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News Release

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Released by _____ Jane Weber, Public Affairs Officer

Large Portions of the Bob Marshall Closed for Public Safety

Great Falls, MT – Ongoing fires on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District have prompted a large area closure of the Bob Marshall Wilderness to prevent the public from inadvertently hiking or horseback riding into the fire area. The area closure includes lands that fire behavior specialists predict could be affected in coming weeks if the weather does not moderate significantly. The closure is approximately 447,000 acres and while some may question the size of this restriction, Forest Service officials are breathing easier knowing the public will not be exposed to the danger of rapidly growing fires. Fire crews on both the Ahorn and Fool Creek fires within the Bob Marshall Wilderness have been experiencing fires behaving uncharacteristically for this time of the summer, with active burning on typically cooler north-facing slopes and fire growth continuing later into the evenings.

Forest Supervisor, Spike Thompson explained the reason for the closure, “We are experiencing unforgiving fire behavior with the extreme temperatures and dry fuel conditions. The recent history of fire along the Rocky Mountain Front has taught us that fire can grow exponentially with fuel conditions this dry. We need to plan ahead to protect backcountry users from being caught in a moving fire situation.” The Ahorn Fire burning west of Benchmark has exhibited erratic fire behavior, expanding from 600 acres on Saturday to over 7,000 acres by Tuesday. Most of the area involved in this new area closure is in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, east of the Continental Divide in the Lewis & Clark National Forest.

Despite the backcountry closure, over 423,000 acres remain open for backcountry travelers and **all** campgrounds, with the exception of those in the Benchmark area remain open for camping.

Horseback riders, hikers and campers are encouraged to explore lands on the southern portion of the Ranger District in the Scapegoat Wilderness. Backcountry areas on the southern part of the District like the Dearborn River, Petty Creek, Welcome Creek, and Green Fork within the Scapegoat Wilderness are excellent alternatives, as well as the Falls Creek drainage outside the Wilderness. Backcountry areas to the north include access through Blackleaf Canyon, all branches of the Birch Creek drainage, access through Swift Reservoir into Birch Creek or the entire Badger Two Medicine including Badger Creek, Hall Creek, Two Medicine Creek and noted peaks, Elk Calf Mountain, Running Crane Mountain, Bullshoe Mountain. Additionally, much of the district's "front country," outside the Wilderness remains open. North-south oriented trails like Hannan Gulch, Blacktail Gulch, Mortimer Gulch, Sheep Gulch, Slim Gulch, Clary Coulee and many more are still available for hikers.

For details, go to www.inciweb.org/incident/508 or call (406) 791-7754.