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## News Release

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Released by \_\_\_\_\_ Jane Weber, Acting Public Affairs

### Unattended Campfires Concern Forest Service

GREAT FALLS –Smoldering campfires left by campers has Forest Service officials on the Lewis and Clark National Forest concerned about the careless attitude of some Forest visitors. Record high temperatures and summer vacations are sending campers to their favorite campsites and trails; and the thought of an unattended campfire has District Rangers, like Tina Lanier from the Belt Creek Ranger District worried about the potential for person-caused fires. Lanier said, “With the record high temperatures we’re experiencing so early this summer, we will soon have our hands full managing lightning-caused forest fire starts. Man-caused fires are an unnecessary complicating factor.” On Lanier’s District alone, backcountry rangers and patrols have come upon and extinguished nearly a dozen campfires left burning by campers who have left the scene, mostly in the Dry Fork drainage. The Rangers in White Sulphur Springs and Stanford have witnessed the same careless behavior. Some Forest Service employees say the number of unattended campfires is the highest they recall ever seeing on the Forest.

Brad McBratney, newly appointed Fire Staff Officer on the Lewis and Clark National Forest and former smokejumper and Ranger District Fire Management Officer, is no stranger to fire management and he concurs. McBratney said, “In my 25+ years of fire work, I never have understood how a camper can walk away from a smoldering campfire ring. It just makes no sense with the recent fire seasons we’ve experienced in the west. It only takes a breeze to bring that campfire back to life.”

McBratney reminds all campers who intend to build a campfire to cook their dinner or simply roast marshmallows that they are responsible for completely extinguishing the campfire before departing the firering, whether to crawl into their sleeping bags for the night or drive home from their campsite. Anyone

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building a campfire must carry a bucket and shovel, tools of the trade when dousing a fire. Some tips to use when building and extinguishing a campfire.

1. During the dry summer months, only build a campfire when necessary, consider foregoing one during the summer when conditions are dry
2. If you must have a fire, use an established fire ring clear of any flammable grasses or shrubs
3. Keep your fire small, it's not needed for warming this time of year
4. Use small logs and forest litter to ensure your fire burns completely to ash and does not leave large partially burnt logs behind
5. Stay by your campfire at all times with water bucket and shovel at the ready
6. When retiring for the night or departing your campsite, make sure your campfire is COLD to the touch. The best way to extinguish your fire is to
  - Douse it with water and stir the coals
  - Repeat this process until you can thrust your hand into the ashes and feel no warmth whatsoever

Campers are responsible for any campfires they start, and can be fined up to \$5000 and/or up to 6 months in jail for campfires that escape their control. Campers whose campfires result in a Forest fire can be assessed the cost of fire suppression activities.

By state law, anyone building a campfire must have a shovel and bucket available at the campfire. Campers using charcoal briquettes are also held to the same requirement to carry fire tools if their briquettes are removed from their home barbecue. Backcountry motorized users who plan a campfire may consider their helmet as a bucket, but a folding portable shovel is required to be transported on their vehicle. Forest officials also remind riders that spark arrestors are also required on all trail vehicles. Smokers should ignite and smoke in enclosed vehicles or while standing in areas clear of grass and other flammable materials, preferably on graveled surfaces. All smoking materials must be extinguished and packed out by the smoker.

During a hot summer like 2007 is shaping up to be, Forest visitors need to stay apprised of changing fire restrictions; perhaps the sensible thing to do is to save campfire building until fall hunting season.