

2022 Bovee Wildfire FAQ's

Fire Restrictions

1. *Why don't you just stay closed because it is so dry out?*

The Forest Service has to meet legal standards in order to close. The District Ranger has determined that we don't meet the legal standard to remain closed, especially as regards the "Dingell Act". Pursuant to the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, 16 U.S.C. §§ 7911-7915 ("Dingell Act"), fire closure orders that prohibit hunting or recreational shooting require public notice and comment and consultation with state fish and wildlife agencies, unless they qualify for the very limited emergency exception. Any fire closure order that includes a prohibition on hunting or recreational shooting must be limited to the smallest area for the least amount of time that is required for public safety, administration, or compliance with applicable laws. In addition, a temporary hunting or recreational shooting closure may not exceed 180 days.

2. *Can you explain your metrics for how you go into fire restrictions?*

We consider a number of factors including: live fuel moistures; energy release component; current and predicted drought; current and predicted weather conditions; availability of resources to fight wildfires; whether the number and size of fires is increasing or decreasing; and others. Every closure is reviewed and approved by law enforcement and attorneys from the Office of General Counsel before it can be implemented.

3. *What are the fire restrictions and what do they restrict?*

Fire restrictions limit where and when the public can have open flames or sparks.

4. *How many fires have been human caused in the last five years? Ten years?*

Between 1965 and July 2022, the Bessey Ranger District (including the Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest) had 219 reported wildfires. Of these, 195 (89 percent) were caused by lightning.

5. *Why is there such a large, restricted area around the fire perimeter?*

To allow fire crews to continue work such as cutting hazard trees and for ease of implementation. It's easier to close specific roads than a fire perimeter that goes through the forest.

General

6. *What caused the fire?*

The fire was human-caused. The specific circumstances are still under investigation.

7. *How was the fire able to jump so far north?*

The fire was running through the crowns of the trees, not staying on the ground. The winds were ferocious. When that happens, sparks and embers can be blown miles ahead of the main fire. In this case, the sparks and embers from the trees blew across the Middle Loup River and Highway 2, then the winds pushed the fire north very quickly through the dry grass.

8. *Will you replant?*

A lot of discussion needs to happen in order to decide if, when, where, and what to replant. Here is what the Forest Service decided in 1964 (before the Plum Fire) and 1965 (after the Plum Fire).

9. *Will you rebuild the fire tower?*

We hope so.

10. *Will the 4H Camp be rebuilt?*

The decision to rebuild lies with the 4H Foundation.

11. *Will this fire encourage the Forest Service to fix up the west entrance?*

Repairing roads is an on-going process and budgets only go so far. The District Ranger has decided to focus on the roads that go to Whitetail Campground. The Nebraska Recreational Trails Program and the Great American Outdoors Act have provided supplemental funding to improve Forest Roads 203 and 224.

Recreation

12. *Did the campgrounds burn?*

No.

13. *How did the fire affect the OHV trails?*

Between the 201 East Fire in May and the Bovee Fire in October, most of the 36 miles of OHV trails have been burned over.

14. *Will this encourage new rules about OHVs?*

Probably not. All vehicles have potential to start fires and Stage 2 and Stage 3 fire restrictions address this possibility.

15. *What is the best fire extinguisher to put on my OHV?*

Any fire extinguisher is better than no fire extinguisher. Work with your local OHV dealer on what would work best for your machine.

Volunteering

16. Is there anything I can do to help?

The Forest Service will keep a list of names of people willing to help and if an opportunity arises we will reach out. To help the 4H Camp, please reach out to the Nebraska State 4H Foundation directly.

17. Can I help plant trees?

See answers to #8 and #16.

Wildlife

18. How will the fire affect the deer population?

In the short term, it is estimated that many of the of the deer that lived within the fire footprint will be displaced and take up temporary refuge in the adjacent hand-planted forest and neighboring grasslands. The carrying capacity of deer on the forest is not being stressed and no mortality from lack of food resources is expected to occur. It is too early to tell what impact the increased hunter concentration on a smaller area will have on deer harvest, but it is expected to be a minimal difference from past seasons.

19. How will the fire affect deer habitat for the rifle season in 2022?

In 2022, it is unlikely that many deer will occupy areas of the Bovee Fire. The fire burned with high intensity at a time when little post-fire green-up is expected to occur, thus there is ~5,000 acres less deer habitat on Bessey during 2022 than in years past.

20. Do you think this will affect the upland game bird populations next year?

Most of the fire burned within the hand-planted forest, which was not optimal upland game bird habitat with the exception of some coveys of bobwhite quail. Birds are capable of flight and likely suffered little direct impacts from the fire other than displacement. Annual plants and forbs will be the first to re-occupy the fire footprint and are beneficial to upland game birds. The burning of trees may actually improve areas of grouse habitat – areas where eastern red cedar encroachment had occurred outside of the hand-planted forest yet within the Bovee Fire footprint.