



EMERGENCY CLOSURE ORDER OF THE FOREST SUPERVISOR
BWCAW Spice lake Wildfire 'Decreased Closure' Order
ON THE SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST

Effective June 21, 2023

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Order NO: 09-09-23-04

Q. Why was there a closure for a small wildfire?

A. No two fires are alike, it is about the complexity of the fire. And due to the complexity of the Spice Lake fire, the initial 100,000-acres closure was necessary. The circumstances were not normal, the drought, warm temperatures, unpredictable high winds, and fuel loads created a dangerous condition for our firefighters and the recreating public. In addition, the fire is/was in a unique area of the Forest – a designated Wilderness, which is managed differently from other management areas. As we learned during the Greenwood fire, the closure order is/was needed to prioritize safety.

Additional factors considered for this closure included but are not limited to: the area being highly remote, it has limited communication capacity, it takes an extended length of time to paddle the area, the capacity for extreme fire behavior, and excessive fuel conditions all lead to a large fire growth potential. These factors combined require a calculated closure plan until we have complete containment for safety purposes.

The decreased closure has been made effective at 100% containment and for the safety of visitors.

Q. Will the Forest reinstate the BWCAW visitor use quota permits to the area that were cancelled?

A. The forest is in contact the cooperators and BWCAW permit holders who cancelled permits for Moose, Snowbank, Seagull, and Saganaga Lakes, and the Kekekabic Trail (east). The forest will reinstate the remaining quota to the system that was withheld thru July 7.

Q. If I utilized a BWCAW cooperator to obtain my quota permit for this area, what do I do?

A. Contact that cooperator to discuss your trip and possible options, including available quota permits in other areas.

Q. What BWCAW entry points were affected by this Closure order?

A. Although one can access this area through several entry points, Moose, Saganaga, Seagull, and Snowbank Lakes are the entry points that most people use to travel to the area affected by the closure order. These entry point quota will be reinstated, however, please note there are 6 lakes with 13 campsites, and 8 portages that remain closed.

- BWCAW Lakes:
 - Annie Lake
 - Kingfisher Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake
 - Skindance Lake
 - Spice Lake
 - Tickle Lake



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- **BWCAW Portages:**
 - Jasper Lake to Kingfisher
 - Kingfisher Lake to Ogishkemuncie Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake to Holt Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake to Skindance Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake to Spice Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake to Annie Lake
 - Ogishkemuncie Lake to Mueller Lake
 - Annie Lake to Jenny Lake

Q. How long will this fire closure be in place?

A. Safety closures on public lands help to reduce interference with emergency crews and allow for fire suppression and burned area recovery. The Forest Closure Order is effective June 21, and will remain in effect until the fire is fully contained. The Forest would like to express gratitude for the public's patience as we work to reopen 99,000 acres of the initial closure. The remaining 1,000-acres +/- will remain closed until further notice.

Please remain vigilant while recreating on all public lands. Fuel conditions remain very dry and new fire starts are possible from improperly extinguished or abandoned campfires, lightning strikes, or cigarette butts. Help us thank firefighters by protecting your community from new, human-caused fires by following important campfire fire restrictions still in place across the forest.

Q. How do I find updates, photos or general information about the Spice Lake Wildfire?

A. Inciweb information for this incident, as well as for other fires, can be found at <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident-information/mnsuf-spice-lake-fire>

Q. How many BWCAW campsites are affected by this closure? And are there quota permits available for other Wilderness entry points?

A. The initial closure included 80 campsites, the new decreased closure only effects 13 campsites.
Yes, there are quota permits available at other entry points.

Q. Did the Forest Service use a full suppression approach to this wildfire?

A. Yes, the Forest Service used full suppression on this fire. By Forest Service policy, every fire receives a strategic, risk-based response appropriate for the circumstances and associated threats and forest health opportunities. Each strategy considers the full spectrum of management actions that contemplate fire and fuel conditions, weather, values at risk and resource availability.



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Fire danger is high from Duluth through the Arrowhead region due to drought conditions, warm weather, and high winds. Fire danger is likely to remain high at least through the end of June and can increase again throughout the summer. In addition to weather conditions, this area includes high fuel loads due to spruce budworm affected trees, both standing and downed, that can increase fire behavior.

Because of these factors, the Type 3 team prioritized firefighter safety using indirect tactics to suppress the fire. These are not usual conditions, so the Forest Service is responding in the safest and most effective way possible.

Q. What does mopping and gridding mean as applied to fighting wildfire?

A. **Mopping** up involves putting water on the fire, and using tools to mix it into the soil and duff to extinguish the heat until the area is cooled.

Gridding is walking through the burned area in an organized pattern to seek out and extinguish pockets of heat and smoke.

Q: What is the difference between a controlled and a contained wildfire?

A: A **contained** wildfire means that a containment line has been placed around the entire perimeter of the fire, and any associated spot fires, that can reasonably be expected to stop the fires' spread. The fire continues to burn actively within the bounds of the line, but its spread is less likely. A containment line includes any natural (lake, river, road, etc.) or constructed barrier that block the spread of a fire. A humanmade control line is a strip of ground that has been dug, burned out or otherwise cleared of fuel. The necessary width of a control line depends upon a variety of factors, including wind, weather, landscape and the height of the flames. A faster traveling fire requires a wider containment line. Containment is often referred to in terms of percentages.

A fire is considered **controlled** with the completion of a control line that has been strengthened and secured making it unlikely for the fire to escape the bounds of the line. To be considered controlled, firefighters need to have cooled any hotspots adjacent to the line and removed any unburnt fuel in the area surrounding the line. In other words, a controlled wildfire is safer than a contained wildfire.

Q. Can I fly a recreational drone over the wildfire to take photos?

A. No, flying drones or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) within or near a wildfire without permission could cause injury or death to firefighters and hamper their ability to protect lives, property, and natural cultural resources. Also, recreational UAS devices are illegal in designated wilderness, such as the BWCAW, at all times.



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Individuals who fly UAS without authorization over wildfires may be violating federal, state, and/or local laws, regulations, and ordinances, whether a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) is in place or not. All unauthorized UAS flights over wildfires on National Forest System lands will be reported to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and law enforcement agencies.

Individuals who have been determined to have endangered manned aircraft or people on the ground with a UAS and/or interfered with wildfire suppression may be subject to civil penalties, including fines of up to \$25,000, and potentially criminal prosecution.

Q. How are current air quality conditions affecting wildfire operations?

A. Currently there is an air quality alert in affect for northern and central Minnesota due to wildfire smoke from Canada.

Safety is our number one priority and, in some instances, aviation resources like planes, helicopters, etc. may not be used in suppressing a fire because of continued air pollution from Canadian wildfires.