



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Who Fixes the Fence?

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest



Welcome Neighbor

With increasing numbers of people seeking the slower pace of rural life and the solitude of wildlands, more homes are being built adjacent to National Forest System Lands. As with any new neighborhood, there are adjustments and transitions to be made. This brochure is designed to help prospective and new landowners: learn about the management of the nearby National Forest and ease that transition.

National Forest belong to “all the people” and are managed with the idea of the “greatest good for the greatest number, in the long run.” This means that the Forest Service has been charged to care for National Forests in a way which benefits all the people of the United States, not just those who live nearby

The following information highlights some for the most commonly asked questions and problems that arise.

Wildfire Strikes Home

To more and more Americans, the dream of a home at the edge of the forest, screened by a thick stand of pines, is becoming a reality. This idyllic setting, however, can pose a serious wildland fire risk; threatening life, property, and natural resources. Wildfire can rapidly exceed suppression capabilities and quite literally “strike home.”

As a private landowner, you can take steps to fireproof your property and protect your investment.

Reduce fuels

- ◆ Remove thick vegetation from around your house and buildings – at least 30’ and in some areas, up to 100’
- ◆ To lessen the impact of “crown fires,” remove the limbs of trees close to buildings – about 15 feet from the ground
- ◆ Trees should not touch the roofs of buildings. Keep dead leaves, limbs, and needles off roofs and out of gutters. Wood shake roofs, though attractive, are extremely flammable. Fire resistant fiberglass or metal is a better choice.
- ◆ Flammables such as wood piles and garbage should be kept away from buildings

Provide a buffer zone

- ◆ A well-watered green lawn will provide an oasis of protection. A zone of green of 30 to 100 feet around your house is recommended. If this is not possible, keep vegetation cut short.
- ◆ Make sure that you have an adequate water supply such as a sprinkler system or a pond with a pump.

Think before you act

- ◆ Burn barrels are illegal. Garbage should be hauled to a container site or landfill.
- ◆ Open burning (leaves, ditches, ect.) requires a permit from the Local Fire Department.
- ◆ Use spark arrestors on chain saws and other equipment.

Be prepared – Things to think about before a fire occurs:

- ◆ Can a fire truck get in your driveway? Is it well marked with your name and fire lane number?

- ◆ If you have a bridge on your property, can it handle the weight of a heavy fire engine?
- ◆ Do you have an escape plan?
- ◆ Who will you contact in the event of a fire? An emergency phone number list will save time. Have a legal description of how to reach your property on file or ready to give.
- ◆ Remember to contact utility companies – downed utilities lines can totally block an escape route.
- ◆ Forest roads are rarely maintained for “user comfort” because it is not within the Forest Service’s management objective or fiscal ability to do so. The Forest Service grades roads to meet land use objectives and typically Forest roads are not graded every year. Forest roads are often bumpy, dusty and not designed or maintained for residential use.

How to get to your home in the hills

This is a question that needs to be addressed early on. Congress has directed the Forest Service to grant access across forest lands only when all of the following conditions are met.

- ◆ Applicant currently does not have access to the private property;
- ◆ Applicant cannot gain access across non-federal land; and
- ◆ Applicant cannot exercise existing rights of access across non-federal land.

Generally, if these conditions are met, a special use permit granting access may be considered.

If you plan to use an existing National Forest roads to access your private land, keep in mind that forest roads are maintained for recreational, not residential access and may be graded only once every year of two. Also, very few forest roads are plowed in the winter and some may be subject to seasonal closures.

Who’s responsible for the fence

The forest boundary is usually not fenced, but may be marked with yellow or red boundary signs. These markers are placed directly over the surveyed boundary and read “National Forest Beyond this Sign.” If the boundary of your land has not been identified, it is advisable to have the boundary surveyed and marked by a licensed land surveyor. Where private lands have a common boundary with Nation Forest System Lands, the landowner may cooperate with the Forest Service in a survey of this boundary. This will assure that the boundary is accurately located and marked and prevent the cost of relocating a fence or building.

Landowners are responsible for keeping their grazing stock off the National Forest (unless they have the appropriate permits) and keeping any unwanted livestock off their property. The cost of constructing and maintaining private property fences is incurred by the private landowner.

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Northern Region



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What's that pretty purple flower

In Southwestern Montana, spotted knapweed is one of the greatest threats to natural ecosystems, despite the pretty purple flowers that appear in midsummer. This plant, native to Siberia, has no natural predators and is unpalatable to wildlife and livestock. If unchecked, spotted knapweed can completely take over, destroying valuable rangeland and wildlife habitat, and lowering property values.

Early detection and treatment are essential to controlling noxious weeds. To prevent the spread of spotted knapweed, along with other weeds like leafy spurge, Canada thistle, houndstongue, field scabious, and dalmation toad-flax, the Madison Ranger District actively treats approximately 1,000 acres annually.

To protect your investment, we recommend that you contact the Madison County Weed Control District at (406) 843-5594. They will assist you in setting up a weed control strategy. Additionally, if you identify a noxious weed on adjacent National Forest lands, please notify the Madison Ranger District immediately.

When do you need a permit

Removal of any resource such as landscape rocks, trees, firewood, post and poles, etc., requires a permit. These permits can be obtained at your local Forest Service office and will direct you to the appropriate area for such removal. Some permits have a nominal fee.

Removal of historic and cultural resources is prohibited by law.

Developing or installing roads, water and phone lines, etc., across or on forest lands also requires a permit. Before issuing this type of permit, the Forest Service must (by law) evaluate the cultural and environmental factors that will be affected. Other considerations in the permit issuance are:

- ◆ Is this in the best interest of the public?
- ◆ Is private land available for use?
- ◆ Is this a fair and reasonable use of the forest?
- ◆ A fee is charged for these permits, and they will contain terms and conditions needed to protect the forest.

When critters become pests

A benefit of living near a forest is the opportunity to view wildlife, often from your front porch. This can become a problem when the animals become pests and/or pets. It is detrimental to the animal and can be hazardous and destructive to the landowner. Animals should eat only what they were designed to digest – Twinkies, popcorn, and your garbage are not the food groups that benefit them the most. Unfortunately, they seem to like the easily accessible “junk food” and some even revert to panhandling instead of foraging for their own food. To prevent conflicts with the forest critters:

NEVER feed them. They can become dependent very quickly and tend to return to the same spot to be fed again. Remember – they are WILD life. And when an animal becomes a problem, it usually means the end of that animal.

KEEP the area around your home “food-free.” Dog and cat food left out will attract skunks, raccoons, and other scavengers. Haul your garbage frequently and keep it contained. Bears are very adept at opening garbage lids and scattering debris. Bear proof trash containers are a worthwhile investment



The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is the agency responsible for wildlife. If you have wildlife problems, contact your local warden or the FWP's Bozeman office at (406) 994-5700.

The changing look of the land

Forest ecosystems are not static landscapes. In addition to natural processes such as wildfire and ecological succession, the Forest Service uses a variety of tools to manage vegetation. These include prescribed burning, grazing, and timber management, done in such a manner to ensure that future generations have the same opportunities to use and enjoy Forest lands. Also, because the Forest is managed for “multiple uses”, there could be other factors like recreational access, land exchanges, and commodity extraction that will influence the view. This means that the scene outside your picture window may change, over time, due to both natural and management factors.

If you have questions

Please stop by, or call your local Forest Service office whenever you have questions. If you wish to meet with the District Ranger or a particular specialist, we suggest calling to make an appointment.

Other agencies

Madison and Beaverhead Counties have a checkerboard of public lands. The issues addressed in this brochure pertain to lands administered directly by the US Forest Service. However, many of the issues also relate to public lands administered by the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). For information pertaining to these public lands, please contact:

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Headquarters and

Dillon Ranger District

420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
(406) 683-3900

Madison Ranger District

5 Forest Service Road, Emmis, MT 59729
(406) 682-4253

Wisdom Ranger District

PO Box 238, Wisdom, MT 59761
(406) 689-3243

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Dillon Resource Area
1005 Selway Dr.
Dillon, MT 59725 (406) 683-2337

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

860 N. Montana
Dillon, MT 59725 (406) 683-6305

Offices are open weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.