# NEWS RELEASE

**USDA Forest Service**
**Caribou-Targhee National Forest**
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## Two fires burning on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest are being managed under Wildland Fire Use Program

**Idaho Falls ID:** The Caribou-Targhee National Forest is currently managing two lightning started fires as Fire Use fires in the northern portion of the forest.

The Dry Ridge fire is the first Wildland Fire Use (WFU) event of 2004. It is on the Teton Basin Ranger District. This lightning fire started on July 19 and is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Driggs, Idaho on top of Dry Ridge about 0.25 miles from the Jedediaha Smith Wilderness boundary. The fire is currently burning in a clump of sub alpine fir. Spread potential is very low due to green meadows around the sub alpine fir.

The second fire being managed as a WFU event is Tyler Canyon on the Dubois Ranger District. The fire started July 26 by an afternoon thunderstorm in the southern portion of the Lemhi Range is located, approximately 12 miles west of the Junction of Highways 22 and 28. The elevation is approximately 7500 to 8000 ft and 50-70% slope. It is currently a single tree. Travelers heading to Salmon via Hwy 28 may see the smoke from this fire.

Wildland Fire Use fires are lightning-caused fires that are allowed to play their natural role in the life cycle of a forest. Fire has always been a part of shaping the ecosystem in the Northern Rocky Mountains. It is a necessary element in the life cycle of any forest and, in fact, some species need fire to regenerate.

Fires burn with different intensities. In some areas a fire may burn hot, leaving patches of ashes, charred trees and a good seedbed for plants to regenerate. In other areas, cool fires just meander along the ground, burning grass, brush, dead logs, and lower branches. Fire returns valuable nutrients to the soil, opens overgrown areas to sunlight, and allows new growth that provides food and habitat for various animal species. The fuels (dead wood and other debris) that could kindle larger, more intense fires are burned before they

become dangerous. The result of this free-burning is a patchwork of young and old vegetations, often referred to as a mosaic. This variety of vegetation promotes a variety of wildlife and a diverse landscape.

When a fire starts in an area which has an approved fire use management plan,supported by Forest Plan direction, a determination has to be made: Is it a **"wildland fire that meets resource benefits"** or a **"wildland fire that needs an appropriate suppression response?"** Some areas of National Forest still need to be protected from the effects of wildland fire, these areas include; timber production areas, urban interface, old forest habitats, recreation sites, etc. Fires in these areas with a protection emphasis, are unwanted fires that are suppressed. **A Wildland fire use incident** is a lightning-caused fire burning under pre-planned, specified conditions (prescription) to accomplish specific objectives. It is a "wanted event." If a wildland fire use event exceeds prescription parameters, an appropriate suppression response action may be taken on all or a portion of the fire necessary to meet the protection objectives. It will be allowed to burn as long as it stays within the predetermined "prescription". **A wildland fire that needs an appropriate suppression response** is an "unwanted fire" where the damages outweigh the benefits. An appropriate suppression response will be taken to meet suppression objectives for each of these kinds of fires.

The decision to classify a fire as "wildland fire for resource benefit" or a "wildland fire needing an appropriate suppression response" is complex, requiring consideration of many factors, and the involvement of both fire, wilderness, and other resource specialists.

1). **Within a maximum of two hours** of the discovery of the fire, a team of experts in resource management must decide if it will be classified as a wildland fire use event or a wildland fire needing an appropriate suppression response. This is called completing the stage I initial assessment. This assessment is a report about the fire situation that includes information about the fire location, start date/time, current size, fuel conditions in fire area, weather (current/predicted), fire behavior (current/predicted),and availability of resources. This decision is approved by the Forest Supervisor, District Ranger or an approved acting. These following elements are considered in this decision:

| **Wildland Fire needing Appropriate Suppression Response (Old Terminology-Wildfire)** | **Wildland Fire Use for Resource Benefit (Old Terminology-PNF)** |
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| **Person-caused fire** or **Lightning-caused fire** that is: | **Lightning-caused fire** that is: |
| -Threats to the plan boundary can't be alleviated | -Threats to the plan area boundary can be alleviated |
| -Threats to life or property can't be alleviated | -Threats to life or property can be alleviated |
| -Cultural and natural resources effects unacceptable | - Cultural and resource effects are acceptable |

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| -Weather forecast unacceptable | -Weather forecast acceptable |
| -Risk indicators unacceptable | -Risk indicators acceptable |
| -Fire Prescription parameters unacceptable | -Fire Prescription parameters acceptable |
| -Local, Regional, & National situation unacceptable (i.e., too many fires, shortage of firefighting resources, poor air quality, etc. | -Local, Regional, and National situation acceptable |

**2.) Then, within a maximum of one day** (24 hours) after the inital assessment decision to proceed with a wildland fire use, the stage II short-term implementation action plan is developed. This plan is reviewed and approved by the Forest Supervisor, District Ranger, or their acting.

This plan includes a listing of objectives and desired effects, safety considerations, external concerns, environmental concerns, threats, short-term actions in managing this under wildland fire use, and estimated costs.

Fire managers constantly evaluate weather and fuel conditions, comparing them to long-term averages, as well as known wet and dry years. This enables managers to better assess risks associated with this program. Depending on the relative risk of this wildland fire, the time of season, relative complexity of managing the fire under wildland fire use, and documented or potential fire behavior - a Stage III analysis is completed. This is a long-term implementation action plan that is similar to the old PNF burn plan. It includes more detailed information about; 1) natural and cultural resource objectives and constraints/considerations, 2) mapping of the Maximum Manageable Area (MMA), 3) longterm fire projections under expected and severe conditions, 4) weather season/drought discussions and prognosis, 5) risk assessment map, 6) description of probability of success, 7) potential threats to MMA, 8) threats to public use and firefighter safety, 9) smoke dispersion and effects, and any other information the deciding official needs in order to make the decision. It also includes monitoring actions, holding actions to keep the fire within the management area, resources needed to manage the fire, a revised estimate of the costs of managing this fire, contingency actions needed, an information plan, and post-burn evaluation needs.

If the plan is not approved during any stage of the process, the fire is considered a wildland fire needing an appropriate suppression response.

In preparing the stage III plan, resource managers must establish a maximum manageable area (MMA). In wilderness, the resource managers would need to have wilderness and fire expertise. Outside wilderness, the resource managers would need to have expertise in fire and other resource knowledge, i.e., fisheries, soils, wildlife, etc. This area defines the maximum distance in each direction around the fire that the fire will be allowed to affect before it is determined to have negative impacts. The fire can spread any direction within this area. The MMA boundary must be defensible from a fire protection standpoint. If a fire does cross the MMA boundary, it must then be classified a wildland fire. A Wildland

Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) is prepared where appropriate management responses are analyzed and a management strategy is selected.

3.) **Each day, the fire is evaluated by the team of experts.** Fire managers and resource specialists continue to examine fire behavior, smoke conditions, the regional and national fire situation, and many other factors and report to the line officer. If the situation changes from the original assumptions, the deciding line officer must determine whether to allow this wildland fire to continue meeting resource benefits, or to declare it a wildland fire that needs an appropriate suppression response. This process is called a periodic fire assessment. It will be done daily when conditions warrent or during periods of inactivity, could be done once every several days.

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