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## **Fire Danger Level Raised to Very High**

Hamilton, Montana (July 27, 2018) – Fire danger on the Bitterroot National Forest has been raised to “Very High” this morning. Continued hot and dry weather is predicted next week, following a chance of thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty winds over the weekend.

In the last week, Bitterroot fire and recreation crews have found seven abandoned campfires on the forest. “Unfortunately, we are seeing at least two or three of these a week,” said Mark Wilson, Fire Management Officer. “Our wildland firefighters face a long fire season ahead even without having to respond to human-caused fires. We really need the public’s help to stop this continuing problem.”

Leaving a fire without completely extinguishing it is prohibited and violators face substantial fines including potentially paying fire suppression costs -- which can easily run into the thousands if an unattended fire starts a wildfire.

After a wet spring, fuels have dried to the point that fires will spread quickly. 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. Ensure that all campfires are dead out by adding water and stirring dirt into hot coals until cold. If your campfire is still hot, then it’s too hot to leave. Open burning is prohibited in Ravalli County due to increased fire risks. Camp and cooking fires are still allowed.

When fire danger is “very high” fires will start from most causes. The fires will spread rapidly and have a quick increase in intensity, right after ignition. Small fires can quickly become large fires and exhibit extreme fire intensity, such as long-distance spotting and fire whirls. These fires can be difficult to control and will often become much larger and longer-lasting fires.

Firefighters have responded to 9 wildfires this summer on the Bitterroot National Forest.

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