



Cerro Pelado Fire Update Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Hours: 8 am-8 pm

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COMMUNITY MEETING: A public meeting about the Cerro Pelado Fire will be held tonight from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Jemez Mountain Baptist Church, 6 Riverview Court, Jemez Springs, New Mexico. Members of the Southern Area Red Team and agency representatives will discuss and answer questions about current progress and planned activities for the fire. For those unable to attend, a video will be posted to the above-stated Cerro Pelado Facebook page.

The Cerro Pelado Fire, 7 miles east of Jemez Springs, New Mexico, started on Friday, April 22 during an epic wind event. The cause of the fire is under investigation. It is burning in ponderosa pine and mixed conifer trees and brush. The fire is close to the fire footprint from the 2011 Las Conchas Fire, the 2013 Thompson Ridge Fire and the 2017 Cajete Fire. The current fire footprint includes forest units that have previously been treated to reduce fire hazard.

Acreage: 4,903 **Containment:** 0 percent

Personnel and Equipment: 232 total personnel; 8 engines, 1 Type 1 crew, 4 Type 2 crews, 3 Type 2 initial attack crews, 3 helicopters, and 2 water tenders. More people and equipment have been ordered.

Yesterday: Fire behavior was moderate, with minimal spread to the north and east. A break from critical fire weather helped firefighters make good progress building firelines to contain the fire, especially handline near the fire's edge on the northwest side of the fire, where containment is needed to protect communities. These firelines are not yet complete and need to be improved before containment is reached. Therefore, the Sierra de Los Pinos and Cochiti Mesa communities of about 100 residences remain evacuated. Firefighters also continued making good progress on structure assessments in the fire area. These assessments evaluate how to protect each structure from the fire. Helicopters continued reconnaissance and bucket drops on the fire and firefighters scouted locations for firelines along the Forest Service Road 270 system from Rivera Ranch east to Paliza Canyon. A small strategic firing operation was carried out to improve containment and protect a structure at the southwest corner of the fire.

Today: Firefighters are preparing for dry and windy weather and severe fire conditions that will take place later this week. They will continue to protect structures near the fire in the Sierra de Los Pinos and Cochiti Mesa communities. They will construct and improve handline and will begin to install sprinkler systems to protect the Sierra de Los Pinos community and keep the fire east of Forest Service Road 10. Small, strategic firing operations may be conducted again today at the southwest corner of the fire. At the south end of the fire, they will build containment lines by hand or with bulldozers and use existing roads to keep the fire north of Forest Service Road 270. Helicopters will also fly reconnaissance missions over the fire assessing fire behavior and dropping water. Firefighters will consult with resource advisors before conducting any ground-disturbing activities in order to protect sites of cultural importance. They will also patrol and monitor the fire at night.

Weather and Fire Behavior: A potential for some cumulus clouds to develop this afternoon may cause isolated sprinkles or virga (rain evaporating before it reaches the ground) with gusty variable winds, which would not result in wetting rain. High temperatures will be near 60 degrees and relative humidity 20-24 percent. Southeast winds shifting to south will be 5-10 mph, with gusts 20-25mph. Winds become more southwesterly tomorrow, and will start to push low level moisture eastward with a potential for a few thunderstorms. Any storms tomorrow may be dry or a mix of dry and wet with gusty, variable winds. Winds are expected to pick up Thursday into Friday, which will be a critical fire weather day with sustained winds 25=35 mph gusting around 45 mph and relative humidity in the single digits.

Although weather conditions have moderated, active fire behavior is possible today. On the northern part of the fire, southerly winds will push fire the north. On the west, this will push fire toward Vallecitos los Indios. Previous fuels treatments in this area will reduce fire behavior it enters this area. On the northeast, fire will push into burn footprints from the Cajete and Las Conchas fires. These fire footprints have been diminishing fire behavior the last several days, and this is expected to continue. The most active fire behavior is expected in the eastern point of the fire, where it will continue to burn east into the Las Conchas fire footprint. Large logs and stumps continue to burn in this area. The southern flank of the fire will continue to move south with mostly backing fire.

Evacuations, Shelter Areas: The Sandoval County Fire Department and Emergency Management will provide updated information on evacuations, as needed. The Sierra de Los Pinos and Cochiti Mesa communities remain evacuated. Evacuees may seek shelter at the Jemez Mountain Baptist Church, 6 Riverview Court, Jemez Springs, New Mexico, 575-829-4475. Those who evacuated livestock may bring them to the Expo/New Mexico Center at 300 San Pedro Drive NW, Albuquerque or the Sandoval County Sheriff's Posse Arena at 1043 Rodeo Lane, Bernalillo, New Mexico (call Yvette Arnold 505-263-6388).

At this time, due to the unsafe conditions, evacuees are not being allowed back into their homes in the fire area. The fire is 0 percent contained, and due to upcoming hot, dry and windy weather, the area will be extremely dangerous.

Air quality: Information on air quality is at New Mexico Department of Health Environmental Public Health Tracking, <https://nmtracking.org/fire>. An interactive smoke map at <https://fire.airnow.gov/> allows you to zoom into your area to see the latest smoke conditions.

Closures: New Mexico State Police have closed NM Highway 4 from the junction with NM 126 east to nearly the NM 501 intersection at the Los Alamos "back gate." Please stay clear of the Jemez Springs area to keep yourself and firefighters safe.

Fire Restrictions: The Santa Fe National Forest is preparing a closure order to restrict public access to the area around the fire. Stage II Fire Restrictions are in effect for the Santa Fe National Forest, which prohibits building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire, or stove including charcoal and briquettes. Smoking is also prohibited except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site or while stopped in an area at least 3 feet in diameter that is cleared of flammable material. For other activities prohibited under Stage II Fire Restrictions, see <https://www.fs.usda.gov/santafe/>

Also, due to ongoing fire threats, Sandoval County will not issue burn permits.

Temporary Flight Restriction: There is a flight restriction on the area over the fire (10 nautical miles southwest of Los Alamos, NOTAM 2/2366). <https://www.tfr.faa.gov>. Drones over the fire are also prohibited.