

Chris Taggart

From: Glenda Wiles on behalf of Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Sent: Monday, September 18, 2017 8:51 AM
To: Chris Taggart
Subject: FW: News Release: Forest Lowers Fire Danger
Attachments: Fire Danger Lowered.docx

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Ravalli County Planning Dept.

From: McKay, Tod G -FS [mailto:tgmkay@fs.fed.us]
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 2017 11:21 AM
Subject: News Release: Forest Lowers Fire Danger

Forest Lowers Fire Danger

Hamilton, Montana (September 16, 2017) – Due to the recent cooler weather and precipitation, the Bitterroot National Forest will lower its fire danger beginning tomorrow, Sunday, September 17th to “Moderate”, down from “Extreme”, where it’s been since August 3rd.

When fire danger is “moderate”, fires can start from most accidental causes, but the number of fires is usually low. If a fire starts in open, dry grassland, it will burn and spread quickly on windy days. Most wood fires spread slowly to moderately and are often easy to control.

Stage 2 Fire Restrictions which have been in place since July, remain in effect this weekend in Ravalli County and across the Bitterroot National Forest prohibiting all campfires and smoking outside of vehicles, buildings, and flammable free areas. Firewood cutting is also prohibited after 1pm. Camping stoves that can be turned on and off are allowed. Fire managers across the region will discuss the possibility of lifting fire restrictions on Monday.

Although some of the higher elevations on the forest did receive wetting rains this week, many did not. Precipitation levels varied widely with the northern end, Stevensville Ranger District, receiving the highest amounts. The Sawmill Creek weather station in the Sapphire Mountains east of Stevensville received .87 inches of rain over the last 48 hours. While Tepee Point Lookout east of Sula only received .16 inches since Thursday.

While the change in weather conditions slowed fire activity, it did not put the fires out. Fire managers say it will take several more days of wetting rains (or snow) to increase the fuel moisture levels in the larger fuels (heavy timber) which remain dry and receptive to fire.

According to the National Weather Service in Missoula, this summer was the driest on record since 1929 with only one day of measurable rainfall dating all the way back to June 21st. This ties the record low rainfall ever during summer months – also set in 1929.

Ravalli County’s restrictions on open burning remain in place. Go to www.firerestrictions.us for an updated list of current County burn bans.

The Emergency Fire Closure for the Nelson Creek Fire on the West Fork Ranger District that included Gemmel Creek Road #5633 at its junction with Nez Perce Road and Barn Draw Road #373 at its junction with West Fork Road, has been lifted.

The Ravalli County Sheriff's Office has also lifted all Evacuation Warnings for the Meyers Fire east of Sula. All Lolo Peak Fire Evacuation Warnings remain in place at this time. For the latest fire and evacuation information visit <https://inciweb.nwccg.gov>

Firefighters have responded to and extinguished 65 wildfires this summer on the Bitterroot National Forest. Due to the quick response of crews, most fires were kept small -- under 1 acre in size.

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