

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND FIRE DANGER WARNING

MISSOULA, MONT., May 21, 2002----Lightning and pile burning touched off fires in the Bitterroot, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, and Lolo national forests over the weekend, raising officials' concerns about fire danger over the upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend.

Long-term drought persists over most of Montana, and forest officials urged everyone going to the outdoors to be extra careful with fire.

"It's time to get ready in the Northern Rockies," said Rodd Richardson, the fire, aviation and air director for the Forest Service's Northern Region.

"Across Montana, North Dakota and northern Idaho we have more firefighters and fire-fighting equipment and other resources thanks to the additional funding coming from the National Fire Plan. We are forming our crews and completing spring training now in anticipation of a potentially tough season locally and nationally."

Richardson said that in addition, hundreds of fire fighters from the region have gone to help fight fires in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico.

The National Fire Plan, passed by Congress in the wake of the 2000 fire season, gave federal land management agencies more funding in 2001 and 2002 to reduce the risk of dangerous fires and to restore forests damaged by intense wildfires.

This year, the northern region of the Forest Service has over 2,700 fire fighters on duty as a result, officials said.

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The plan has also given funding to local fire departments and communities in Montana, northern Idaho and North Dakota.

For more information, contact your local Ranger Station or go to www.fireplan.gov.