

SOUTH PLATTE - HOLIDAY TREE PROGRAM - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Where can I cut my Holiday tree?

- A.** Within the Buffalo Creek tree cutting area on the South Platte Ranger District of the Pike National Forest. The area is located southeast of Pine Junction on County Highway 126 and FDR 550.
- A.** Within the Camp Fickes tree cutting area on the South Platte Ranger District of the Pike National Forest. The area is located south of Buffalo Creek on FDR 550 approximately 8 miles from County Highway 126.
- A.** Within the Sugar Creek tree cutting area on the South Platte Ranger District of the Pike National Forest. The area is located along County Road 67 South of Sprucewood.

Q. I've been in the Holiday tree cutting area and I see that the Forest Service has been doing a lot of hazardous fuels reduction work. Is this work impacting the Holiday tree cutting area?

- A.** The trees that have been cut for the hazardous fuels reduction work are not Holiday tree size and shape. Many of the trees that have been left will grow into very nice Holiday trees over the next few years. In addition, by thinning the forest, many new trees will sprout providing a Holiday tree crop for many years to come. Many areas have had fuels reduction projects completed in the past with very little impact to the Holiday tree cutting area, for example the Spring Creek area. However, those parts of the Holiday tree cutting area that have had fuels reduction projects completed in the last year may contain trees, limbs, and branches scattered all over the ground that may be difficult to see in the snow. Holiday tree cutters are advised to use caution when entering in and walking through these areas.

Q. I've seen many trees in the area with dead tops. What is happening to these trees?

- A.** The trees have been infested with Douglas-fir Tussock Moth. The Tussock Moth is a naturally occurring insect that thins the forest. Evidence suggests that the infestation has run its course and few if any moth larvae are still present.

Q. If I cut a tree with Tussock Moth and bring it home, will the Tussock Moth infest the trees in my yard and neighborhood?

- A.** Tussock Moth overwinters as eggs in the trees. In the spring the eggs may hatch and infest other species of conifers surrounding Douglas-fir trees. In urban settings, blue spruce is attacked. Urban infestations are often confined to individual trees. We recommend that after the holiday season, you dispose of your tree properly to avoid any potential spread of the Tussock Moth. (From USDA Forest Service RMRS-GTR-1241. 2010 page 203.)

Q. With the ongoing forest management and the Tussock Moth, what kind of trees do you expect will be available in the area?

- A.** The Buffalo Creek area will have a mix of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees available. However, the size of the trees may be substantially smaller than those that were present in the past.

Q. The Buffalo Creek area has been open for Holiday tree cutting for many years. How long do you anticipate cutting Holiday trees in Buffalo Creek?

- A.** We anticipate that the number of trees available in future years will be less than it has been in the past. We are currently investigating adding other areas to the Holiday Tree program, such as Camp Fickes.

Q. Do I need a permit to cut a Holiday tree in the Buffalo Creek and Camp Fickes tree cutting areas?

- A.** Yes, you must have a permit for the Buffalo Creek and Camp Fickes cutting areas.

Q. Do I need a permit to cut a Holiday tree in the Sugar Creek tree cutting area?

- A.** Yes, you must have a permit for the Sugar Creek cutting area.

Q. Where can I buy a permit to cut my Holiday tree on the South Platte District?

- A.** Permits can be purchased at the South Platte Ranger District office, 30403 Kings Valley Dr. Suite 2-115 Conifer, CO 80433. The office is located in the Kings Valley Business Center near Highway 285, behind the Kum and Go gas station.

Permits can also be purchased through the mail, but mail in permit requests must be received by the Forest Service no later than **November 1st, 2019.**

Q. When can I buy a permit to cut my Holiday tree?

A. Mail in permit request forms can be downloaded from the Ranger District's web page starting October 1, 2019 and must be postmarked by November 1st, 2018. Counter sales for tree cutting permits will begin on Monday, November 4th, 2019 and continue until November 27th, 2019 or when sold-out.

Q. Do you take credit cards for paying mail in requests?

A. No, we can only take checks and money orders for mail in permit requests. Make check or money order payable to **USDA Forest Service**.

Q. Do you take credit cards for paying permit sales in your office?

A. Yes, we can take credit/debit cards for permit sales in the office.

Q. Do I have to purchase a permit for a specific cutting day?

A. Yes, if you want to cut on a weekend day. Permits are sold for specific weekend days only. When purchasing a permit, you must select a specific weekend day to cut your tree. If you wish to cut on a weekday, you do not need to choose a specific day. Permits are checked as individuals enter the area and are individuals are only allowed to cut their tree on the day they have purchased their permit for.

Q. What if the day I want to cut my tree is sold out?

A. You will need to choose a different day.

Q. What if I can't cut my tree on the day that I have bought a permit for?

A. Any permit can be used on weekdays between December 2nd-December 6th, and December 9th-December 13th and Sunday December 15th, 2019.

Q. Are there other restrictions?

A. Only trees that are less than 6 inches across AT GROUND LEVEL and less than 25 feet tall can be cut.
Cut the tree as close to the ground as possible. Leave stumps no more than 6 inches high.
The entire tree must be removed from the forest, including all branches and stem wood.
Permits must be attached and visible on tree as you leave the cutting area.
Do not cut trees marked with signs, paint or flagging.

Q. Why do I need to remove the entire tree when the Forest Service has left all the limbs and branches from the trees that were cut for the forest management projects?

A. The forest service will have the contractors stacking and piling limbs and branches. After the limbs and branches have dried out, the forest service will be burning the piles of limbs and branches. Holiday tree cutters will be cutting scattered trees throughout the area where the limbs and branches cannot be piled for later burning. To reduce the fire hazard from the scattered Holiday trees, individuals cutting trees are required to remove the entire tree, including all limbs, branches and stem wood.

Q. What if I want to cut a very big tree?

A. Tree size in the Buffalo Creek area is limited to trees that are less than 6" in diameter at ground level and no more than 25 feet tall. Trees larger than 6" in diameter at ground level and more than 25 feet tall can not be cut in the Buffalo Creek area. **Individuals cutting trees larger than 6" in diameter and/or more than 25 feet tall may be issued a Federal Petty Offence Violation Notice subject to up to 6 months in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine.**

Q. What kind of tree makes the best Holiday tree?

A. Options vary on what tree is best. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ponderosa Pine: Makes a fine Holiday tree, however their needles are very long and the cones have sharp bristles. Ponderosa Pines have strong branches that do not bend under the weight of heavier decorations.
- Douglas-Fir: Very good, best option due to their soft and silky needles. Traditional Holiday tree shape and abundant. Douglas-firs have small branches and are best suited for smaller, light weight decorations.
- Lodgepole Pine: Also a fine tree, but hard to find in the Buffalo Creek area.
- Spruces: (Engelmann and Colorado Blue) are prized as beautiful Holiday trees; however, spruces have sharp pointed needles that some people find objectionable (and painful!). Spruce trees are not abundant and difficult to find in all of the cutting areas.
- Rocky Mountain Juniper: Juniper trees can be found all over the area but they have weak branches and a pungent odor some find objectionable.

Q. I only have a 2WD vehicle. Is there any place I can go for my tree?

A. Most areas are accessible by 2WD in good weather but you may have to hike, snowshoe, or ski in to find the best trees. If the weather is snowy, tree cutters with 2WD vehicles may be limited to the main roads. Camp Fickes can be difficult or not possible to access after heavy snowfall.

Q. The Holiday Tree Cutting areas have posted parking restrictions. Do I have to park in a designated parking spot?

A. No, Holiday tree cutters with valid permits are allowed to park in a safe location within one car length to the side of a road in the Holiday tree cutting area.

Q. Are there any new areas open this year?

A. Yes. Sugar Creek is our newest Holiday tree cutting area, however we are only allowing a limited number of permits for this area. No camping is allowed in this area and a 4WD/AWD vehicle is always recommended.

Q. What else do I need to know?

A. Dress warmly. Be prepared for changes in weather. **ROADS MAY BE SNOWY, ICY, AND NOT REGULARLY PLOWED.** We recommend you carry chains and/or use a 4WD/AWD vehicle. High clearance may also be necessary. Have a full tank of gas. Pack out your trash. Do not trespass on private property. Be sure to allow plenty of daylight time to find your tree; it gets dark by 4:30pm during the holiday season!

Q. Will Smokey be at the tree cutting area?

A. Smokey plans on being in the Buffalo Creek area at the Little Scraggy Trailhead during posted times. However, due to limited staffing, Smokey may not be able to make all the days the area is open.

We are not responsible for permits lost in the mail; no replacement permits will be re-issued.

If you have further questions, please call the office at (303) 275-5610 or visit our website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/psicc/sopl