



San Juan Public Lands Center

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www.co.blm.gov/sjra/index.html



Questions and Answers: Missionary Ridge Fire Area

Is National Forest land previously closed in association with the Missionary Ridge Fire now open to the public?

As of Friday, Oct. 4, the 100,000 acres of National Forest System land within and surrounding the Missionary Ridge Fire (from the Animas River drainage east to the Florida and Pine River drainages) will be reopened to the public. A portion of Missionary Ridge Road and some National Forest trails will remain closed. Other trails that are currently open may be closed at any time due to debris flows, falling trees or other hazards.



What part of Missionary Ridge Road is closed?

About 12 miles of Missionary Ridge Road (682) between the gate two miles east of East Animas Road (CR 250) and the intersection of Burnt Timber Road (595) will be closed to all entry. Signs will be posted at both ends of the road closure. No motorized, foot or horseback travel will be allowed on the closed portion.



Why is Missionary Ridge Road closed?

This portion of the road will be dangerous and impassable during rehabilitation operations this fall. Existing culverts that channel runoff in steep drainages must be replaced because their diameter is too small to handle increased debris flows. Heavy equipment will be creating large cavities in the roadbed. Also, there are plans to remove roadside hazard trees with burned-out root systems, to protect public safety. These operations would take place immediately adjacent to (often uphill from) the road, with the possibility of trees falling directly

into the roadway. Installation of log erosion barriers is also planned for the area.

How long will Missionary Ridge Road be closed and how will the closure affect motorized access to the area?

The road closure will remain in effect until rehabilitation operations are completed - at least through the fall. Conditions will then be reassessed to decide whether the road can be safely reopened to winter traffic. There will be no motorized access into the area because Missionary Ridge is the only road accessing the area. Other areas burned in the fire will be open under their normal travel-management regulations, although visitors should exercise extreme caution in these areas and consult a San Juan National Forest map to determine the type of motorized access allowed in specific areas.

What about non-motorized use of other parts of Missionary Ridge Road and Forest roads that intersect it?

Horseback riders and hikers may travel on open sections of the Missionary Ridge Road and other open roads. Hazards have not been mitigated, however, and dangerous conditions exist in many areas.

What trails in the area are closed to public use?

Trails Closed: Missionary Ridge Area	Trails Closed: Lemon/Vallecito Areas
Shearer Creek (558)	Runlett Park (530.1)
Stevens Creek (728)	Lake Eileen (668)
	Graham Creek/North Canyon (656),
	Lower 7 mi. of Endlich Mesa Trail (534), also known as Freeman Park Trail, between Vallecito and the Endlich Mesa trailhead

Are other trails in the area open?

Other National Forest trails in the burned area will be open to foot and horse travel, but they may be closed at any time because of debris flows, falling trees or other hazards. Signs will be posted at trailheads warning of the inherent dangers of entering the burned area, and the public is advised to use extreme caution. Very hazardous, and unknown, conditions may exist along any trail at any time within the burned area. Visitors to burned areas should check for warning and trail-closure signs. Trails that must be closed will be marked. The Forest Service strongly advises people to visit other public lands not affected by the fire, to avoid these dangers.

Are the four campgrounds on the east side of Vallecito still closed?

Yes, Old Timers, North Canyon, Graham Creek and Pine Point Campgrounds on the east side of Vallecito Reservoir remain closed



because of fire damage or debris flows. They will reopen when damage is repaired, and debris-flow activity ceases.

Who is exempt from road and trail closures?

Federal, state or local officials, or members of an organized rescue or firefighting force in the performance of an authorized official duty; those with a permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act; and contractors working on rehabilitation operations.

What kind of conditions will those who choose to enter the area encounter?



About one third of the burned area was severely impacted by the fire, another third is moderately affected, while the remaining third is rated as low burn severity or unburned. Visiting the backcountry at any time is inherently risky - even during normal conditions, visitors risk avalanches, falling trees, high cliffs, unstable rocky slopes, flash floods, getting lost, etc. Within the burned area, however, even greater dangers now exist. Rain can cause debris flows and flash flooding in drainages or on hillsides. Trees in burned areas may fall without warning (even those that don't appear

damaged are risky, because their root systems may have been damaged by the fire). Ash on steep slopes can create slick conditions when wet. Burned stump and root holes can be hidden under a thin layer of soil. Winds can whip up choking ash storms. Visitors should avoid areas where hazard-tree removal, salvage operations, aerial seeding, or log erosion barrier projects are underway.

Does the Forest Service advise visiting the burned area?

No, the public is encouraged to avoid burned areas. Instead, the Forest Service strongly encourages visitors to use the millions of acres of other National Forest or BLM land in southwestern Colorado. Although some trails in burned areas are open, hazardous and inaccessible conditions exist, and anyone who chooses to enter these areas should exercise extreme caution and check for warning and closure signs. Those who choose to enter burned areas should leave immediately if windy or rainy conditions develop. Driving through and parking in burned areas is as hazardous as hiking or riding. Many fire-affected trees have few visible signs of damage and often are not blackened. If rain occurs, walk upslope away from channels, to try to avoid debris flows or flash floods.



What is the status of specific trails/roads/destinations in the area?

Missionary Ridge Area	Status
Missionary Ridge Road (682)	Closed from gate 2 miles east of County Rd. 250 and intersection of Burnt Timber Rd. (596) to motorized and non-motorized travel; other portions open to nonmotorized travel
Burnt Timber Road (595)	Open to foot and horse travel only
Haflin Creek Trail (557)	Open
Stevens Creek Trail (728)	Closed
Missionary Ridge Trail (543)	Open to foot and horse travel only
Red Rim Road (076)	Open to foot and horse travel only
Henderson Lake	Open to foot and horse travel only
Shearer Creek Trail (558)	Closed
Red Creek (533), First Fork (727) trails	Open
Two-track (071) above Durango Hills	Open
Lemon/Vallecito Areas	Status
Burnt Timber Trail (667)	Open to foot and horse travel only
Upper 6 mi. of Endlich Mesa Trail (534) above the Endlich Mesa Trailhead on FS Road 597 to City Reservoir	Open
Lower 7 mi. of Endlich Mesa Trail (534), also known as Freeman Park Trail, between Vallecito and Endlich Mesa Trailhead	Closed
Young's Canyon Trail (546)	Open
East Florida Road (597)	Open
Florida, Transfer Park Campgrounds	Open
Miller Creek Campground	Open
Lemon Picnic Area	Open
FS Road 603	Open - minor debris flows have occurred
FS Road 602	Open – expect delays due to hazard-tree removal
Old Timers, Graham Creek, Pine Point, North Canyon Campgrounds	Closed
Vallecito, Middle Mountain Campgrounds	Open
Vallecito Creek (529), Pine River (523) Trails	Open
Lake Eileen Trail (668)	Closed
East Creek Trail (535)	Open
Graham Creek, North Canyon (656) Trails	Closed
Middle Mountain Road (724)	Open
Cave Basin Trail (530)	Open
Runlett Park Trail (530)	Closed

What other rehabilitation efforts are ongoing in the burned area?

The San Juan National Forest has received \$5 million to complete the recommendations of the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team and is trying to secure additional funding for other fire recovery efforts in the burned area, as well as fuels-reduction projects in other areas susceptible to fire. A USFS/BLM team is implementing the recommendations of the BAER Report, which include:



- Hazard-tree removal on roads, trails, campgrounds, and some private-land boundaries;
- Aerial seeding on about 24,000 acres;
- Log erosion barriers on about 4,600 acres;
- Straw mulch on about 300 acres;
- Precipitation and early-flow-warning systems;
- Engineering design of stream diversion at Lemon Dam spillway;
- Engineering assessment to stabilize slumps in drainages;
- Replacement and installation of road culverts, ditch cleaning, sign replacement, trail damage assessments and repairs; and
- Monitoring of debris jams and treatments.

What is the history of the Missionary Ridge Fire?

The fire was reported at 2:30 p.m., June 9, 2002, along the Missionary Ridge Road at a switchback next to the Coon Creek drainage, north of Durango. A Forest Service investigator concluded a spark from a dragging tow chain or muffler ignited the fire. The relative humidity that day was in the single digits; temperatures were in the 90s, with brisk winds. The fire was not controlled until August 7th. Some 70,000 acres of National Forest, BLM, state and private land burned. One firefighter died, more than 50 structures were lost, and some \$40 million in federal funding was spent on fire suppression. About 80 % of the acreage burned was National Forest, and about 10 % private. The fire impacted the Animas, Florida and Pine River watersheds, where debris flows are now threatening municipal water sources, homes, roads and other facilities.



What are the current fire restrictions on the San Juan?

As of Friday, Sept 13, 2002, all fire restrictions have been lifted on San Juan Public Lands. No fire restrictions are in effect.

San Juan Public Lands Center ... 970 247-4874
Columbine Ranger District ... 970 884-2512
San Juan Public Affairs Office ... 970 385-1219

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