



## Forest Service News Release

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### Spring Burning Planned at Bass Creek Recreation Area

**Hamilton, MT, April 1** — The Bitterroot National Forest is advising horseback riders, hikers, and other recreationists that prescribed burning is scheduled next week at the Bass Creek Recreation Area northwest of Stevensville. Pending favorable conditions, the 620-acre burn could begin as early as Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup> and will temporarily impact some roads and trails in the recreation area for 2-3 days.

To provide for visitor safety, the area will be closed to the public during active burning and monitoring operations. The closure includes the popular Larry Creek Trails and Horse Trailer Parking, Bass Creek Nature and Physical Fitness Trails, and the Bass Creek Trail #4 and Trailhead. See attached map for more details.

Forest officials say the closure is necessary as firefighters and engines will be working in the area, and many roads and trails used as control lines could be temporarily impacted by low intensity fire and smoke. Timing of the burn will be dependent on favorable weather conditions. Fire managers plan to conduct the burning as quickly as possible to limit impacts to recreational users and the general public.

“The reason for the area closure is to provide for the safety of the many visitors at Bass Creek,” said Stevensville District Ranger Steve Brown. “We hope to re-open the trails and other areas in a few days, following the burn.”

Smoke will likely be visible from Highway 93. The burn will only be ignited if operational safety, fuel moisture, weather conditions, and air quality parameters can be attained. Fire crews will monitor the burn after ignition to ensure it stays within prescribed boundaries until declared out.

Roads in the area will be signed and local residents who have requested prior notification will be contacted in advance of burning. 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.

In 2013, a 700-acre thinning operation took place at the recreation area to reduce hazardous fuels and fire hazards created by dead, dying, and diseased trees impacted by mountain pine beetles. Besides improving overall forest health, the project also saved and protected many of the areas large and distinctive ponderosa pine trees.

Last spring, firefighters completed a 250-acre underburn operation at the recreation area. 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 such as pine needles and dead vegetation.

Low intensity prescribed fires have several objectives including:

- Maintain forest health and ecosystem restoration
- Improve wildlife habitat – many plants respond favorably to fire providing new food sprouts for wildlife.
- Reduce the potential of large, high intensity wildfires by reducing the amount of downed fuel to burn.
- Post-harvest slash treatment – reduce residual slash created by thinning operations.

For more information or to be placed on a pre-burning notification list, contact the Stevensville Ranger District at 406-777-5461. For burn updates, maps, and photos of treatment areas, visit <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/8024/> or the Discover Bitterroot National Forest Facebook page [www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF](http://www.facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF).

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