



## Flathead National Forest

## Media Release

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### Forest Hosts Public Open Houses to Discuss Additional Areas Planned for Wildland Fire Use

The Flathead National Forest is hosting public open houses to share information and discuss wildland fire use on the forest. Wildland fire use is the management of naturally ignited wildland fires to meet specific resource objectives.

The Flathead National Forest has been successful using wildland fire use as a tool to help restore forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in the Bob Marshall and Great Bear Wilderness Areas for the past two decades. Last year, the forest expanded wildland fire use program to suitable areas outside the wilderness, including areas along the Hungry Horse Reservoir. Additional areas of the Flathead National Forest that will utilize naturally ignited wildland fire are the North Fork Area north of Columbia Falls, the west face of the Swan Range south of Bigfork and the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

Swan Lake District Ranger Steve Brady said, "Fire is a valuable tool for land managers. Decisions to use naturally ignited fire as a tool for resource management objectives are made incident by incident, and only under certain conditions."

Hungry Horse-Glacier View District Ranger Jimmy DeHerrera said, "Not all fires started by lightning will be managed as wildland fire use. But, when fire can benefit the forest and wildlife, and there are no values at risk, we will consider utilizing fire use."

Managing naturally ignited fires, under controlled conditions, can reduce the amount of fuel on the landscape and minimize larger, more costly and catastrophic wildfires according to Brady and DeHerrera. They also commented that they appreciate the working relationships with neighbors and local communities, as well as the fuels mitigation work that is being completed on neighboring lands.

A public open house to discuss fire use in the North Fork Area, north of Columbia Falls, will be **Thursday, June 12, 7-8pm, at Sondreson Hall**. Sondreson Hall is located along the North Fork Road at Whale Creek, approximately 45 miles north of Columbia Falls.

The Swan Lake District will host two public open houses to discuss fire use on the Flathead National Forest along the Swan Range and within the Mission Mountains Wilderness; **Wednesday, June 18, 4-7pm at the Condon Community Center and Thursday, June 19, 4-7pm at the Swan Lake Ranger Station in Bigfork.**

The public open houses will be opportunities to discuss wildland fire use with Flathead National Forest fire management specialists. The public is invited to stop by at anytime during the open houses. For more information about areas planned for wildland fire use management, please contact the Hungry Horse and Glacier View Districts at 387-3800 or the Swan Lake District at 837-7500.

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