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Fire Danger Level Raised to Extreme

Hamilton, Montana (August 9, 2018) – Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest will be raised to “Extreme” beginning tomorrow, August 10th.

This week is the hottest of the summer so far with triple digit heat. While cooler temperatures are forecast this weekend, high winds are also expected. Scarce precipitation in the past month means that grasses and forest vegetation is continuing to dry and this trend is expected to continue.

“We are currently at record-setting levels for dryness for this time of the year,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “I think everyone can see the conditions changing in the valley bottom, we’re really seeing the grasses cure out so that’s going to make a big difference with fires that start as they have the potential to spread very quickly.”

Due to our continued hot and dry conditions, Stage 2 fire restrictions will go into effect across the Bitterroot National Forest beginning tomorrow. This means campfires and all other fires are prohibited along with operating motorized vehicles off designated trails. Firewood cutting is also prohibited after 1pm and smoking is not allowed unless in enclosed vehicles, buildings, or flammable free areas. Camping stoves (Liquid petroleum) that can be turned on and off are allowed. Fire restrictions are not in effect at this time in wilderness areas in Idaho (Selway-Bitterroot & Frank Church) and the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness in Montana.

Temporary firewood cutting areas that opened on the forest back in June will also close tomorrow due to increased fire risks. Stage 2 restrictions also begin tomorrow in Ravalli County and many others areas across Western Montana. To know if there are any restrictions in your area visit www.firerestrictions.us/mt.

Individuals who violate these restrictions can face fines up to \$5,000 and six months in jail, along with paying suppression costs and damages, if you start a fire.

“People really need to be more careful, because it’s just getting drier and drier out there,” said Brad Mohn, Hamilton Fire Chief. “Another problem we deal with often is the improper disposal of cigarettes, especially along the highway. Cigarette butts should never be thrown from vehicle windows.”

Fire managers are reminding visitors and recreationists to be extremely careful while visiting the forest. Pay attention to those items that can cause a spark, such as chains on a trailer. Any spark has the potential to ignite a wildfire. Be vigilant while working outdoors, especially on windy days or in the heat of the day. Have a water supply or fire extinguisher, leather gloves, and a hand tool at the ready.

When fire danger is "Extreme" fires start quickly, spread furiously and burn intensely. All fires are potentially serious and development into high intensity burning will be faster and occur even on smaller fires. Direct attack is rarely possible and may be dangerous except immediately after ignition

The ridge of high pressure that is bringing us these extremely hot temperatures, is also transporting smoke from wildfires in California, Oregon and Washington causing widespread hazy skies and smoke impacts. For the latest air quality information visit <http://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair>. This site displays particulate concentrations and health effects including a daily *Wildfire Smoke Update*.

For more information about fires in Montana and across the country, visit <http://inciweb.nwcg.gov>.

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