



NEWS RELEASE

Lolo National Forest

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Illegal Dumping, Vandalism Increases Across Lolo N.F.

Missoula, MT. – Lolo National Forest employees have cleaned up and removed truckloads of garbage and abandoned household goods from the forest over the last several weeks along roads and near dispersed recreation camp sites. The problem of illegal dumping has been especially noticeable on the Superior and Missoula ranger districts. On the Superior Ranger District, crews in the last week have cleaned up and removed five large pick-up loads of garbage. Most of the dumping on the Superior district has occurred along well-traveled forest roads and within two miles of Interstate-90.

An increase in vandalism has also occurred on some districts, including the severing of hydraulic lines Tuesday night on equipment that was being used in the Sawmill II Fuels Reduction Project in the Sawmill gulch area of the Missoula Ranger District. The equipment, owned by Woodland Restoration Inc., was vandalized to make it inoperable. Human feces were also around the equipment. The Sawmill II project objective is to reduce the potential for high intensity fire on the forest adjacent to private property in the Rattlesnake neighborhood. It includes treating 754 acres and has been supported by local residents, the Society of American Foresters, and the local chapter of the Sierra Club.

Matt Arno, Head Forester at Woodland Restoration, said he was disappointed that his work was the subject of vandalism – and possible protest. But he noted that most of the people he has come in contact with in the area have been supportive of the project. He said there were some initial challenges with the landing site, where logs are stacked and loaded onto trucks, and one of the Sawmill Gulch trails, but that was solved with a short trail bypass.

“The public has been real good since we got the trail routed around the landing,” Arno said.

Employees on the Missoula Ranger District have removed four loads of dumped garbage – including a washer and dryer, desks, and tires -- just from the Pattee Canyon Recreation Area in the last two weeks. The district has also seen damage and destruction of signs at the Lolo Creek Campground, including the ramming of an information board by a vehicle. On the Ninemile Ranger District employees have responded to destroyed signs, an abandoned vehicle, restrooms vandalized with graffiti, and a gate cut open.

To deal with the dumping fire crews and other forest employees have been pulled away from regular work to clean up the debris.

“It’s a shame that some people choose to show such disrespect for our forests and dispersed camping areas,” said Sharon Sweeney, Superior District Ranger. “Some of this dumping was spread out over a half mile of road, while in other areas it was obviously just tossed out of someone’s car or pick-up.” Sweeney noted that she diverted district crews away from important work such as thinning and trail maintenance “to clean up the mess.”

“It’s disappointing and offensive and it’s possibly even a health risk,” Sweeney said.

Missoula Ranger District officials also noted the impact to other programs from the dumping and vandalism.

“Vandalism costs us thousands of dollars each year and repair costs take away from our basic recreation maintenance budget,” said Andy Kulla, Missoula Ranger District Resource Staff Officer. “We work hard to maintain clean and high quality recreation facilities around Missoula and this kind of damage makes that really difficult.”

Some information on the vandalism and dumping has been obtained by Lolo National Forest law enforcement officers and they are currently investigating several of the incidents. Forest officials urge anyone with information on illegal dumping or vandalism to contact the Lolo National Forest at 329-3814. A vehicle description and license plate number is the most helpful information for law enforcement, and callers may remain anonymous. In the Missoula and Mineral County areas, residents can also contact Crime Stoppers at 721-4444.

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