



DON'T ADD **FUEL** TO THE FIRE

WILDLAND FIRE DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH VISITORS

SUMMER 2020

Extinguish fear with positive messaging. Let's keep our social media communications in check and send the right signal for all of Montana.

When communicating about wildland fire and smoke conditions in the region, it is vital that we all do our part to send positive, factual, reassuring and helpful messaging. A disruptive or dramatic response can have widespread, lasting effects. When travelers change plans needlessly, their visitor experience isn't the only thing that suffers—the effects can be detrimental to Montana's tourism and main-street small-business economy. Fire is a natural, necessary part of our ecology, and Montana is a big place with millions of acres to enjoy. Let's make sure we keep that top of mind when communicating about wildland fires in the region.



DON'T ADD FUEL TO THE FIRE

DO's:

- State the facts only; do not make any assumptions.
- Avoid drama.
- Keep up-to-date on the latest fire information, including road closures, destination closures, attraction closures, camping and fishing restrictions, etc.
- Share information with all frontline employees who work with visitors; consider having a fire update meeting each morning or distributing updates from reputable sources—National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, regional tourism bureaus, convention and visitor bureaus—to all appropriate employees. See full list of links below.
- Explain that closures are for public safety and allow resources access to fight the fire. If it's open, it's safe. Note, these closures change often.
- Focus on the positive and locations that are open. Always emphasize what is open first, and then list what is closed.
 - Give perspective on what is open.
 - Example: "Glacier National Park is more than one million acres; only 2,500 acres—or less than 3% of Glacier National Park—are currently burning." OR "Montana is more than 93 million acres of spectacular unspoiled nature. Even large incidents cause only a small percent of the state to be temporarily inaccessible."
- Use words like "temporary" and "currently" and "precautionary" when describing conditions and closures.
- Use the term "wildland fire" as opposed to "wildfire" in all communications.
- Highlight areas of Montana and other parts of the state that are not affected by the fire and direct visitors to these areas and attractions.
 - Give perspective on what is open.
 - Example: Show them on a map where the fire is located and then show them all the areas not affected.
- Smoke comes and goes with the intensity of fire and weather patterns. If an area is closed, or if air quality is poor because of smoke, remember it's only temporary. If air quality becomes "unhealthy for sensitive groups," update visitors with current conditions by providing a link to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality: svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair
- Assist travelers by redirecting them to alternative activities, including things to do indoors if necessary.
 - Suggest indoor activities such as favorite shops and restaurants to check out, breweries and distilleries, museums and art galleries. Communicate the need to follow all COVID-19 mask and social distancing regulations while inside public spaces. Find more info here: glaciermt.com/things-to-do-indoors
- Let visitors know that incidents often occur in remote locations, and even if smoke is visible, it could have blown in from an incident hundreds of miles away.
- Remain helpful and positive when visitors inquire about a fire.
- Encourage visitors to continue their travel in Montana.
- Help travelers understand wildland fire occurs because of the diverse landscape and weather that make Montana a world-class destination for outdoor recreation. Wildland fire plays a natural role in our ecology.
- Highlight the efforts fire crews are making to fight the fire.
- Remind campers fire restrictions may be in effect, and encourage them to responsibly recreate on our public lands.



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- Post and share positive social media messaging.
 - Post close-up photos—of people, flowers, animals, food, drinks, etc.—rather than photos of smoky landscapes.
 - Post links to activities that can be done safely in other outside areas or indoors (dining, breweries/cideries/distilleries, concerts, museums, theaters, shopping, spas, etc.).
 - Focus on health and safety when it comes to danger from air quality and proximity to fire.
 - Encourage visitation to Western Montana on your social media channels; it is an extraordinary place to visit any time of year, with millions of acres to explore.
- Remind visitors about fire safety.
 - Stay on designated roads and avoid parking on dry brush or grass, as exhaust pipes and vehicle undercarriages can be very hot and easily start a wildland fire.
 - Campers are reminded to never leave a campfire unattended, and make sure fires are completely extinguished before leaving the site.
 - Extinguish and properly dispose of cigarette butts. Do not throw them out the window!
 - Follow Montana state fire restrictions. What Fire Restrictions Mean to You:
fwp.mt.gov/news/drought/definitions.html

DON'Ts:

- Avoid terms such as “Fire Season.”
- Avoid dwelling on the negative effects of the fire; instead, work to help visitors have a great vacation despite the presence of fire.
- Avoid sharing photos or news of the fire on your personal or company/organization’s social media channels. Instead show the beauty and other activities still available.
 - Don’t post images of smoke or fire on social media. Our social audiences often include friends, family and customers from all parts of the world. Not everyone who views, comments or shares your post understands Montana’s vast landscape.
 - Don’t share dramatic images of fire and smoke. These images go viral quickly and often make it appear that the entire state of Montana is on fire or covered in smoke.
 - Don’t misinform visitors when it comes to current conditions; instead try to focus on positives rather than negatives.
 - If you must share fire information because your business’s hours are affected, your business is closed because of the event, etc., be sure to use words such as “temporarily,” and “currently” and avoid over-dramatizing.
- If you don’t know the answer to a guest’s question about closures or the fire, do not guess. Instead, help your guest check the sources listed below.



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Information Resources:

Keep apprised of Glacier National Park closures and other advisories by following

- Glacier National Park Twitter – [@GlacierNPS twitter.com/glaciernps](https://twitter.com/GlacierNPS)
- Glacier National Park Facebook – facebook.com/GlacierNPS
- Glacier National Park Dashboard – nps.gov/applications/glac/dashboard
- Road Status – home.nps.gov/applications/glac/roadstatus/roadstatus.cfm

U.S. Forest Service updates can be found on Twitter and Facebook at:

- Bitterroot National Forest – [@BitterrootNF](https://twitter.com/BitterrootNF)
- Flathead National Forest – facebook.com/discovertheflathead
- Lolo National Forest – [@LoloNF](https://twitter.com/LoloNF)

Don't forget the webcams (check these often as conditions change):

- Montana Department of Transportation – mdt.mt.gov
- Glacier National Park – nps.gov/glac/learn/photosmultimedia/webcams.htm
- Bitterroot Valley – alltravelcams.com/webcams/bitterroot_valley_montana
- Monture Mountain (Near Ovando) – fsvisimages.com
- Woods Bay in Bigfork (Flathead Lake) – ravenbigfork.com/webcam
- Whitefish Mountain Resort – skiwhitefish.com/webcams

Statewide activity for wildland fire and smoke related issues: TravelAware.MT.gov

Frequent updates on fires/closures: inciweb.nwcg.gov/accessible-view

Posting of fishing, camping and other recreation restrictions due to drought and fire: fwp.mt.gov/news

Air quality: svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair

Glacier Country Regional Tourism: glaciermt.com

Glacier National Park Conservancy: glacier.org

Destination Missoula: destinationmissoula.org

Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau (Explore Whitefish): explorewhitefish.com

Kalispell Convention and Visitor Bureau: discoverkalispell.com

Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development (MOTBD)

- MOTBD will be posting frequent statewide updates on TravelAware.MT.gov, providing useful information when there are fire and smoke conditions impacting the visitor experience including: latest activity, webcams, air quality, fire restrictions and quick links to additional resources. This site also includes a statewide list of indoor activities to reference when air quality is of concern.