



# FACT SHEET

## Wildfire Update

**September 9, 2022**

**Contact:** Public Affairs Officer – Tod McKay  
**Phone:** 406-531-1130

**What:** Mill Lake Fire  
**Discovered:** August 29<sup>th</sup>  
**Cause:** Lightning  
**Location:** Upper Mill Creek Canyon, 7 miles west of Pinesdale, MT. -- Stevensville Ranger District

**Summary:** The lightning-caused Mill Lake Fire located on the north side of Mill Canyon and north of Mill Lake, has grown to 1,589 acres. Most of the growth in the last two days occurred on the north and west sides of the fire, pushed by winds from a passing cold front. According to the latest mapping, there has been little to no growth on the east side of the fire (further down canyon) towards Pinesdale and private property.

Yesterday's winds out of the northeast actually pushed the fire back onto itself and burned several patches of dead timber within the main fire area. Smoke from other fires kept activity relatively low for most of the afternoon and last night. The fire remains confined to the Upper Mill Creek drainage and has not crossed over to Upper Sheafman Canyon or the Fred Burr drainages.

**Terrain:** The fire is burning in very steep, rugged, and inaccessible terrain with large boulder fields, and a heavy component of dead standing timber (snags). Due to the difficult terrain and no landing locations for a helicopter, the fire is not currently staffed. The terrain and the presence of snag trees, limits the ability to safely place firefighters directly on the fire.

**Fire Behavior:** Isolated single tree/group tree torching creating short range spotting when conditions align. Clear skies today and more ventilation will help to increase fire activity as the inversions and smoke lift.

**Planned Actions:** Multiple helicopters (Type 1 & 2) have been conducting water bucket drops on the fire each day this week. The helicopters have been very effective at checking and slowing the fire's spread. Helicopters will be used again today, and this weekend (water drops) as needed.

Firefighters are continuing to clear brush and thin fuels along Sheafman Road from Cow Creek Trailhead to Sheafman Trailhead. They are also doing fuels prep/reduction from Cow Creek Trailhead along the private land down to and including Mill Creek Trailhead. Crews will continue scouting for further opportunities to build indirect fire line.

**Additional Resources:** A 20-person hand crew (Type 2) and an additional engine (Type 6) will arrive today to assist crews with digging hand line and fuels reduction work. Heavy

equipment has also been ordered (excavator and processor) to begin work on a shaded fuel break from the Mill Creek Trailhead south along the private land.

**Weather:** A Canadian cold front will bring breezy east to northeast winds to western Montana today with gusts up to 20 mph. The front will also bring cooler temperatures and higher humidity. Chances for wetting rains are very low. A ridge of high pressure will rebuild over our area on Sunday through at least next Tuesday, bringing warmer and drier conditions.

**Safety Concerns/Closures:** Firefighter and public safety is always the highest priority during a wildfire. No amount of protection for a structure or resource is worth the loss of human life. No structures or infrastructure are currently threatened by the Mill Lake Fire. An emergency road closure and several trail closures, including Mill Creek Trail #364 are in place for public safety. For additional closure information visit <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/8392>.

**Fire Danger:** Fire Danger is currently "Extreme" on the Bitterroot National Forest, the highest level possible. Stage 2 Fire Restrictions also remain in place. Visit <https://www.mtfireinfo.org/> for more information on local fire restrictions.

**2022 Fire Season:** This summer, there have been 59 wildfires on the Bitterroot National Forest; 10 human-caused and 49 lightning fires.

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