



Forest Service News Release

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Aerial Spraying for Invasive Weeds Planned on the Forest

Hamilton, MT, September 15 — The Bitterroot National Forest and the Ravalli County Weed District are planning to treat cheatgrass and spotted knapweed on approximately 3,000 acres through the aerial application of the herbicides Milestone, Plateau, and Compadre, with the goal of reducing or even eradicating these species.

Aerial spraying with a helicopter is scheduled for September 18 through September 29, 2023. Treatment units are located on the Darby-Sula Ranger District in the areas of Sleeping Child, Little Sleeping Child, Gird Creek, and Tolan Ridge. See attached map for further details.

“The fall is the best time to effectively treat these noxious weeds before they sprout” said Abbie Jossie, District Ranger. “With the use of helicopters, we are able to be efficient and accurate with the application of herbicide”.

Treatment will take place over a two-week window; however, herbicide application is weather-permitting and could result in full, partial, or no-spray days.

Recreationists in these areas, and especially on the Buttercup Loop Trail located in the Little Sleeping Child area should be aware of the planned spraying. On-the-ground signage has been posted along with maps. Short-term closures are possible during the project pending treatment timing.

“These are some of the newest herbicides available,” said Diane Bessler-Hackett, Rangeland Management Specialist. “They are recognized as having low use rates, little to no toxicity to humans, low toxicity to non-target organisms, and low potential for groundwater contamination.”

The helicopter is based out of Hamilton, with various staging areas throughout the forest, determined by the area currently being treated. The emphasis is on controlling non-native, annual cheatgrass and spotted knapweed on critical big-game winter ranges, enhancing native vegetation species, stabilizing soils, and reducing erosion. Treating cheatgrass also greatly minimizes the risk of a wildfire by the reduction in fine fuels and diminishes the threat of shorter fire intervals in the future.

Treatment of these aggressive species has become a priority for many agencies in the western United States. Partnering with the Ravalli County Weed District, this treatment is being funded through grants from the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), and the Ravalli County Resource Advisory

Committee (RAC). The grants will fund integrated weed treatment on approximately 35,000 acres of the forest over the next 4 years, to include herbicide treatment, reseeding, and biological control.

The ability to spray aurally is a result of the 2003 Environmental Impact Statement for Invasive Plant Management. Specific questions about the project should be directed to Diane Bessler-Hackett, Rangeland Management Specialist at (406) 241-1791.

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