

Ravalli County Commissioners Office

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Rock Climbing Restrictions in Mill Creek

Hamilton, Montana (February 26, 2015) – The Stevensville Ranger District has announced that it is imposing a moratorium on establishing new bolt-intensive climbing routes within the Mill Creek climbing area north of Hamilton. The area is a popular destination for hikers, hunters, and other recreationists and has recently become very popular with rock climbers. Increased use has raised concerns shared by the Forest Service and some local residents, such as parking, vehicle traffic, trail erosion, and the visual impact of climbing equipment left on cliffs. Members of the local climbing community are supportive of the moratorium while they work with the Forest Service to resolve impacts due to increased use.

“The popularity of this area has really grown in just the last few years,” said Stevensville District Ranger Dan Ritter. “Many new climbing routes have been developed and Mill Creek has become a preferred location for climbers, especially in the Bitterroot.”

Beginning immediately, the Bitterroot National Forest is prohibiting the placement of new fixed anchors (bolts) in the lower portion of Mill Creek. They are also closing some climbing routes, beginning March 1st to prevent disturbance to known raptor nesting sites. Last summer, an occupied golden eagle nest was discovered and several climbing routes near the nest were closed. Climbers avoided the area and the eagle successfully raised several chicks. Photos of the restricted areas will be posted at trailheads and on the Forest Service and Western Montana Climbers Coalition websites.

“We’re hoping this action will give us time to work with climbers and interested citizens to develop a longer term climbing management plan for the area, and begin work on restoring areas that are eroding and establishing a better trail to the crag,” said Ritter. The Forest has been working with the Western Montana Climbers Coalition and members of the public on new ‘Leave No Trace Climbing’ education and outreach materials. The new brochures and posters will go up later this spring at trailhead bulletin boards. To learn more about these simple climbing tips and recommendations visit www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot and click on Recreation.

For more information contact the Stevensville Ranger District at (406) 777-5461. Stay in touch with the Bitterroot National Forest through www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot and www.twitter.com/BitterrootNF.



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