



San Juan Public Lands Center

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



Questions and Answers: **Missionary Ridge Fire Area Open;** **Missionary Ridge Road and Some Trails Closed**

What is the status of National Forest lands burned in the Missionary Ridge Fire?

Yes, 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) is open to the public. However, a portion of the Missionary Ridge Road and some National Forest trails remain closed. Other trails that are 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 are posted at both ends of the road closure. No motorized, foot or horseback travel is allowed on the closed portion.

Why must the Missionary Ridge Road remain closed?

This portion of the road will be dangerous and impassable during rehabilitation operations, which include replacement of culverts and hazard tree removal. Two culverts have been replaced, and another four will be replaced by early summer. The existing culverts must be replaced because their diameter is too small to handle increased debris flows in steep drainages. Removal of burned trees along the roadside will begin later this summer. These operations will take place immediately adjacent to the road, with the possibility of trees falling directly into the roadway.

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 - possibly through the summer or fall of 2004. Conditions will then be reassessed to decide whether it can be safely reopened to winter traffic. This means there will be no motorized access into the area, because Missionary Ridge is the only road access. 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, mountain bicyclists, and hikers may travel the portions of the Missionary Ridge Road not affected by the closure, as well as other open roads. Hazards have not been mitigated, however, and dangerous conditions may exist.

What trails in the area are closed to public use?

Trails Closed Missionary Ridge Area	Trails Closed Lemon/Vallecito Areas
Haflin Creek (557)	Runlett Park (530.1)
Shearer Creek (558)	Lake Eileen (668)
Stevens Creek (728)	North Canyon (656),
	Graham Creek Trail (no number designation)
	Lower 7 mi. of Endlich Mesa Trail (534), known as Freeman Park Trail

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 are posted at trailheads warning of the inherent dangers of entering the burned area, and the public is advised to use extreme caution. The Forest Service advises people to visit other public lands not affected by the fire, to avoid these dangers. 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. Closed trails are marked.

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 during efforts to repair fire damage and debris flows. The campgrounds will reopen as soon as the damage is repaired.

Who is exempt from road and trail closures?

- ⌘ Federal, state, or local officials, or members of organized rescue operations in the performance of authorized official duties
- ⌘ Those with a permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act
- ⌘ Rehabilitation crews.

What are the conditions in the burned area?

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. Even greater dangers now exist in the burned area that include, but are not limited to:

- ⌘ Rain may cause debris flows and flash flooding in drainages or on hillsides.
- ⌘ Trees and limbs may fall without warning (even those that don't appear damaged may have fire-damaged root systems).
- ⌘ Ash on steep slopes may create slick conditions when wet.
- ⌘ Burned stump and root holes may be hidden under a thin layer of soil.
- ⌘ Winds may whip up ash storms and cause even greater tree instability.

Those who choose to enter the burned area should avoid hazard-tree removal, timber salvage, aerial seeding, and other rehabilitation operations.

Does the Forest Service advise visiting the burned area?

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 the burned area 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 do 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 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. (595) 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)	Closed
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 –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 \$4 million to complete the recommendations of the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team. Additional funding is being used for other fire-recovery efforts, as well as fuels-reduction projects in areas susceptible to fire. BAER projects include:

- ⌘ Hazard-tree removal on roads, trails, in campgrounds, and private boundaries
- ⌘ Aerial seeding accomplished on 24,000 acres
- ⌘ Log-erosion barriers installed on 4,600 acres
- ⌘ Installation of 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 culverts, ditch cleaning, sign replacement, trail damage assessments and repairs
- ⌘ 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 National Forest?

As of May 2003, there are no fire restrictions 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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