

HOLIDAY TREE PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Where can I cut my Christmas tree?

A. In the Buffalo Creek tree cutting area on the South Platte Ranger District of the Pike National Forest. The area is located south of Pine Junction on County Highway 126.

Q. I've been in the Christmas tree cutting area and I see that the Forest Service has been doing a lot of hazardous fuels reduction work. Is this work impacting the Christmas tree cutting area?

A. The trees that have been cut for the hazardous fuels reduction work are not Christmas tree size and shape. Many of the trees that have been left will grow into very nice Christmas trees over the next few years. In addition, by thinning the forest, many new trees will sprout providing a Christmas tree crop for many years to come. Many areas have had fuels reduction projects completed in the past with very little impact to the Christmas tree cutting area, for example the Spring Creek area. However, those parts of the Christmas tree cutting area that have had fuels reduction projects completed in the last year may contain trees, limbs, and branches scattered all over the ground that may be difficult to see in the snow. Christmas tree cutters are advised to use caution when entering in and walking through these areas.

Q. I have seen many trees in the area with dead tops. What is happening to these trees?

A. The trees most likely have Douglas-fir Tussock moth. The Tussock moth is a naturally occurring insect that thins the forest.

Q. If I cut a tree with Tussock moth and bring it home, will the Tussock moth infest the trees in my yard and neighborhood?

A. Tussock moth overwinters as eggs in the trees. In the spring, the eggs may hatch and infest other species of conifers surrounding Douglas-fir trees. In urban settings, blue spruce is attacked. Urban infestations will often be confined to individual trees. We recommend that after the holiday season, you dispose of your tree properly to avoid any potential spread of the Tussock moth. Three good ways to dispose of Christmas trees:

- take it to a community Christmas tree recycling program (those trees will be chipped up, most of the eggs destroyed and any larvae that manage to hatch will have almost no needles to eat),
- take it to a landfill (the eggs will still hatch, but there won't be any food sources around), or
- burn the trees (that will eliminate the bugs and any potential food source).

Q. With the ongoing forest management and the Tussock moth, what kind of trees do you expect will be available in the area?

A. The Buffalo Creek area will have a mix of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees available. However, the size of the trees may be substantially smaller than those that were present in the past.

Q. The Buffalo Creek area has been open for Christmas tree cutting for many years. How long do you anticipate cutting Christmas trees in Buffalo Creek?

A. We anticipate that the number of trees available in future years will be less than it has been in the past. In the future, permits may sell out very quickly.

Q. Do I need a permit to cut a Christmas tree in the Buffalo Creek tree cutting area?

A. Yes, you must have a permit for the Buffalo Creek cutting area.

Q. Where can I buy a permit to cut my Christmas tree in the Buffalo Creek area?

A. Permits may be purchased in person at the South Platte Ranger District office, 19316 Goddard Ranch Court, starting on **Monday, November 2** and continue until all of the permits have sold out. The office is located on the east side of Highway 285 approximately six miles south of Highway C-470. Permits can also be purchased through the mail, but mail-in permit requests must be postmarked by **October 28, 2015**.

Q. When can I buy a permit to cut my Christmas tree?

A. Mail in permit request forms can be downloaded from the Ranger District's webpage starting about **October 16, 2015** and must be postmarked by **October 28, 2015**.

Q. Do you take credit cards for paying mail in requests?

A. No, we can only take checks and money orders for mail in permit requests. Make check or money order payable to **USDA Forest Service**.

Q. Do you take credit cards for paying permit sales in your office?

A. Yes, we can take credit cards for permit sales in the office.

Q. Do I have to purchase a permit for a specific cutting day?

A. Yes, permits are sold for specific days. When purchasing a permit, you must select a specific day to cut your tree. Permits are checked as individuals enter the cutting area. Individuals are only allowed to cut their tree on the day they have purchased their permit for.

Q. What if the day I want to cut my tree is sold out?

A. You will need to choose a different day.

Q. What if I can't cut my tree on the day that I have bought a permit for?

A. Any permit can be used on **weekdays between November 30th and December 4th, and Sunday, December 6th, 2015**.

Q. Are there other restrictions?

A. Yes!

- Only trees that are less than 6 inches across AT GROUND LEVEL and less than 25 feet tall can be cut.
- Cut the tree as close to the ground as possible. Leave stumps no more than 6 inches high.
- The entire tree must be removed from the forest, including all branches and stem wood.
- Permits must be attached and visible on tree as you leave the cutting area.
- Do not cut trees marked with signs, paint or flagging.

Q. Why do I need to remove the entire tree when the Forest Service has left all the limbs and branches from the trees that were cut for the forest management projects?

A. The forest service will have the contractors doing the work pile the limbs and branches. After the limbs and branches have dried out, the forest service will be burning the piles of limbs and branches. Christmas tree cutters will be cutting scattered trees throughout the area where the limbs and branches cannot be piled for later burning. To reduce the fire hazard from the scattered Christmas trees, individuals cutting trees are required to remove the entire tree, including all limbs, branches and stem wood.

Q. What if I want to cut a very big tree?

A. Tree size in the Buffalo Creek area is limited to trees that are less than 6" in diameter at ground level and no more than 25 feet tall. Trees larger than 6" in diameter at ground level and more than 25 feet tall can not be cut in the Buffalo Creek area. **Individuals cutting trees larger than 6" in diameter and/or more than 25 feet tall may be issued a Federal Petty Offence Violation Notice subject to up to 6 months in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine.**

Q. What kind of tree makes the best Christmas tree?

A. Options vary on what tree is best. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ponderosa Pines: Make fine Christmas trees, however their needles are very long and the cones have sharp bristles. Ponderosa Pines have strong branches that do not bend under the weight of heavier decorations.
- Douglas-Firs: Very good, best option due to their soft and silky needles. Douglas-firs have small branches and are best suited for smaller, light weight decorations.
- Lodgepole Pine: Also a fine tree, but hard to find in the Buffalo Creek area.
- Spruces: (Engelmann and Colorado Blue) are prized as beautiful Christmas trees; however, spruces have sharp pointed needles that some people find objectionable. Spruce trees are very difficult to find in the Buffalo Creek area.
- Rocky Mountain Juniper: Juniper trees can be found all over the Buffalo Creek area but they do not make good Christmas trees. They stink really bad when they warm up in your house.

Q. I only have a 2WD vehicle. Is there any place I can go for my tree?

A. Most areas are accessible by 2WD but you may have to hike, snowshoe, or ski in to find the best trees. If the weather is bad, tree cutters with 2WD vehicles may be limited to the main roads.

Q. The Buffalo Creek area has posted parking restrictions. Do I have to park in a designated parking spot?

A. No, Christmas tree cutters with valid permits are allowed to park within one car length to the side of a road in the Christmas tree cutting area.

Q. Are there any new areas open this year?

A. No new areas are open this year, however, the Buffalo Creek area is a very large area with a lot of valleys and hillsides that have many trees to choose from. Tree cutters can find a very large selection of trees by walking a little further off of the road to search for their tree. **Note: Due to ongoing vegetation management activities on the Pike National Forest, some areas in the Buffalo Creek Christmas tree cutting area may not be accessible for Christmas tree cutting.**

Q. What else do I need to know?

A. Dress warmly. Be prepared for changes in weather. **FOREST SERVICE ROADS MAY BE SNOWY AND ICY.** We recommend you carry chains and/or use a 4WD vehicle. High clearance may also be necessary. Have a full tank of gas. Pack out your trash. Do not trespass on private property. Be sure to allow plenty of daylight time to find your tree; it gets dark by 4:30pm as Christmas approaches.

Q. Will Smokey be at the tree cutting area?

A. Smokey plans on being in the tree cutting area whenever possible. However, due to limited staffing, Smokey may not be able to make all the days the area is open.

We are not responsible for permits lost in the mail; no replacement permits will be re-issued.

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If you have further questions, please call the office at (303) 275-5610.