



NEWS RELEASE

Lolo National Forest

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United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
Lolo National Forest
Building 24, Fort Missoula
Missoula, Montana 59804

For Immediate Release

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Fuel Reduction to Begin July 1 in Sawmill Gulch

Missoula, MT. – Crews are expected to begin working in the Sawmill Gulch area of the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (RNRA) July 1 to thin timber and reduce the threat of fire to the local Rattlesnake community. The work is expected to continue for several months but truck traffic along Sawmill Gulch Road and Rattlesnake Drive will be limited to weekdays. To minimize impacts to the local neighborhood, log-haul trucks will not operate during commuter hours. The project area is northwest of the Sawmill Gulch Trailhead approximately 300 feet and includes 178 acres.

The work will not involve parking or area closures but hikers, runners, and bikers can expect to encounter work crews and truck traffic. And there may be short-term trail closures to ensure public safety. Hikers and others should keep a 300 foot buffer between themselves and operating equipment. To help separate motorized and non-motorized traffic, a recreation trail from the main Rattlesnake Trailhead – running parallel to Sawmill Gulch Road -- has been extended to the Sawmill Gulch Trailhead.

Current information on the project will be posted at the Sawmill Gulch trailhead to keep the public updated on thinning activities and any short-term trail closures. The public can also contact the Missoula Ranger District for updates. Please call (406) 329-3814.

The public's cooperation and awareness of personal safety is appreciated while the work is being done. It's important for motorists and bikers to be aware of log truck traffic. Log trucks cannot backup easily, so if motorists encounter a truck they should find a safe place to pull over, or backup until they can safely pull out of the way.

Background: During the summer of 2003, wildfires burned thousands of acres of National Forest land near Missoula. These fires increased local landowner awareness of fuel loading and desire to reduce fuels -- on their own land as well as National Forest land adjacent to their properties. During this time, the local chapters of the Sierra Club and the Society of American Foresters were also looking for opportunities to work together with the Forest Service in the wildland urban interface; specifically, an opportunity that included commercial timber harvest as well as hand slashing and prescribed burning. The Sawmill Gulch fuels reduction project was subsequently identified as important work that would meet the needs of this collaborative effort.

Project Intent: The objective of the project is to reduce the potential for catastrophic fire through fuel reduction. The location of the project is within the wildland urban interface, immediately adjacent to private property where fuels reduction activities have occurred, and within vegetation types that historically had frequent, low intensity fire intervals. These low intensity fires have not occurred in the past several decades, allowing dense vegetation to accumulate, providing continuous fuels, both vertically and horizontally. The Sawmill Gulch project will reduce the threat of high intensity fire in the project area.

For more information on this project, please contact Acting Missoula District Ranger Tom Rhode at (406) 329- 3948. For current information on trails, please contact the Missoula Ranger District at (406) 329-3814.

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