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Conditions Are Right for Wildland Fires

As you prepare for camping and other outdoor activities this weekend, remember that the stage is set for wildland fires.

Fire danger in the south-central and eastern parts of Montana is very high to extreme. The moisture level in large dead trees is the lowest in 26 years, thus allowing for very large, fast-moving fires. Over the next few days, the forecast calls for red-flag conditions: very low humidity with gusty winds.

Even the smallest spark could lead to significant wildfire damage to property and natural resources. Before engaging in any outdoor activities, carefully consider the potential for igniting a wildland fire and the possible widespread consequences.

STAGE 2 RESTRICTIONS: Because of the current extreme conditions, Stage 2 restrictions are in effect in south-central Montana. Under Stage 2, open burning, including campfires, is prohibited. Smoking is allowed only in areas cleared of all flammable materials. Motorized vehicles must stay on designated roads and trails. Operating an internal combustion engine, welding, or using explosives is prohibited between 1 p.m. and 1 a.m. An exemption for agriculture harvesting is in effect, but those taking advantage of this exemption are urged to have equipment, including spark arrestors, in good working order.

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Stage 2 restrictions apply to all lands within the Crow Reservation and Northern Cheyenne Agency and federal, state, and private lands in Treasure, Sweetgrass, Big Horn, Carbon, Musselshell, Stillwater and Yellowstone counties. Lands within a city boundary are exempted.

CLOSURES: Bureau of Land Management lands are closed to motorized vehicle use within the South Hills Motorcycle Area, Acton Recreation Area, and the Shepherd Ah Nei OHV Area.

Exemptions include fires fueled solely by liquid petroleum or LPG, or other activities for which there is a permit or written authorization. However, an exemption does not absolve an individual or organization from liability or responsibility for any fire started by the exempted activity. Anyone who causes a wildland fire intentionally or through negligence will be held accountable for damage and suppression costs. For example, the cost of just one helicopter is about \$5,500 per hour.

For more information about fire prevention, please contact the Custer National Forest at 406-657-6200; Bureau of Land Management at 406-896-5013; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation at 406-247-4400; Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks at 406-247-2940; Carbon County at 406-446-1595; Stillwater County at 406-321-0204; Sweet Grass County at 406-932-5143; Yellowstone County at 406-256-2775; or your local fire department or sheriff's office.

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