



## Forest Service News Release

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

### Spring Burning Planned on the Forest

*Burns Could Begin This Week*

**Hamilton, MT, March 22** —With the arrival of spring, firefighters across the Bitterroot National Forest are gearing up for their annual prescribed burning operations to reduce hazardous fuels, restore wildlife habitat, and better protect communities from future wildfires.

Pending favorable conditions, underburning operations could begin as early as tomorrow Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> on the Darby/Sula Ranger District south of Lake Como. Underburning, a type of prescribed fire treatment, ignites vegetation under the forest canopy or in open grassy meadows and focuses on the consumption of surface fuels. Frequent, low-intensity fire is essential in improving habitat conditions by regenerating fire-adapted vegetation and encouraging the growth of new forage and food sprouts for wildlife.

“This is the time of year when we have the opportunity to be proactive and meet our forest-wide goals of reducing hazardous fuels in key areas near communities,” said David Tingley, Bitterroot National Forest Fuels Fire Management Officer. “Over the coming weeks, we will be burning on days that maximize safety and minimize smoke impacts to restore healthy forest conditions.”

Spring prescribed fire activities normally take place from March to May and burning is highly weather and fuels dependent. A mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas will remain after treatments.

All total, fire managers plan to burn approximately 3,774 acres this spring. Smoke may be visible at times from West Fork Highway, East Fork Road, or Highway 93. Treatment areas include:

**Darby/Sula Ranger District** – 2,292 acres are planned:

- Waddell Units, south of Lake Como
- Como/Horse Lick, south of Lost Horse and north of Lake Como
- Trapper Bunkhouse, SW of Darby between Little Tin Cup & McCoy Creeks
- Cameron Blue, along East Fork Road near Guide Creek
- Teepee Face & Schultz Saddle, east of Sula and north of Springer Memorial
- Tolan Ecoburn, east of Sula between Reimel and Tolan Creeks

**West Fork Ranger District** – 815 acres are planned:

- Lower West Fork Units, south of Trapper Creek and north of Lloyd Creek
- School Point Ecoburn Units, west of Boulder Creek and east of Halford Creek

**Stevensville Ranger District** – 667 acres are planned:

- Upper Larry Bass Units, within the Bass Creek Recreation Area northwest of Stevensville
- Three Saddle Units, Sapphire Mountains east of Stevensville

Prescribed burning operations will only be conducted if conditions are favorable. Favorable conditions include correct parameters for temperature, wind, fuel moisture, and ventilation for smoke. When prescription criteria are met, firefighters implement, monitor, and patrol each burn to ensure it meets forest health and public safety goals.

All prescribed burns will be implemented in compliance with Montana air quality standards and coordinated with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to reduce the impacts of smoke to neighbors, cooperators, and surrounding communities. Smoke may settle in the valley bottoms and drainages overnight, but it is expected to dissipate within a few days.

For public safety, recreationists are asked to be aware of fire crews and vehicles in these areas. The public is also asked to avoid traveling in prescribed burn units while crews are present, as well as trails and roads directly adjacent to the units. Please take caution as roads and trails used as control lines for the burn could be temporarily impacted by low intensity fire and smoke.

For more information about specific burns or to be placed on a pre-burning notification list, please contact your local ranger district. For burn updates, maps, and photos of project areas, visit <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/8024/> or the *Discover Bitterroot National Forest* Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF](http://www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF).

The USDA Forest Service recently released a 10-year [\*Wildfire Crisis Strategy\*](#) that works with partners to protect communities and improve the resilience of America's Forests. The plan includes a dramatic increase in fuels and forest health treatments by up to four times current treatment levels in the West. The Bitterroot National Forest and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Hamilton field office were also recently awarded the USDA's [\*Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Partnership Award\*](#). The funding will support *Fire Adapted Bitterroot*, a three-year, 10,000 acre project, which seeks to address forest health concerns and reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners in Ravalli County.

###

*USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender*