

# FOREST LANDOWNER GUIDE

## Eastern Montana

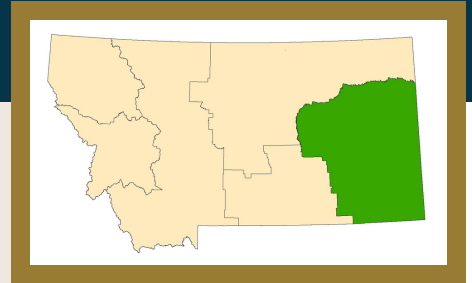


With Dinosaurs and Badlands to the north, inland forest like Ekalaka Hills, and Powder and Tongue River country to the south, the Eastern Region of Montana is truly Big Sky Country with unique natural beauty and full of history and tradition.

The diversity of ecosystems within this landscape support family livestock operations, abundant wildlife populations, diverse native plants, and endless recreation opportunities.



Some of the iconic species that inhabit this region are pallid sturgeons, the threatened piping plover, black bears, the greater sage-grouse, and pronghorn.



The millions of acres that host these treasures exist in a patchwork of public and private lands. The rangelands of this region provide diverse benefits with sustaining livelihoods and local economies while also playing a key role in landscape conservation. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation resides as a sovereign nation within the Eastern Region, stewarding this renowned landscape as they have since time immemorial. We hope you will find the information in this guide useful as you continue to steward your land for your values and goals.

## DOING YOUR PART - Protecting Your Home, Your Habitat

When landowners take personal responsibility for applying and maintaining wildfire risk reduction practices on their property, they greatly increase the chances of their homes surviving a wildfire. Studies show that as many as 80% of the homes lost to wildland fire could have been saved by owners that followed a few simple fire-safe practices.

- Create and maintain an area 5 feet away from a home that is free of anything that will burn, such as wood piles, dried leaves, and lawn furniture.
- Regularly clean the roof and gutters.
- Remove branches overhanging or touching the roof of a home to a distance of at least 10 feet.
- Prune tree branches 10 feet high to prevent them from acting as ladder fuels in a perimeter 5 to 30 feet around your home.
- Maintain a minimum of 18 feet between trees/clumps in the area 5 to 30 feet from your home.

**To learn more about how to address wildland fire issues connect with fire prevention resources by visiting: [mtfireinfo.org](http://mtfireinfo.org)**

Fire resistant construction materials offer homes the best chance to survive a wildland fire.

- The roof is the most vulnerable part of a home. Roofs made of composite shingles, metal or tile, are fire ignition resistant.
- Embers can easily enter a home through vents. All vent openings should be covered with a 1/8-inch corrosive-resistant metal mesh.
- Open windows and gaps under garage doors allow embers to readily enter a home. Ensure all windows and doors can securely close.



Photo by Brontë Wittpen, The Missoulian

# DOING YOUR PART - Understanding Fire in the Forest

Fire has been a key ecological process in Montana's forests and grasslands for thousands of years. Ponderosa pine in this region historically burned about every 15 years. Frequent and low-severity fires burned at the forest floor to maintain an open forest structure and space for favorable seedbeds, with adult ponderosa pine able to withstand the heat due to their thick, insulating bark. Ponderosa pine forests are often accompanied by Rocky Mountain juniper that merges into grasslands in the Eastern Region. These plains grasslands were historically burned at intervals ranging from 3 to 20 years. Over a century of fire suppression in this region has altered forest structure and composition and has disrupted plant diversity and community dynamics in these grasslands.

Fire suppression may have decreased the frequency of fires in ponderosa pine and woodland savannas, but it has increased the severity of fires when they do occur. Without frequent, low-severity fires these forests have increased in density. This overcrowding has led to a decline in forest health and increase in outbreaks of insects and diseases, allowing dead fuels to accumulate. Lack of historic fire regimes on bordering grasslands has led to a decrease in diversity of native grass prairie species, increase in invasive grasses, and conifer encroachment.



The more fuel in the forest, the easier fire can climb ladder fuels from the ground up into the canopy and become severe, crown fires. Increased frequency of large, high-severity fires has been associated with increases in warmer and drier weather trends. These fires not only threaten to replace these stands, but also put an increasing number of homes, communities, and livelihoods at risk.

Managing for resilience in these fire-suppressed forests requires thinning dense forests to reduce fuels, restoring an open forest structure and, where feasible, returning frequent fire to the landscape.

Management of these forested areas span across varied ownership, including tribal, federal, private, and state lands. It is important to gain understanding of the cultural considerations to fire and fuels management. Tribal Historic fire use in Montana was a common practice amongst First Nations peoples.



Tribal resource professionals are providing leadership and guidance to reintroduce fire, working across jurisdictions while integrating cultural and ecological knowledge. This type of information will allow land managers across all ownerships to implement strategies that benefit landscapes at a larger scale.

Land management agencies are an invaluable resource for combining traditional and modern approaches while adjusting to a changing climate.

**To learn more about specific First Nations natural resource departments visit:**

- **Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs Tribal Nations -<https://tribalnations.mt.gov>**

**To learn more about how to address wildland forest fire issues as a landowner please connect with the following resources:**

- **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation – Miles City, MT (406) 232-2034 or find your local DNRC service forester by visiting: [dnrc.mt.gov/serviceforestry](https://dnrc.mt.gov/serviceforestry)**

**If interested in reducing your wildfire risk, there may be financial assistance available with local organizations and governments. To find a partner in your area and connect on available programs visit:**

- **Montana DNRC Hazardous Fuel Reduction Program, Partner Map - [dnrc.mt.gov/forestry/resources/resources-for-landowners](https://dnrc.mt.gov/forestry/resources/resources-for-landowners)**

## DOING YOUR PART - Sustaining Working Forests and Addressing Invasive Weeds

Forests on working lands in the Eastern Region have a long history in Montana of being grazed by livestock. While some landowners graze livestock for income, others also use this system as a management tool. When actively and sustainably managed, grazing can be beneficial for forests through reducing weeds, decreasing combustible vegetation leading to fire hazard reduction, and opening up the shrub canopy to provide more favorable vegetation for livestock and wildlife.

Conservation of working forested lands is critical to effective forest management and restoration. These working lands support local economies while also protecting open space and wildlife habitat, providing access to recreation on public lands, and maintaining ecosystem services for the region. Particularly, these lands play an essential role in reducing wildfire risk to Montana's forests and communities.



Many family owners of grazed forestland are actively and sustainably managing their forest to meet their land management goals. Management tools and decisions depend on the objectives of each forest landowner, but both thinning and prescribed burns are options. When applied correctly, thinning reduces overcrowding among stressed trees and increases availability of nutrients. This allows remaining trees to grow healthy while also complementing grass and forb production on the forest floor and mitigating wildfire risk through reducing hazardous fuels.

Forests that have been both mechanically thinned and burned are most resistant to high-severity fire. When feasible, applying periodic prescribed burns can have numerous benefits for forests. In the past, reoccurring fire played an essential role in nutrient cycling and stimulating plant growth. Carefully planned and applied prescribed fire can be used to increase grass and forb production for livestock, reduce the spread of insects and diseases, decrease hazardous fuels, and reduce conifer encroachment onto rangelands. If interested in bringing prescribed fire to your land, reaching out to your service forester is a good place to learn more.

Invasive species rapidly spread with complete disregard for property boundaries. Working with your neighboring landowners is crucial for successful containment and control.

The Montana Weed Control Association (MWCA) is a great organization to learn more about preventing spread and addressing invasive weeds. MWCA is committed to working across Montana to increase awareness, provide education, and support channels that encourage collaboration across neighbor and county lines to address invasive weeds. While they do not provide weed identification or make treatment recommendations, on their website you can find your local county weed district and education on integrated weed management. Their educational resources focus on creating a long-term plan that integrates a variety of control treatments and takes into consideration local ecological conditions of the land. Some of the approaches being used and combined are:

- Application of herbicides
- Biocontrol using insects, fungus, or sheep and goats
- Mowing and cultivation
- Hand-pulling/digging
- Revegetation after eradicating weeds to keep other weeds from becoming established
- Prevention - through education and awareness working to prevent weed establishment in the first place!

*An Insect Used for Spotted Knapweed Biological Control*



**For educational resources on addressing invasive weeds contact:**

- **Montana Weed Control Association at (406) 925-0708 or visit: [mtweed.org](http://mtweed.org)**

**For treatment recommendations to control weeds on your land contact your local weed district:**

- **To find your local weed district visit: [mtweed.org/weed-district/](http://mtweed.org/weed-district/) and navigate to your county**

# DOING YOUR PART - Mitigating Forest Insects and Diseases

Forest insects and diseases naturally occur in forest ecosystems. These organisms only become pests when they interfere with management objectives such as timber production, wildlife habitat, recreation, or aesthetics. Although not always a cause for concern, the following are some insect and disease issues common to the Eastern Region that you may see in your local forests.

*Tussock Moth Larva*



Photo by Dion Manastyrski, Pacific Forestry Centre-B.C.

Pine tussock moth severely defoliates ponderosa pine during periodic, localized outbreaks. Affected trees can be entirely stripped of foliage or have a rusty hue cast by dead, partially consumed needles. Although pine tussock moth can cause significant tree mortality, outbreaks are usually short-lived and controlled by a naturally occurring, lethal virus.

*Group Kill Caused by Pine Engraver Beetles*



Photo by Ladd Livingston, Idaho Department of Lands , Bugwood.org

Pine engraver beetles, often referred to as ips, infest and reproduce in fresh pine slash greater than 3 inches in diameter. Their offspring develop within a couple months and attack nearby pines in the early summer. Offspring require fresh, moist slash for successful development. Therefore, narrowing slash production to August – December will allow it to dry out before beetles seek new material. Infested slash can also be managed by chipping or burning.

*Canker on Trembling Aspen*



Photo by Brenda Callan, Natural Resources Canada

Aspen is a clonal tree that grows in stands of genetically identical individuals. A multitude of canker diseases, leaf blights, wood borers, and defoliators commonly affect aspen but are not usually a management concern. While individual stems can be damaged by insects or diseases, it's important to manage aspen as an entire stand versus a single tree approach. Large-scale mortality in aspen is often associated with other factors such as drought, conifer encroachment, deer and elk browsing, and overall lack of regeneration.

**To learn more about how to address insect and disease issues please connect with the following resources:**

- **Montana DNRC Forest Pest Management Program - visit: [dnrc.mt.gov/forestpests](http://dnrc.mt.gov/forestpests)**
- **Contact your local service forester- visit: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/serviceforestry>**



The funding for the development of this landowner guide was derived in part from a federal award of the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, awarded to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forestry Division.

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#### **Content Resources**

##### Introduction

- Montana Natural Heritage Program, Map Viewer
- Protecting Your Home, Your Habitat
- MT Fire Info
- Montana DNRC Fire Prevention and Preparedness

##### Understanding Fire in the Forest

- Montana Natural Heritage Program, Ecological Systems
- US Forest Service Fire Effects Information System

##### Sustaining Working Forests and Addressing Invasive Weeds

- Montana Weed Control Association
- Montana Forest Action Plan
- MSU Extension Forestry

##### Mitigating Forest Insects and Diseases

- Forest Pest Management Program, Montana DNRC