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Fire Danger Level Raised to High

Hamilton, Montana (July 18, 2018) – Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest has been raised to “High” today.

Continued hot and dry weather is predicted for the next several weeks. When fire danger is “high” fires will start from most causes. The fires will spread rapidly and short-distance spotting is common. All fine dead fuels ignite readily and unattended brush and campfires are likely to escape. High intensity burning may develop on slopes, or in concentrations of fine fuels. Fires may become serious and their control difficult unless they are hit hard and fast while small.

Forest officials are reminding area residents and visitors to be careful with fire. “We had cool spring weather, but conditions are drying out quickly,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “In many areas, spring rains resulted in a good crop of grass that can feed a wildfire when it dries out. People need to be careful when camping, driving in the back country and cutting firewood,” he said.

Those planning camping trips should follow these fire safety tips:

Keep campfires small, and completely extinguish them before leaving camp. The best method is to douse the fire with water, stir the ashes and douse again, making sure that all ashes are cold to the touch. It is illegal to have unattended campfires.

Smokers should light up only in areas cleared of all flammable debris. Cigarette butts should never be thrown from vehicle windows.

Those exploring the forest and back country in vehicles must stay on established roads and trails and avoid driving over dry grass and brush that could be ignited by hot exhaust systems. Firewood cutters should operate chainsaws equipped with spark arresters in the cool morning hours and keep a shovel and fire extinguisher nearby.

Open burning was closed last week in Ravalli County due to increased fire risks. Camp and cooking fires are still allowed.

This year, firefighters on the Bitterroot National Forest have extinguished 2 lightning caused fires, both kept under 1/10 of an acre.

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