



FACTSHEET

Prairie Portage Prescribed Fire—Basswood Units

Anticipated Dates of Burn: Three to four days between September 15 and weather that ends the fire season.

Location and Size: This fact sheet covers two ignition units totaling 2,622 acres located approximately 18 miles northeast of Ely, adjacent to Prairie Portage, along the Canadian Border on the Kawishiwi Ranger District of the Superior National Forest in Lake County, MN. The Prairie Plan also includes the Trident and Three Eagle Ignition Units, which will be covered in a separate factsheet.

- **UNIT 342B- Basswood**, Location: between Newfound, Sucker, Basswood, and Found Lakes. Legal Location: T.64N R.9W Sections 1, 2, 11, & 12; Size: Total Acres –1402 (FS 1331 acres/ State 71 acres). Burnable Acres - **891** acres
- **UNIT 346- Basswood**, Location: between Basswood and Manomin Lakes. Legal Location: T.64N R.9W Sections 2, 3 and T.65N R.9W Sections 34, 35; Size: Total Acres – 1220 (FS 1220 acres); Burnable Acres – **806** acres

Purpose: Superior National Forest managers plan to conduct the Prairie Portage Prescribed Burn within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) to reduce the risk of wildfires that could threaten people, homes, cabins, youth camps, businesses and other resources outside of the Wilderness and across the international boundary into Canada.

An extreme 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 1999 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 Prairie Portage Prescribed Burn consists of four 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 four 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, Forest managers have determined that 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.

Managers will conduct this prescribed burn under conditions specified 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, other improvements and areas across the international border into Canada.

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 Bayley and Inlet Bays of Basswood Lake, Prairie Portage and the Moose Chain Lakes as the primary holding boundaries used to keep fire within the project area. Creeks, wetlands, and portages, constructed "fire lines", and removing balsam fir and other fuels from within 50 feet of the portage will keep fire within the planned area.

During ignition operations, people in the vicinity of Moose, Basswood, Knife, Birch, and Ensign Lakes and lakes in the Quetico Provincial Park near Prairie Portage 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 burn is completed. Depending on wind direction, visitors in the BWCAW and Quetico may smell smoke from the burn.

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 burn is expected to limit visitor travel before the end of the wilderness quota permit season – (October 1) the USFS will notify reserved BWCAW quota permit holders prior to the project start date with options to change their entry point.
- Portages to be temporary closed include: Newfound Lake to Found Lake; Basswood Lake to Manomin Lake Basswood and restricting access across Prairie Portage (limit access to certain times, escorted crossings, etc.).
- Campsites temporary closed include: Found Lake Campsite #1; Newfound Lake Campsites # 4, 6, 9; Sucker Lake Campsites 1, & 8; Basswood Campsites #126, 127, 128 & 129. A closure map will be posted during the burn.
- USFS personnel will be posted at the Moose Lake entry point and on Basswood Lake and the Moose Chain to provide public information and to re-open the travels routes upon completion of burn operations when it is safe.
- Fire fighter Holding Crews using hand tools, fire hose, portable pumps, boats and canoes will be working directly on the prescribed fire ignition units.
- Water delivery aircraft will also be on standby during the burn to support holding operations.
- Since heavy blowdown and conifer/brush regeneration makes foot travel unsafe for ignition by ground firefighters, helicopters equipped with ignition devices will be used to conduct ignition from the air.

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**Forest Service
Superior National Forest**