the West Fork Ranger District is asking the public to avoid recreating and hunting in the Watchtower and Flat Creek area until active burning has concluded next week. The Watchtower Creek Trail #699, and Forest Roads 5637, 5638 & 74038 may be impacted and will be signed with prescribed fire information. Travel along the Magruder Road Corridor or camping at Fales Flat Campground will not be impacted by the prescribed burn.

A helicopter will be utilized to conduct the burning. Aerial ignitions allow prescribed fires to be ignited in areas that can be difficult for firefighters on the ground to reach.

The objectives of the burn include:

- Reduce the amount and arrangement of fuels to affect behavior of future wildland fires at landscape scale.
- Improve forage quantity and quality for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, big horn sheep and moose. Many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for deer, elk, and moose forage.
- Re-introduce fire as a natural process on the landscape.
- Increase future fire management options within the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness.

Grant funding provided to the Bitterroot National Forest by the Wild Sheep Foundation is covering a portion of the implementation costs for this project.

The burn will only be ignited if operational safety, fuel moisture, weather conditions, and air quality parameters can be attained. Fire crews will monitor the burn after ignition to ensure it stays within prescribed boundaries until declared out. Forecasts are indicating a major weather pattern change by the middle of next week, with cooler temperatures and rain that will limit fire spread and reduce smoke duration.

Fire managers hope to conduct the burning quickly, with limited impacts to recreational users and the general public. Smoke will likely be visible from Valley locations including Darby, Sula, and Hamilton. Overnight there is potential for smoke to settle into the bottom of the West Fork and Nez Perce Corridors that may cause short term impacts for residents and travel.

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 are implemented in compliance with Montana air quality standards and coordinated with the Ravalli County Health Department to reduce the impacts of smoke.

For more information or to be placed on a 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](http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot) or [www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF](https://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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