

FIRE RESTRICTIONS AND EMERGENCY CLOSURE PLAN

SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST

U.S. FOREST SERVICE, REGION 5

2015

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JUNE 11, 2015

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FIRE RESTRICTION AND EMERGENCY CLOSURE PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Each year California faces the threat of wildland fire on forests and grasslands. During especially hot and dry years, the situation is potentially disastrous. Firefighting techniques have improved greatly during the past 50 years, but prevention is still our best defense against resource destruction and loss of life caused by wildland fires. The usual period of high fire danger on the Sierra National Forest is May through October. Exact dates vary from year to year, depending upon weather conditions. This period is referred to as "Peak" fire season.

The Forest Service has imposed some form of public fire restrictions and/or closures in California since prior to World War II. Fire Management views these restrictions as an important part of our Fire Prevention program.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To protect National Forest lands and resources from unnecessary loss by fire and protect the public when conditions exist that would expose the forest user to potential injury or harm over and above what is reasonable to expect in a forest environment.
- Coordinate with neighboring forests and other Wildland Fire Protection Agencies to restrict use when fire danger reaches a predetermined level for the purpose of reducing the potential for loss resulting from human caused fires.

III. SUMMARY OF FIRE RESTRICTIONS AND EMERGENCY CLOSURE PLAN

This plan outlines the action to be taken on the Sierra National Forest for restricted use and closure when weather conditions result in hazardous forest fire conditions. The plan is designed to permit maximum possible public use while minimizing the risk of potential loss of valuable resources by wildfire and providing for public safety.

Activation of Fire Restrictions or Emergency Closure comes under authority of 36 CFR 261.50. Forest Supervisors/Regional Foresters have the authority to issue Fire Restrictions and/or Closures.

Due to geographic, social, and economic relationships unique to Southern California, the Forest Supervisors on the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forest are authorized to issue emergency closure orders. All

other Pacific Southwest Region Forest closures are issued by the Regional Forester.

IV. TYPES OF FIRE RESTRICTIONS

- A. **Regional Annual Fire Restrictions** are imposed by Regional Order 91-1. Some of these restrictions are in effect year-round and some remain in effect from May 1 and continue until the end of peak fire season. A summary of the restrictions/prohibitions under this order are as follows:

FROM MAY 1 TO THE END OF PEAK FIRE SEASON:

1. Campfire permits are required for fires built outside developed recreation sites. The wilderness permit issued to visitors serves as a one-time campfire permit.
2. Smoking outside of vehicles, residences and other developed sites is permissible only while stopped in an area cleared of all flammable materials 3 feet around. Smoking while hiking, riding, horseback riding, or while driving an open vehicle is prohibited.
3. Welding on the forest requires a permit.

IN EFFECT YEAR ROUND:

4. All motorized equipment other than automobiles must have approved spark arresters in operating condition while in use on the forest.
5. Blasting on the forest requires a permit.
6. Possessing, discharging or using any kind of firework or other pyrotechnic device is prohibited.

- B. **Fire Restrictions** are imposed by a Forest Order. These Restrictions, which are in addition to the above, are imposed when the implementation criterion is met and adjacent forests, districts and cooperators have been consulted. The following is a summary of the general prohibitions that will go into effect when a Forest Order is signed and issued:

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire, charcoal, or stove fire, except a portable stove using gas, jellied petroleum, or pressurized liquid fuel, outside of designated sites. 36 CFR 261.52(a) **CAMPFIRE PERMITS ARE INVALID. Campfires are allowed in designated sites ONLY.**
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or at a developed recreation site. 36 CFR 261.52(d)

3. Operating an internal combustion engine except on a road, designated trail or by permit. 36 CFR 261.52(h) Chainsaw use to cut firewood will be regulated by the wood cutting permit.
4. Using or causing to be used any explosives, except by Forest Service permit. 36 CFR 261.52(b)
5. Welding, or operating acetylene or other torch with open flame, except by Forest Service permit. 36 CFR 261.52(i)

The Sierra National Forest will administer the use of chainsaws (wood cutting) utilizing the adjective ratings for specified Fire Danger Rating Areas and fuel wood permit. When the adjective rating within any fire danger rating area reaches very high or extreme, chainsaw use will be prohibited in that area. The section in the restriction order that refers to internal combustion engines would not apply to people with a valid wood permit being used during the appropriate adjective level.

REVISION OF THE FOREST FIRE RESTRICTION ORDER- the Forest Fire Restriction Order will remain in effect for at least 48 hours following abatement of the conditions which required the restriction action. A revision of the Forest Order will be issued to cancel the restriction order.

C. **Emergency Fire Closure** is imposed by a special order. This is a temporary order prohibiting entry to specific areas of the National Forest due to severe fire hazard and/or burning conditions. Closure is a measure that will be used as a last resort when there is no other option available to protect forest resources and provide for public safety. Closure orders prohibit persons from going into or being within the area as defined within the Closure Order.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e) only the following persons are exempt from closure orders:

1. Persons with a permit authorizing entry into the closed area.
2. Owners or lessees of land in the closed area.
3. Residents in the closed area.
4. Any Federal, State or local officer in the performance of official duty.
5. Persons engaged in a business trade or occupation in the closed area.

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V. IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

A. Hazard Areas

Fire Restrictions will be applied to different parts of the Sierra National Forest at different times recognizing that lower elevations may be hotter and drier than the higher elevations. Weather conditions, fuel types (grass, brush, timber), fuel density (heavy to light), and terrain determine the hazard classifications. The criteria found in Table 1 were used in determining hazard area ratings.

The Sierra is divided into three Fire Hazard Areas; High, Moderate and Low. Fire Hazard Areas sometimes include more than one fire danger rating area. These boundaries are readily identified on the ground by fire danger rating area signs posted along all main roads within the Forest.

The High Hazard Area generally includes the area from the National Forest boundary to 4,000 feet. This Hazard area is comprised of fire danger rating Areas 528 and 529.

The Moderate Hazard Area generally includes the area of the Forest between 4,000 feet and 6,000 feet. This Hazard area is the same as fire danger rating Area 532.

The Low Hazard area generally includes the area of the Forest from 6,000 feet up to the Wilderness Boundary. This Hazard area is the same as fire danger rating Area 533.

Additional fire restrictions in Wilderness Areas are described in the Forest Wilderness Plan. Forest Order 15-02-1 (Appendix I), discusses campfire restrictions in Wilderness Areas above 10,000 feet.

District Rangers have the authority to designate in their District Plans fire safe areas within each of the Hazard Areas. These designated areas might include areas where the risk has been satisfactorily offset such as: access or stream corridors, large landings or cleared areas, etc. These areas need to be signed and, if possible, identified on the map.

B. Criteria for Implementation

Table 2 describes the criteria that will be used to determine if and when Fire Restrictions by Forest Order will be implemented. The following steps will be taken when initiating Fire Restrictions or Closures:

1. Fire Restrictions

- a. Adjacent Forests and cooperating agencies will be notified of conditions, and coordination between Fire Management Staff(s) and the Forest Supervisor(s)/Agency leads will be established.
- b. Notification will be made to the local Patrol Captain or designee for all fire restrictions or emergency closures proposed. The Patrol Captain or designee will coordinate with the Office of General Council for document review and concurrence. OGC will act as a clearinghouse, authorizing the implementation of restrictions.
- c. After receiving authorization, a Forest Order will be issued by the Forest Supervisor.

2. Emergency Closure

- a. A special order pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(a) & (b) will be prepared for the Regional Forester's signature.
- b. A map will be prepared (1/4" = mile) delineating the area recommended for closure.
- c. A single page summary of conditions will be prepared and sent to the Regional Fire and Aviation Management Staff. After the Regional Forester's approval is obtained, F&AM will notify the Forest Supervisor.
- d. Upon issuance of the order, the Forest Supervisor will implement the Forest Emergency Closure Plan.

C. **Cancellation**

1. Criteria

Fire restrictions and emergency closures will remain in effect for at least 48 hours following the abatement of the conditions which required the restriction or closure action or until:

- a. Red Flag Wind Warnings are cancelled
- b. Burning conditions moderate
- c. Adequate resources are again available for initial attack.

2. Procedures

- a. Cancellation of fire restrictions will be done by the Forest Supervisor issuing an order repealing the temporary restrictions.
- b. Cancellation of an emergency closure will be done by a special order. The Forest Supervisor will prepare an order repealing the emergency closure. After Regional Fire Management has been notified, they will obtain the Regional Forester's approval and notify the Forest Supervisor.

VI. **INFORMATION COORDINATION**

When Fire Restriction or Emergency Closure is contemplated, Public Affairs Officers from the involved Forests will coordinate announcements and press releases.

Prior to the implementation of Fire Restriction or Closure, there should be a 5-day period of intensive public notification effort and an effort to internally notify employees and make them aware. Elements to be included in this notification/awareness process include:

A. News Media

1. Local
Newspaper; daily and weekly
Radio; AM and FM
Television
Sequoia and Stanislaus PAO's

2. Los Angeles Area
Wire Services

3. San Francisco Bay Area
Wire Services
RO, Press Officer

B. Key Individuals, Organizations and Cooperators

Key individuals and organizations, as listed on the Forest and Ranger Key Lists, will be contacted and their support solicited. Cooperators will be notified. These contacts will include:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Responsibility</u>
Timber Sale Purchasers	District Rangers
Contractors and Permittees	District Rangers
Power and Utility Companies	SO - Lands
California Dept. of Forestry	SO – Fire (Dispatch)
Corps of Engineers	District Ranger – High Sierra RD
CALTRANS	District Rangers
California Highway Patrol	District Rangers
County Sheriffs	SO – Fire
California Dept. of Fish & Game	SO – Range
National Park Service	SO – Fire
County Road Department	SO – Fire

Local stores, private resorts, Chambers of Commerce, Organizational Camps and Campground Concessionaires will be contacted by the District Ranger.

The Regional Aviation and Fire Management Director, the South Zone Dispatcher, the Office of Information Director and Forest personnel will be notified by the Forest Fire Management Officer.

C. Signing

District Rangers are responsible for the development and implementation of effective sign plans for fire restrictions and closures. Signs will be posted in locations according to District Implementation Plans. Various types of signs will be utilized to adequately publicize the restrictions and provide legal recourse in cases of violation. These types are:

- “No Smoking” reminders
- “No Open Fires” reminders
- “No Off-Road Vehicle Travel” reminders
- Special signs indicating sources of information about the closure
- Special signs advising public of road closures
- Large special signs for primary points of entry with restricted use information.

D. Handouts and Maps

Handouts describing fire restrictions and/or prohibitions as well as maps showing the fire hazard area(s) where restrictions apply will be available for public distribution. These items along with the press release information will be utilized for internally informing employees.

Bi-lingual handout materials will be produced, as needed, to provide a means of communicating this important prevention message to specific user groups.

E. Websites

Forest websites should be posted with updated information on fire restrictions.

VII. COORDINATION PROCEDURES

A. SO Fire Management is responsible for:

1. Determination of trends, predictions, and current status based on implementation criteria.
2. Keeping Ranger Districts and on-Forest units advised.
3. Advising Forest PAO of all proposed actions.
4. Preparation of recommendations to Forest Supervisor for activation of Forest Fire Restrictions/Closure, or special needs to coordinate with other agencies or Forests.

5. Preparation of recommendations to Forest Supervisor for repealing of Forest Fire Restrictions/Closure, or special needs to coordinate with other agencies or Forests.

B. SO Public Affairs are responsible for:

1. Coordination with adjoining Forests, counterparts in cooperating agencies, and notification of public through established procedures in Zone of Influence.
2. Coordination and dissemination of information to the news media regarding activation or repealing of applicable restrictive measures or closures.
3. Informing Interagency Information Liaison Committee of pending actions, and determining effects of proposed actions on other agencies.
4. Informing SO Fire Management of effects on other agencies and on procedures taken to inform the public.

C. Ranger Districts are responsible for:

1. Keeping Forest Supervisor informed of special needs or requirements, especially those outside of or beyond the District's ability to resolve.
2. Notifying Contractors and Permittees of Implementation. (Emergency fire contract provisions for such activities as timber sales, public works, and service contracts shall govern those projects.) If the emergency measures are inadequate to meet the stated objectives of this plan, or are unrecognized in the contract, then the proper action must be initiated through contracting methods; i.e., change orders prepared and negotiated.
3. Curtailing Forest Service activities. Where special project plans containing emergency measures provisions for Forest Service project activities exist, the project will be controlled by those provisions. Where no special provisions exist, Forest Service project work activities will be subject to the same restrictive measures as contract/permit governed activities in the same vicinity and work environment. In other words, if the timber sale contractor is shut down, then Forest Service crews will be similarly restricted.

DEFINITIONS

FIRES

- a. Campfire – a fire not within any building, mobile home, or living accommodation mounted on a motor vehicle, which is used for cooking, personal warmth, lighting, ceremonial or aesthetic purposes.
- b. Charcoal fire – any fire which the primary fuel is charcoal and can be contained within a barbecue, hibachi, or other container or fire pit.
- c. Portable stoves – any stove using gas, jellied petroleum or pressurized liquid fuel.

DESIGNATED SITE – Includes developed campground, picnic area, and any location indicated by sign or marker showing approved fire use.

ROAD – General term denoting a way for purpose of travel by vehicles a minimum of 8 feet width, drivable in a two-wheel drive where exhaust systems will not touch any vegetation, included in Forest-developed road system plan.

FOREST DEVELOPMENT TRAIL – As defined in 36 CFR 212.1 (FSM 1023.4) those trails wholly or partially within, or adjacent to and serving, the National Forests and other areas administered by the Forest Service that have been included in the Forest Development Transportation Plan or Off-Highway vehicle Plan.

TABLE 1

CRITERIA FOR HAZARD AREA DETERMINATION

	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
1. Predicted rate-of-spread at HIGH	3 ch/hr	5-8 ch/hr	10 ch/hr
2. Spotfire potential - Flame length	2 ft	3-6 ft	8 ft
3. Flammable 1-hour timelag ground fuels % of area	20%	30-40%	60%
4. Continuous fuel beds without barriers	200 ac	400-800 ac	1000 ac
5. Resistance to control	L	M	H, VH, E
6. Firefighter access	Good	Fair/Poor	Arduous
7. Initial attack hour control zone	60 min	30 min	15 min
8. Escape routes for public	Good	Fair	Poor
9. First run damage potential	50 ac	100-300 ac	500 ac

TABLE 2

CRITERIA FOR FIRE RESTRICTION IMPLEMENTATION

HIGH HAZARD AREA (FDR Areas 528/529)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:** At or above these levels for 3 consecutive days with predicted stable or upward trend
Burning Index: **128**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **78**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <80%; Manzanita <100%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <10%
- An upward trend of human-caused fires within the Hazard Area, in particular abandoned and/or escaped campfires.

MODERATE HAZARD AREA (FDR Area 532)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:** At or above these levels for 3 consecutive days with predicted stable or upward trend
Burning Index: **68**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **71**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <80%; Manzanita <100%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <15%
- An upward trend of human-caused fires within the Hazard Area, in particular abandoned and/or escaped campfires.

LOW HAZARD AREA (FDR Areas 533)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:** At or above these levels for 3 consecutive days with predicted stable or upward trend
Burning Index: **37**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **42**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <80%; Manzanita <100%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <15%
- An upward trend of human-caused fires within the Hazard Area, in particular abandoned and/or escaped campfires.

CRITERIA FOR EMERGENCY FIRE CLOSURE RECOMMENDATION

HIGH HAZARD AREA (FDR Areas 528/529)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:**
Burning Index: **143**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **98**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <60%; Manzanita <80%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <10%

MODERATE HAZARD AREA (FDR Area 532)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:**
Burning Index: **77**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **80**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <60%; Manzanita <80%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <10%

LOW HAZARD AREA (FDR Areas 533)

Any combination of two or more of the following:

- **Fire Danger Indices:**
Burning Index: **42**
Energy Release Component (ERC): **49**
- **Measured Live Fuel Moistures:**
Brush Types- Chamise <60%; Manzanita <80%
Timber Types- 1000-hour fuels <10%

****Additional conditions may warrant the need for recommendation of Emergency Fire Closure beyond these; i.e. on-going large fire or high wind event.**

Appendix 1
ORDER NO. 15-15-06
SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST

OCCUPANCY and USE RESTRICTIONS
JOHN MUIR, ANSEL ADAMS AND DINKEY LAKES WILDERNESS AREAS

Pursuant to 36 CFR 251.50(a) and (b) and to protect natural resources the following acts are prohibited within the boundaries of the John Muir, Ansel Adams and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses; in the Sierra National Forest:

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using any fire, campfire, or stove fire above 10,000 feet in the elevation north of the boundary, and above 10,400 feet south of that boundary as shown on the attached maps, Exhibits A1 through A3. Use of portable stoves using gas, jellied petroleum or liquid fuel is exempt from this order. 36 CFR 261.52(a).
2. Camping within 100 feet of any water source. If steep or rocky terrain does not permit camping 100 feet from any water source, camping is permitted from 50 to 100 feet of the water source. 36 CFR 261.58(e).
3. Possessing or storing any food or refuse unless stored in a manner designed to keep bears from gaining access to the feed or refuse. 36 CFR 261.58 (cc)

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50 (e), the following persons are exempt from this order:

1. Persons with a Forest Service permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission.
2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an official duty.

These prohibitions are in addition to the general prohibitions in 36 CFR Part 261, Subpart A.

Done at Clovis, California, this 31st day of May, 2002.

This order is in effect from May 31, 2002 through December 31, 2006.

/s/ _____
DEAN A. GOULD
Forest Supervisor
Sierra National Forest

Violation of these prohibitions are punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than 6 months, or both. 16 USC 551 and 18 USC 3559 and 18 USC 3571.

SAMPLE FOREST ORDER

ORDER NUMBER 15-15-06

Temporary Fire Restrictions
Sierra National Forest

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(a) and (b), and because of the high fire danger, the following acts are prohibited within the Moderate Fire Hazard area of the Sierra National Forest. The Moderate Fire Hazard area is shown on Exhibit A. This Order is effective from June 29, 2015, through the end of the official fire season.

1. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire, charcoal fire, or stove fire, except in the designated recreation sites listed in Exhibit B.
36 CFR 261.52(a)
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or within the designated recreation sites listed in Exhibit B. 36 CFR 261.52(d)
3. Operating an internal combustion engine, except on a National Forest System road or trail. 36 CFR 261.52(h)
4. Welding, or operating an acetylene or other torch with an open flame.
36 CFR 261.52(i).
5. Using an explosive. 36 CFR 261.52(b)

Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this order:

1. Persons with a permit from the Forest Service specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission. Persons with a valid California Campfire Permit are not exempt from the prohibitions listed above. However, persons with a valid California Campfire Permit are not prohibited from using portable stoves or lanterns using gas, jellied petroleum, or pressurized liquid fuel.
2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.
3. Persons with a Special Use Permit from the Forest Service for a recreation residence within the Moderate Fire Hazard area may use a campfire or stove fire at their recreation residence.

These prohibitions are in addition to the general prohibitions in 36 CFR Part 261, Subpart A.

Done at Clovis, California, this 29th day of June, 2015.

DEAN A. GOULD
Forest Supervisor
Sierra National Forest

A violation of these prohibitions is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000.00 for an individual or \$10,000.00 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than six months, or both. 16 USC 551 and 18 USC 3559, 3571, and 3581.

FOREST ORDER 15-15-06
 Sierra National Forest
 Exhibit B – Designated Recreation Sites

<u>BASS LAKE RANGER DISTRICT</u>		
Big Sandy Campground	Gaggs Campground	Recreation Point Group CG
Bowler Campground	Granite Creek Campground	Rock Creek Campground
Chilkoot Campground	Greys Mountain Campground	Soda Springs Campground
Clover Meadow	Jerseydale Campground	Soquel Campground
Crane Valley Campground	Kelty Meadow Campground	Summerdale Campground
Dirt Flat Campground	Little Jackass Campground	Sweetwater Campground
Dry Gulch Campground	Lone Sequoia	Texas Flat Campground
The Falls	Lower Chiquito Campground	Upper Chiquito Campground
Fish Creek Campground	Mammoth Pool Campground	Whiskers
Forks Campground	Nelder Grove Campground	Whisky Falls Campground
Fresno Dome Campground	Placer Campground	Willow Cove Day Use

<u>HIGH SIERRA RANGER DISTRICT</u>		
Badger Flat Campground	Dorabelle Campground	Portal Forebay Campground
Badger Flat Group CG	Gigantea Campground	Rancheria Campground
Billy Creek Lower CG	Gravel Flat Campground	Sample Meadow CG
Billy Creek Upper CG	Jackass Meadow Campground	Sawmill Flat Campground
Black Rock Campground	Kinnikinnick Campground	Swanson Meadow CG
Bolsillo Campground	Kirch Flat Campground	Trapper Springs Campground
Bretz Mill Campground	Kirch Flat Group CG	Upper Kings Group CG
Buck Meadow CG	Lilypad Campground	Vermillion Campground
Catavee Campground	Marmot Rock Campground	Voyager Rock Campground
College Campground	Midger Creek Group C.G	Ward Lake Campground
Deer Creek Campground	Mono Creek Campground	West Kasier Campground
Dinkey Creek Campground	Mono Hotsprings Campground	Haslett Basin Traditional Use Area

EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATION TO FOREST SUPERVISOR

MEMORANDUM

To: Forest Supervisor

cc: Law Enforcement

From: Resource Protection

Date: 6/29/15

Subject: Forest Order – Fire Restrictions

Criteria for activation of prohibitions through Forest Orders are based on National Fire Danger Rating System indices and fuel moisture conditions. Current conditions reflect a range of Burning Indices from 37 to 145, a thousand hour fuel moisture of less than 14%, Live Fuel Moistures of less than 100%, and a predicted stable weather pattern and drying trend. Per the current Sierra National Forest Fire Restriction and Emergency Closure Plan, these conditions meet the criteria for entry into restrictions.

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act. This action falls within the category identified in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(1) – prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety – and does not require documentation in a decision memo, decision notice, or record of decision. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this temporary closure. Implementation of the decision may begin immediately.

VAN ARROYO
Fire Management Officer

Concurrence of Forest Supervisor: _____ Date: _____