

# 2024 Fire Year in Review



## LOCAL WILDFIRE STATISTICS

Firefighters responded to a total of 118 fires this summer on the Bitterroot National Forest, 108 of these were caused by lightning and 10 were human caused fires. Bitterroot National Forest resources also responded to 5 Mutual Aid fires with our local fire department partners - 1 assist by the Stevensville District, and 4 by the Darby/Sula District.

## NATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

The Bitterroot National Forest sent a total of 618 personnel and support resources off forest for National wildfire support assignments in 2024. This included 561 overhead personnel, 38 engines & equipment, 15 fire & camp crews, and 4 aircraft.

## FUEL TREATMENTS

This year 20,882 acres of fuel treatments were accomplished on the Bitterroot National Forest. Examples of treatments include the thinning of dense stands of trees, prescribed fire, and other fuel treatments that make our forests better able to withstand unwanted effects from wildfires. Treatments include hand piling, mechanical treatments, and creating fuel breaks to achieve the desired objectives for an area. Often, thinning and slashing treatments are followed by prescribed fire to effectively reduce hazardous fuels.

**Broadcast Burning:** 8,466 acres

**Pile Burning:** 1,537 acres

**Thinning/Slashing:** 4,438 acres

**Piling:** 2607 acres

**Commercial Treatment:** 547 acres

**Planned treatment burned in wildfire (2023):** 3287 acres

*98% of treatments were in the Wildland Urban Interface*

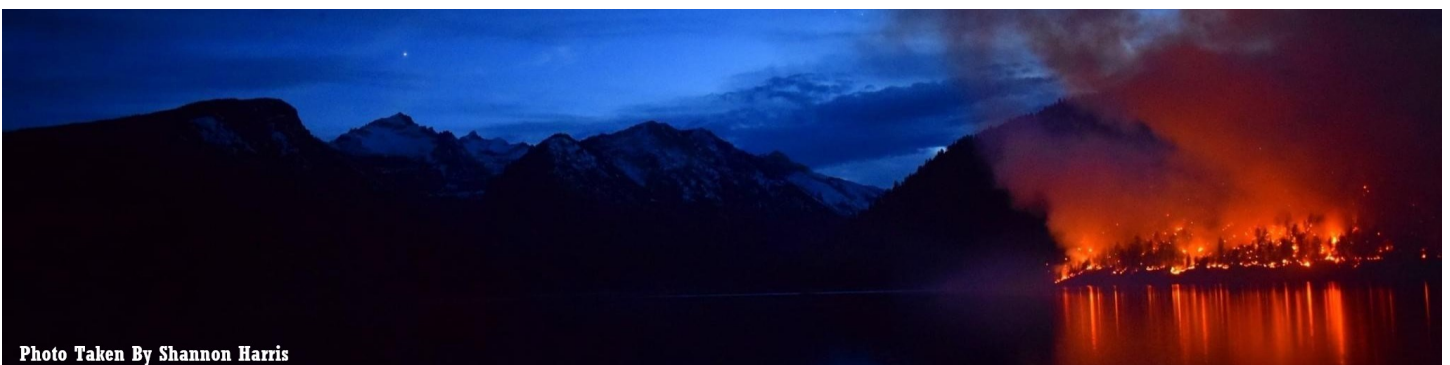


Photo Taken By Shannon Harris



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## WILDFIRE DANGER LEVEL & FIRE RESTRICTIONS

The forest was in *Very High* to *Extreme* fire danger from July 12th - August 15th.

**Very High:** 13 days      **Extreme:** 21 days

Stage 2 Fire Restrictions were in effect July 19th – August 8th for a total of 21 days.

Stage 1 Fire Restrictions were in effect July 25th – September 16th in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness for a total of 54 days.

## INCIDENT QUALIFICATION CERTIFICATION SYSTEM (IQCS)



IQCS is the database that all federal agencies use to track qualifications, training and experience. Currently, the Forest Training Officer manages 378 individuals in the IQCS who obtain an Incident Qualification Card “Red Card.” 112 of the 378 are affiliated with Trapper Creek Job Corps. Within the Job Corps, 88 students are either Firefighter and/or Camp Crew qualified, the other 24 are staff members. The remaining 266 individuals are comprised of employees from the Bitterroot National Forest Supervisors Office, Bitterroot Helitack, Dispatch, Bitterroot Interagency Hotshots, Stevensville/ Darby-Sula/West Fork Ranger Districts, and Casual Hires/Administratively Determined.

## TRAINING

The Position Task Book (PTB) identifies all critical tasks required to perform the job for most standard incident management and prescribed fire positions. Position Task Books must be completed by the individual and then reviewed by the Forest Fire Qualifications Review Committee (FQRC). If approved during the review, the individual is then certified in that position and considered fully qualified. For positions that do not have a PTB, the FQRC shall review and recommend to the certifying official an individual's certification and qualification, based on objective factors such as performance evaluations and visual observation of satisfactory performance of position duties. Bitterroot National Forest employees have a total of 298 Taskbooks currently open with 136 newly opened this year. In 2024, the FQRC certified 72 Position Task Books and Qualifications.

### Certified Taskbooks and Qualifications

<b>Operations:</b> 28	<b>Air Operations:</b> 10	<b>Plans:</b> 2
<b>Command &amp; General Staff:</b> 7	<b>Logistics:</b> 5	<b>Prevention:</b> 6
<b>Dispatch:</b> 4	<b>Finance:</b> 4	<b>RX:</b> 6
	<b>Total:</b> 72	

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## FIRE LOOKOUTS

During the 2024 fire season, our Fire Lookouts detected 41 new starts on the Bitterroot National Forest. Of those starts, 35 were due to lightning. The Bitterroot National Forest alone received 3,109 lightning strikes from May 14th to October 31st. Barecone Lookout (pictured below) was



wrapped this year due to the proximity of the Fales Creek Fire and was forced to close early. Saint Mary's Lookout was also forced to close early due to the Sharrott Creek Fire's impacts to the 116 trail. Salmon Mountain Lookout was unstaffed for the season due to maintenance, but volunteers were still able to help support the forest by staffing Hells Half Lookout.

## 2024 STAFFED FIRE LOOKOUTS

- ♦ **Hells Half**  
(07/19—09/03)
- ♦ **Lookout Mountain**  
(06/10—09/30)
- ♦ **Barecone**  
(06/24—09/16)
- ♦ **Spot Mountain**  
(06/24—09/30)
- ♦ **Teepee Point**  
(06/03—09/23)
- ♦ **Sula Peak**  
(07/02—08/31)
- ♦ **Willow Mountain**  
(07/01—09/20)
- ♦ **Deer Mountain**  
(06/02—09/23)
- ♦ **Saint. Mary's Peak**  
(07/18—08/26)

## BITTERROOT DISPATCH CENTER

The Bitterroot Dispatch Center was staffed 7 days a week starting on July 9th and ran until November 3rd, spanning 117 days. Dispatchers staffed 24 hours a day consecutively from July 13th to October 28th totaling 108 Days.

## FIXED WING, AERIAL DETECTION, AND AIR ATTACK

Fixed-wing platforms flew a total of 178 hours this season. The Bitterroot National Forest utilized Incident Awareness and Assessment (IAA) and National Infrared Operations (NIROPS) for detection and fire mapping. NIROPS flew over 70 missions on the Bitterroot National Forest.





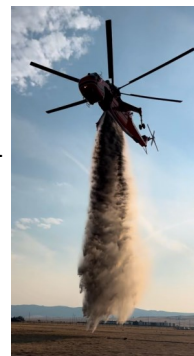
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## TYPE 1 HELICOPTER (N172AC)



The Forest hosts a Type 1 Helicopter (Sikorsky S-64 Sky Crane) which is considered a “Nationally Shared Resource” primarily used for initial attack and large fire support. It is equipped with a 2,600-gallon capacity tank and responds to incidents across the nation. The helicopter was contracted from July 1<sup>st</sup> through October 28<sup>th</sup> for a total of 120 days and supported fires in multiple regions. In total it flew 245 hours responding to 19 initial attack fires and supporting 12 large incidents. It delivered a total of 1,381,850 gallons of water and 15,000 gallons of retardant.



## TYPE 2 HELICOPTER (N96EC)

The Forest hosted a call when needed, Type 2 or “medium” helicopter (Bell UH-1H) for 92 days with a total fly time of 127 hours. The primary function is for water delivery or external cargo delivery. The aircraft is equipped with a 320-gallon fixed tank or can be configured with a 340-gallon water bucket. N96EC delivered 34,770 gallons of water.



## TYPE 3 HELICOPTER (N640MA) & HELITACK CREW



The Bitterroot Helitack Program is based in Hamilton, MT, at the Ravalli County Airport. The 10-person initial attack fire crew is a forest resource supported by a High-Performance Type 3 Helicopter (Bell 407 HP). The crew supports initial attack, large fire incidents, all risk incidents, and resource management functions as well as local project work such as fuels reduction and prescribed fire. 640MA was contracted from June 15 - October 29 for a total of 137 days with



an extension of 37 days. The helicopter responded to 59 local initial attack fires, hauled over 687 passengers, carried 46,329 pounds of internal cargo and 79,457 external cargo, and delivered 34,770 gallons of water via bucket.

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**FIRE INFORMATION: GETTING OUR MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY, PARTNERS & FOREST SERVICE MEMBERS**



Many traplines, with fire updates and maps, were positioned around the Bitterroot to help inform.

The 2024 fire season was one of the longest and most active fire seasons in the Bitterroot National Forest since 2017. The season started in early July and ended in early November. Many factors contributed to this, such as unseasonably hot, dry weather that persisted through October, and more than 3,000 lightning strikes between May 14 to Oct. 31.

The three Bitterroot National Forest Ranger Districts (Stevensville, Darby-Sula, and West Fork) commanded or hosted fire Incident Management Teams. Three fires directly threatened communities: Sharrott Creek, Johnson and Railroad-Daly Fires. The public information team informed the community of fire activity and firefighter response through timely, transparent, social media updates, community meetings, media and congressional interviews, hundreds of public phone calls, and information traplines and trailers around the forest. To help tell the story, public information officers used the Discover Bitterroot National Forest Facebook page with more than 26,000 subscribers. The page received over 1 million views over the fire season. We also partnered with several agencies, such as the Ravalli County Sheriff's office, to share vital



Community members thank firefighters during a Johnson Fire community meeting.



We provided international and community tours to share strategies and educate about the wildfire crisis.

information which expanded notifications of evacuations and closures.

In large part, the community was supportive and receptive of firefighters, their mission, and in understanding the challenges of wild-fire this season. We also continued to keep the community updated on air quality and wildfire smoke - a main community concern. The pace for BNF fire team doubled this

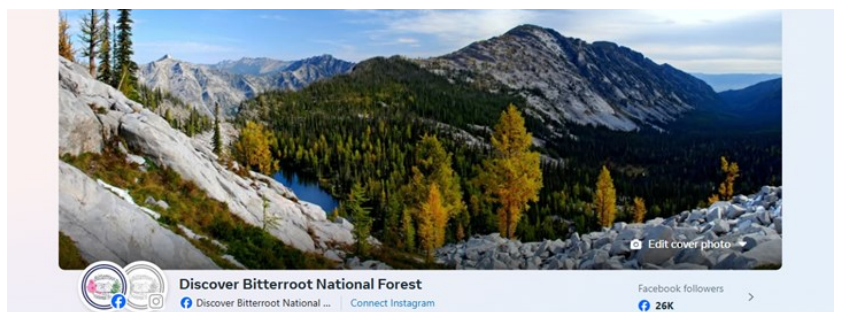


We worked with the media to help tell the story, from fire information to job recruitment.

season - responding to new fires along with managing multiple fires with safety as the highest priority. The 2024 fire season wrapped up with no loss of life (community or firefighter), major accidents, or damage to structures. Immediately on the heels of this active-fire season, firefighters transitioned to Fall prescribed burning as well as planning for Spring burning to help mitigate the effects from wildfire for the next season. All this was done with keeping the community informed. The public information team will continue to work on building community trust and two-way communication.

We are not just workers here, we are a part of this community and we love our forest and valley.

**Discover Bitterroot  
National Forest  
Facebook Page**



Check out our Bitterroot National Forest Facebook page with more than 26,000 followers.



# 2024 Fire Year in Review



## WILDFIRE PREVENTION, EDUCATION, AND MITIGATION



Smokey Bear and friends from the Bitterroot National Forest participated in 32 different events and programs this year around the Bitterroot Valley spreading the wildfire prevention and wildfire preparedness message. These events included school field trips, classroom fire science, community events, youth expos, parades,

Smokey Bear's birthday, and Smokey's reading challenge. Prevention personnel carried out forest patrols centered around wildfire prevention, education, and enforcement. The forest prevention program was involved in conducting wildfire risk home assessments to identify vulnerabilities to homes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), Firewise community assessments, wildfire cause investigation, large fire and prescribed burn support both locally and off forest, and assisting with public information work.



## TRAPPER CREEK JOB CORPS FIRE PROGRAM

The Trapper Creek Fire Program trained 35 students in wildland fire management through 13 two-week assignments conducted across 6 geographic regions. Throughout the 2024 fire season, the program responded to 20 wildfires, burning a total of 61,637 acres.

Trapper Creek also contributed to numerous hazardous fuels reduction projects across 3 geographic regions, totaling 23,341 acres treated through prescribed fire. In addition to fire suppression, Trapper Creek trained 47 students to be Camp Help qualified, serving on 9 camp crews in support of large fires across 3 geographic regions.



## BITTERROOT INTERAGENCY HOTSHOT CREW

This season the Bitterroot Hotshots started critical training April 8<sup>th</sup>, went nationally available May 6<sup>th</sup>, and



were assembled for 179 days concluding their season on October 3rd. They traveled over 15,000 miles across 4 regions completing 7 full 14-day assignments on 16 incidents for a total of 77 days assigned. They helped treat 2,252 acres supporting 11 different prescribed fires, thinned fuels units and cleared trails.



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## STEVENSVILLE RANGER DISTRICT FIRE & FUELS

The Stevensville Ranger District completed 504 acres of Rx fire treatments (130 acres hand piles, 374 acres understory broadcast) and 557 acres of mechanical fuels reduction treatments. The district responded to 26 fires (22 lightning, 4 human caused) for a total burned acreage of 3,290. Crewmembers supported Rx in Regions 1, 4 and 8 and served in numerous overhead and single resource positions on large fires throughout the duration of the 2024 fire season.



## DARBY/SULA RANGER DISTRICT FIRE & FUELS

In 2024 the Darby/Sula Ranger District fully suppressed 38 Initial Attack fires with over 22,000 acres burned including large fires. Fire crewmembers traveled to Florida, Idaho, and Mississippi for fuels re-



duction assignments. They had 3



off forest assignments to the LoLo National Forest, and parts of California, and Oregon. Darby/Sula completed 3,107 acres of understory burning, and 986 acres of pile burning.

## WEST FORK RANGER DISTRICT FIRE & FUELS

The West Fork Ranger District completed 3,031 acres of Rx fire projects (2,364 broadcast understory acres, 667 pile Rx acres). 2,685 acres of fuels reduction treatment was completed (584 acres on private land, 2,101 acres on Forest Service land) West



Fork Ranger District had 54 fires for a total 11,136 acres burned. 12 miles



of mechanical fuel break was completed on the Boulder Peak Fire. Crewmembers from the West Fork spent 49 days off forest supporting Rx within R1 and suppression severity in R3.

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## LARGE FIRES ON THE BITTERROOT



### Daly Fire:

**District:** Darby/Sula Ranger District

**Start Date:** 08/18/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 11,387 acres



### Johnson Fire:

**District:** Darby/Sula Ranger District

**Start Date:** 07/25/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 8,438 acres



### Magruder Ridge Fire:

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 08/19/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 3,777.86 acres





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## LARGE FIRES ON THE BITTERROOT



### Elkhorn Ridge Fire:

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 08/07/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 3,375.19 acres



### Sharrott Creek Fire:

**District:** Stevensville Ranger District

**Start Date:** 08/23/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 3,253 acres



### Railroad Fire:

**District:** Darby/Sula Ranger District

**Start Date:** 07/25/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 1,583 acres



# 2024 Fire Year in Review

## LARGE FIRES ON THE BITTERROOT



### Prospect Fire:

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 08/12/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 2,934 acres



### Wilkerson Fire:

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 09/05/2025

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 511.64 acres



### West Crooked Fire:

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 07/05/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 142 acres





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## LARGE FIRES ON THE BITTERROOT



### **Boulder Peak Fire:**

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 07/30/2024

**Cause:** Lighting

**Total Size:** 136 acres



### **Fales Creek Fire:**

**District:** West Fork Ranger District

**Start Date:** 09/09/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 100 acres



### **Reynolds Lake Fire\***

**Start Date:** 08/22/2024

**Cause:** Lightning

**Total Size:** 2,671 acres

**Salmon Challis Size:** 1,411 acres

**Bitterroot Size:** 1,260 acres

\*The Reynolds Lake Fire started on the Salmon-Challis National Forest but almost half of the acres burned were on the West Fork District of the Bitterroot National Forest.

