



NORTHERN ROCKIES TEAM 3

INCIDENT COMMANDER: MIKE BEHRENS

Big Knife & Niarada Fires

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe

Fire Information: 406-426-9595 | 2023.BigKnife@firenet.gov

<https://tinyurl.com/BigKnifeFire>

| <https://tinyurl.com/NiaradaMillPocketFires>

August 2, 2023

Location: Big Knife - 5 miles east of Arlee, Montana | Niarada - 12 miles west of Elmo, Montana | Mill Pocket: 3 miles West of Highway 28 and the Niarada Fire **Start Date:** Big Knife - 7/24/2023 | Niarada - 7/30/2023 | Mill Pocket – 7/30/2023
Cause: Lightning **Total Personnel:** 188 total **Engines:** 19 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 4
Size: Big Knife - 2,000 acres, 0% contained | Niarada - 8,400 acres, 0% contained | Mill Pocket – 2000 acres, 80% contained)

Mike Behrens' Northern Rockies Team 3 began managing the Big Knife and Niarada fires August 2, 2023, at 6:00 a.m. A community meeting for the Big Knife, Niarada, and Mill Pocket fires will be held on Thursday, August 3, 2023, at the Arlee Community Center, 34086 Pow Wow Rd. in Arlee at 6:00 PM. This meeting will be broadcast live on the CSKT Division of Fire Facebook page (www.facebook.com/CSKT.Division.of.Fire). A second community meeting will be held on Friday, August 4, 2023, in Elmo with more details to come soon.

The Big Knife Fire continued to be very active Tuesday, burning across the Big Knife drainage to the north late in the day. The fire is burning in extremely steep, inaccessible terrain for most equipment, so crews continue to try to flank the fire and help stop the spread toward the valley floor. They are aided by aircraft as conditions allow, although visibility has hindered some air operations across the multiple fires. Big Knife Fire remains visible from Missoula and throughout the Jocko Valley.

Although the Niarada Fire was also very active Tuesday, fire behavior around Niarada and Highway 28 had decreased enough to enable authorities to reopen Highway 28. The fire is burning in mixed grass and shrub fuels, helping the fire to spread quickly in hot, dry, windy conditions. Crews, heavy equipment (dozers and skideons), engines, and aerial resources continue to work the fire. They have been working to build firelines from safe anchor points and protect structures in the area. Last night, the Flathead Interagency Hot Shot Crew implemented successful strategic firing operations north of the highway to secure the line on the north perimeter nearest Lake Mary Ronan.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

Hot, dry, windy weather is forecast for the coming week. Based upon current weather conditions and fire behavior trends, this weather will likely result in high potential for very active fire behavior and large fire growth.

CLOSURES AND SPECIAL MESSAGES

Stage 2 evacuations are in effect for a few residences around the Niarada Fire. Residences around both fires are under Stage 1 evacuation warnings. The Lake County Sheriff's Office asks residents to be mindful of changing conditions and any new fire starts. Closures surrounding both fire areas are necessary to protect the safety and welfare of the public and provide for safe firefighting efforts and access. Specific closure information and maps are posted on Inciweb as they are implemented.

Use extreme caution when driving on Highway 28. Visibility is very poor and the speed limit has been reduced to 45 mph. Crews and equipment are working along the road edge and fire vehicles are present.

