

USDA Forest Service temporarily closing all California national forests

September 7, 2021



To better provide public and firefighter safety due to the ongoing California wildfire crisis, USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region is announcing a temporary closure of all National Forests in California. This closure will be in through September 17. This order does not affect the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, which is not in the Pacific Southwest Region.

“We do not take this decision lightly but this is the best choice for public safety,” said Regional Forester Jennifer Eberlien. “It is especially hard with the approaching Labor Day weekend, when so many people enjoy our national forests.”

Factors that led to this decision include:

1. By temporarily reducing the numbers of people on national forests, we hope to minimize the likelihood that visitors could become entrapped on National Forest System lands during emergency circumstances.
2. The closure order will also decrease the potential for new fire starts at a time of extremely limited firefighting resources, and enhance firefighter and community safety by limiting exposure that occurs in

public evacuation situations, especially as COVID-19 continues to impact human health and strain hospital resources.

3. Due to state-wide conditions, any new fire starts have the potential for large and rapid fire growth with a high risk to life and property. The Forest Service and our partners are absolutely doing all we can to fight these fires and will continue to do so, but the conditions dictate the need for this region-wide closure order.
4. Forecasts show that conditions this season are trending the same or worse as we move into late summer and fall.
5. Although the potential for large fires and risk to life and property is not new, what is different is that we are facing: (a) record level fuel and fire conditions; (b) fire behavior that is beyond the norm of our experience and models such as large, quick runs in the night; (c) significantly limited initial attack resources, suppression resources, and Incident Command Teams to combat new fire starts and new large fires; and (d) no predicted weather relief for an extended period of time into the late fall.

The following persons are exempt from this Order:

1. Persons with Forest Service Permit No. FS-7700-48 (Permit for Use of Roads, Trails, or Areas Restricted by Regulation or Order), specifically exempting them from this Order.
2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.
3. Persons with a Forest Service special use authorization for an electric transmission line, an oil or gas pipeline, communications site, or any other non-recreation special use.
4. Commercial recreational special-use permit holders and their customers are not exempt from this Order. However, commercial recreational special-use permit holders, under the terms and conditions of their permit, may access their permit areas to conduct administrative functions and to protect property and related assets. Recreation residence permit holders are not exempt from this Order.
5. Persons with a Forest Service non-special-use written authorization to conduct nonrecreational activities, such as harvesting timber or forest products, or grazing livestock.
6. Owners or lessees of land, and residents of such private landholdings, to the extent necessary to access their land.
7. Persons engaged in a business, trade, or occupation are not exempt from the prohibitions listed above, but may use National Forest System roads to the extent necessary to carry out their business, trade, or occupation.

More than 6,800 wildfires have burned 1.7 million acres across all jurisdictions in California, and the National Wildfire Preparedness Level (PL) has been at PL5 since July 14, only the third time in the past 20 years that the nation has reached PL 5 by mid-July – indicating the highest level of wildland fire activity.

