



FACTSHEET

Crab Lake Prescribed Fire

Anticipated Dates of Burn: Three to four days between September 19 and a season-ending weather event.

Location and Size: The Crab Lake Prescribed Fire includes three ignition units totaling 2,171 acres located approximately 8 miles northwest of Ely, in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) west of Burntside Lake on the LaCroix Ranger District of the Superior National Forest in St. Louis County, MN. Township 63 North, Range 14 West, Sections 10-15, 22, 23, and 24. N47/56.219 W92 05.021.

Purpose: The Forest Service plans to conduct the Crab Lake Prescribed Fire to reduce the risk of wildfires that could threaten people, homes, cabins, camps, businesses and other resources outside of the BWCAW.

A significant wildfire risk resulted from the 1999 massive windstorm that affected nearly 500,000 acres on the Superior National Forest, including approximately 367,000 acres in the BWCAW. The storm caused thousands of acres of trees to be blown-down, creating the potential for large, difficult-to-control wildfires.

The Forest Service has been working to break up continuous areas of blowdown in the Wilderness with a series of strategically-located prescribed fires. As has been demonstrated over the past fifteen years, the use of prescribed fire under favorable conditions will reduce the concentrations of hazardous fuels created by the storm. This will improve public safety by creating conditions that will decrease the rate of fire spread in the event of a wildfire, providing fire fighters time to implement suppression and containment activities as well as evacuations if needed.

Description: The Crab Lake Prescribed Fire consists of three ignition units which were identified as wildland fuels hazards by the BWCAW Fuel Treatments Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision completed in May 2001. All three units were impacted by the 1999 blowdown storm and now contain high concentrations of balsam fir regeneration along with dead, blown-down trees.

Based on monitoring and observed fire behavior, the Forest Service has determined that extreme fire behavior predictions outlined in the original FEIS are still valid for areas of untreated blowdown fuel. A recent example of this behavior was documented during the 2011 Pagami Creek Wildfire and again during an August 2013 wildfire near Knife Lake within the BWCAW. Post-wildfire monitoring and evaluation indicates that treatment of units containing blowdown have successfully reduced intensity and spread rate of wildfires.

The Forest Service will conduct this prescribed fire under conditions specified (prescribed) in the burn plan and guided by the FEIS, a Supplemental Information Report completed in April 2016; and Wilderness Management direction and management objectives stated in the Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. To minimize impacts to wilderness character, prescribed fire use will follow recommendations in the Minimum Requirement and Minimum Tool Determination completed as part of the FEIS analysis and included in the Record of Decision.

The intent of the prescribed fires is to improve public safety by reducing the potential for high-intensity wildland fires to spread from the BWCAW into areas of intermingled ownership containing homes, cabins, resorts and youth camps.

The burn plan identifies potential natural and human-created breaks in fuel that will help to hold the prescribed fire within the planned area. Fire managers will utilize Crab, Little Crab, Lunetta, Hassel, Battle, Sprite, Meat, and Clark Lakes as the primary holding boundaries used to keep fire within the project area.

Creeks, natural wetlands, and portages staffed by firefighting personnel will be used to minimize the likelihood of the fire escaping the planned boundaries. The Foss Lake Fire will also provide a fuel break.

During ignition operations, people in the vicinity of lakes around Crab and Burntside Lakes can expect to see smoke columns, helicopters and planes in the air. Many fire fighters will also be visible on the ground in the area during ignition and several days after the burning is completed. Depending on wind direction, visitors in the BWCAW and Quetico and residents in the area may smell smoke from the prescribed fire.

The completion of this project will help minimize the threat to public and firefighter safety and properties outside of the Wilderness should wildfires start in this area.

Closure Information:

- For public safety, certain canoe travel ways, entry points, hiking trails and campsites will be closed one to two days prior to burning and will remain closed until it is safe for the public to be in the prescribed fire area.
- If the prescribed fire is expected to limit visitor travel before the end of the wilderness quota permit season on October 1st, the Forest Service will notify reserved BWCAW quota permit holders approximately one week prior to the project start date with options to change their entry point.
- The Crab Lake Entry Point (#04) may be closed or have limited and escorted access during prescribed fire operations.
- Portages that will be closed prior to prescribed fire operations include: Crab to Clark Lake, Crab to Saca Lake, Lunetta to Hassel Lake, Cummings to Korb Lake, and Burntside to Crab Lake. (Note: The Cummings to Korb and Burntside to Crab portage closures may be lifted as burning progresses and it is safe to do so (at the discretion of the Burn Boss.)
- All campsites will be closed on Crab, Clark, Glimmer, Meat, Phantom, Boulder, Battle, Hassel, Saca, Lunetta, and Little Crab Lakes
- Forest Service personnel will be stationed at the Van Vac Burntside boat access, the Crab Lake portage, Crab, Lunetta, Little Crab and Battle Lakes to provide public information and to re-open the travel routes upon completion of prescribed fire operations, or as soon as it is safe.

Since heavy blowdown and conifer/brush regeneration make foot travel unsafe for ignition by ground firefighters, helicopters equipped with ignition devices will be used to conduct ignition from the air. Fire fighter Holding Crews using hand tools, fire hose, portable pumps, boats and canoes will be working around the perimeter of the prescribed burn units. Water delivery aircraft will also be on standby during the burn to support holding operations.



**Forest Service
Superior National Forest**

September 2016