



FACT SHEET



United States Department of Agriculture
Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

United States Department of Interior
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Making a Difference Bitterroot National Forest - Montana



No one who lived in the Bitterroot Valley through the summer of 2000 was untouched by the fires. During that fateful summer, people of the Bitterroot Valley saw miles of mountains ablaze, air black with smoke, and homes and possessions consumed in historic wildland fires. Then President Clinton issued a declaration of disaster for the state of Montana.

Due to extended drought conditions and over crowded forest conditions, the Bitterroot Fires of 2000 ran unchecked.

More than 356,000 acres of the Bitterroot National Forest, State managed and private land burned, nearly one third of that with stand-replacing intensity. Seventy homes and 170 other structures were destroyed. Of equal importance is what didn't happen. While 55,000 acres in the wildland-urban interface burned, 124,000 did not. Many of those acres remain choked with unnatural fuel loads. More than 1,700 homes were successfully protected. Well over 10,000 firefighters worked on fires in the Bitterroot Valley that summer. None were killed or seriously injured.

Restoration and recovery of the Bitterroot Valley has been slow but progress is being made. The President's Healthy Forests Initiative is just one tool the national forest is using to expedite hazardous fuel treatment projects. The new procedure provided under NEPA has allowed the Forest to quickly complete the planning to reduce fuel levels on 700 acres by removing dead or dying trees and brush through mechanical means. According to the Acting District Ranger, the Hayes Creek Project took one month to approve compared to nine months, which is the normal time frame.

The treatment area was identified as a priority under a community fire plan. But public involvement did not stop there. The Forest sent letters to stakeholders asking for comments on the project and these comments were incorporated in the final proposed project. This is the exact intent of the President's plan—to restore forest health and reduce the threat of wildland fire to communities and for those very communities to be part of the plan.

Project implementation will begin as soon as funding is secured.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>