Forest Service News Release

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Upcoming Opportunity to Implement the North Hegman Prescribed Fire north of Ely, partially in the BWCAW

Duluth, Minn., May 9, 2024 — The Superior National Forest will continue to implement prescribed fire units that began the past several weeks as conditions allow. Prescribed burning often has a narrow window of opportunity, when the vegetation conditions, temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed are within specific prescriptions based on the approved burn plan.

The Superior NF has some prescribed fire units planned just north of Ely, MN and adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). One of these is North Hegman, a 208 acre unit that is located half inside the BWCAW near the Hegman Lake BWCAW Entry Point #77. Fire managers are anticipating that the window of opportunity to implement North Hegman could happen within the next 3 to 14 days beginning as early as the evening of May 11, 2024. “The amount of rain as well as when and where it falls in the area over the next few days is the biggest determining factor of when we can implement this prescribed fire” according to Jeb Backe, West Zone Fire Management Officer.

Safety, Closures, and Smoke

The Hegman Lake Entry Point #77, portage trail, and campsites might be closed during and following the prescribed fire implementation until these areas can be safely reopened. Impacted BWCAW overnight permit holders will be notified of any closures ahead of time and assisted with finding alternative permits if necessary. Self-issue BWCAW day use permits would also be included in any closure of the entry point. In addition, the Hegman Lake parking lot could also be closed.

During active burning, smoke and flames may be visible from areas near the unit. Smoke may settle in low areas in the evening hours. If near the prescribed fire unit following burning, please be aware of hazardous conditions like dead, burnt standing trees that could fall at any time. “The safety of our firefighters and the public is always our number one priority. We only close areas when necessary and will keep areas closed only as long as needed to ensure everyone’s safety,” Backe added. Existing portages will be utilized when needed for control or holding lines.

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In addition to the North Hegman unit, the Fenske Ridge unit (148 acres) located just south of Fenske Lake along County Road 116 (Echo Trail) and Canary 5-6 units (92 acres) located south of the Ely, MN airport might also be ready during this window of opportunity for prescribed fire implementation. Also, there are some prescribed fire units on the Laurentian Ranger District north of Virginia, MN and east of Hoyt Lakes, MN that could be ready for implementation during this timeframe. Additional Prescribed Fire Fact Sheets and updates will be posted when planning is finalized.

Why use prescribed burning?

Prescribed fires help reduce hazardous fuel build up and the risk of intense wildfire. In addition, they improve and maintain forest health and wildlife habitat and eliminate invasive species. The meadow and forest ecosystems in northeastern Minnesota are fire-dependent and rely on periodic fires to stay healthy. Prescribed fire also is culturally significant to indigenous people of this area.

Benefits of prescribed burning as a forest management tool

- Protects communities and infrastructure by reducing hazardous fuels and the risk of high intensity wildfires.
- Improves and supports wildlife habitat for many species on the forest including kestrel, woodcock, moose, white tail deer, black bear, meadow vole and the rare Nabokov blue butterfly.
- Limits the spread of invasive plant species and maintains native ecosystems.
- Promotes the growth of trees, plants, wildflowers, and wild blueberries.
- Continues the historic fire regime of frequent disturbance by fire.
- Preserves a cultural activity of indigenous Treaty Bands in this area.

Drone Use

For safety of our pilots and firefighters, we ask everyone to refrain from using drones in fire areas. Remember, when you fly, we cannot and it's illegal. Prescribed fire smoke can impair first responder visibility, including aircraft, and unauthorized drones become unwelcome distractions in an already hectic environment.

Additional Information

For more information about the status of prescribed fires, please visit the Superior National Forest website, and sign up for our Forest Newsletter, selecting Public Fire Information. Additionally, follow us on Facebook and Twitter/X for updates. The Fire Information phone number is (218)248-7404.

Superior NF Fire and Aviation Resource Management Webpage (https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/superior/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=fsm91_049815)

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