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News Release

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Pass Fire update for May 27

Fire allowed to play its natural role in maintaining forest and prairie ecosystems

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, NM, May 27, 2023 – The Pass Fire on the Gila National Forest, Black Range Ranger District has grown to approximately 8,261 acres over the past 9 days. The Gila Las Cruces Zone Type 3 Team, led by Incident Commander Pete Valenzuela assumed command this morning.

The fire is located south of New Mexico Highway 59, about 1 mile west of Wolf Hollow Campground, and along the northern Gila Wilderness boundary. Camping is not recommended at Wolf Hollow due to the likelihood of fire reaching the area and heavy localized firefighter activity. Fire is progressing to the south, east, and west, consuming mostly down logs, dead grass, and pine needles beneath a ponderosa pine-dominated forest canopy.

One hundred people are currently working the Pass Fire, including a large number of youths who are supporting the fire at the Incident Command Post, gaining work experience and exposure to public land management. A Job Corps kitchen crew began serving meals this morning and camp yurts are being maintained by a contracted youth crew out of California. Fire crews are cutting back grass and removing surface fuels to protect range and other infrastructure. A Helitack crew will begin cleaning up a helispot on Black Mountain in preparation for structure protection of Black Mountain Lookout.

“Responders have done some great work up to now, protecting values at risk and keeping the fire south of Highway 59, while allowing fire to play its natural role in the forest,” said Valenzuela. “The work we’re doing is helping to restore resiliency to these lands and watersheds.”

A variety of tactics will be used commensurate with public and firefighter safety, values at risk, and likelihood of success. Values at risk include small private land parcels, range fences, water pipelines and stock tanks, powerlines, recreation sites, roads, a research site, historic features, sensitive wildlife habitats, wetlands, and watershed resources. They will be protected as appropriate if fire reaches pre-identified management action points.

Firefighters are using control elements, such as roads, trails and landscape features to safely confine and contain the fire within the desired area identified by resource specialists. A large

planning area allows for the Pass Fire to ultimately encompass about 75,000 acres south of Highway 59, including much of the northern Gila Wilderness east of Indian Creek, north of the Middle Fork Gila River and the Adobe Springs and White Rocks trails, and west of the East Fork Gila River and Beaver Creek.

Decisions about whether to fully suppress a naturally ignited wildfire or to manage for natural resource objectives depend on a number of factors including the ignition source, location, fuels, suppression resource availability, expected fire weather conditions, and seasonal outlook.

Weather over the fire area will be partly cloudy this morning, turning mostly sunny this afternoon, with highs from 68 to 83, depending on elevation. Relative humidity will drop to 10 to 15% this afternoon, and there's a 10% chance of precipitation today.

Several fire scars exist around the area of the Pass Fire, which will help serve as containment features, should the fire reach them. Pass Fire ignited within the 2005 Bull Fire perimeter, which removed a large amount of ladder fuels from much of the area. The 2012 Whitewater Baldy fire scar is a few miles west of the western edge of the Pass Fire, and the more distant 2021 Johnson Fire and 2022 Black Fire scars lie to the south and east.

Please use caution when entering or passing through the area, as heavy firefighter traffic and activity may exist along area roads. Air inversions are likely to cause low-lying smoke to settle into valleys overnight that may obscure visibility for travel. Smoke-sensitive individuals should follow recommendations at [NM Fire Info | Smoke Management](#). More information about the Pass Fire is available at [Nmgnf Pass Fire Information | InciWeb \(nwcg.gov\)](#) and on New Mexico Fire Information at [Fire crews responding to Pass Fire near Indian Creek CabinNM Fire Info](#). For more information contact Maribeth Pecotte at 575-388-8211 or Maribeth.Pecotte@usda.gov.

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