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DeWalt County Commissioners

News Release

Media Contact: (406) 363-7122
Tod McKay



Forest Advisory For Gash Creek Road Conditions

Hamilton, Montana (March 15, 2019) – The Stevensville Ranger District is advising winter recreationists to use extreme caution when driving Gash Creek Road (Forest Road #737) west of Victor. The road accesses the Bear Creek Overlook and Gash Point areas, both popular with backcountry skiers. Due to excessive snow, there is currently insufficient road width for two-way traffic along with no pullouts. The parking lot at Gash Creek Trailhead has not been plowed, so no public parking is available. Parking is not permitted on private land without permission.

The Gash Creek area has received significant snowfall (60+ inches) since February. With spring arriving next week and above average temperatures in the forecast, flooding and spring break-up could make travel difficult and unsafe on many forest roads.

Early spring conditions can create safety hazards for the public as well as concerns for the integrity of the roadbed. Widely varying temperatures generate excessive snowmelt and the resulting runoff freezes to create sheets of ice that are dangerous to negotiate. At the same time, the runoff also creates a soft roadbed that is easily damaged by vehicle traffic. When vehicles drive on soft roads, they create wheel tracks and ruts which can hold and channel water and lead to erosion, expensive repairs, and sometimes road failure.

If motorists find themselves on a soft road bed, they should turn around before they become stuck or cause damage to the road which could result in additional closures.

Hazardous conditions can also develop quickly from rapidly rising waters. Roads and trails that are passable early in the day may become unsafe in the afternoon as rivers and creeks rise due to increased snowmelt. The condition of a roadbed cannot be determined when the road has moving water over it and it may be partially washed out. Outside shoulders of roads may also be soft due to snow melt. Motorists are advised to use extreme caution in these situations.

Please notify us of any road damage, downed trees, plugged culverts or flooding conditions on Forest Service roads.

Officials are advising motorists and recreationists to contact local Ranger Districts to get current information on closures and any flooded roads and trails. The forest also posts closures on their website along with road condition updates on the *Discover Bitterroot National Forest* Facebook page.

For more information, contact the Stevensville Ranger District at (406) 777-5461.

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