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EXPERIMENTAL BURNS PLANNED APRIL 17-30
ON WEST SIDE OF MT. SENTINEL

MISSOULA--

Several experimental fires will be started in the native grassland vegetation on the west side of Mt. Sentinel above the University of Montana campus beginning Saturday, April 17. The experimental fires are scheduled to continue through Friday, April 30.

The experimental burns, to be conducted as weather permits on the University property south of the concrete "M" and adjacent to the fire road, are part of a continuing research project conducted by Dr. James R. Habeck, professor of plant ecology and wildlife biology at UM. Grass plots burned will be 1/4- to 1/2-acre in size.

The study is being financed under a \$1,600 grant from the UM Foundation. Funds from the Foundation earmarked for research projects are awarded to University faculty members by the UM Research Advisory Council under the University Grant and Fellowship Program.

Commenting on the study, Habeck said: "Historical evidence indicates that prior to modern fire suppression much of the grassland and ponderosa pine savannah vegetation on Mt. Sentinel burned at rather regular intervals. The control of fires has led to changes in the vegetation, and these alterations are under investigation."

The University property is currently being studied for possible inclusion in the statewide system of Natural Areas. "If the area does become part of this system, a management plan that includes the possible periodic use of fire will need to be developed," Habeck said.

"Fire is a natural ecological process in many of the natural plant communities in western Montana," Habeck said. "The burning experiments are aimed at discovering the ecological functions of fire in grasslands in this area."

Sandra Jean Johnson, Tupper Lake, N.Y., a graduate student in botany at UM, has been in charge of collecting and analyzing the field data for the study.

The controlled burning is being done within the time period allowable by the City-County Health Office. The time period expires April 30.