



NORTHERN ROCKIES TEAM 3

INCIDENT COMMANDER: MIKE BEHRENS

Big Knife, Niarada, & Mill Pocket Fires

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

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

<https://tinyurl.com/BigKnifeFire>



<https://tinyurl.com/NiaradaMillPocketFires>



August 5, 2023

Location: Big Knife - 5 miles east of Arlee, MT | Niarada - 12 miles west of Elmo, MT | Mill Pocket: 3 miles West of Hwy. 28

Start Date: Big Knife - 7/24/2023 | Niarada - 7/30/2023 | Mill Pocket – 7/30/2023 **Cause:** Lightning

Big Knife- 4,636 acres, 0% contained | **Niarada** –17,024 acres, 0% contained | **Mill Pocket** – 2,135 acres, 0% contained

Total Personnel: 254 total **Engines:** 19 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 6

Big Knife Fire

The Big Knife Fire remained active Friday and continues to burn to the southeast into the South Fork Jocko Tribal Primitive Areas. The fire is burning in extremely steep terrain, fueled by heavy timber and significant dead and down fuels. Crews continue to try to flank the fire, implement structure protection measures along Canal Road and the fire's western edge, and monitor the southwest edge. Heavy equipment operators completed a mastication line along the fire's southwestern edge. Firefighters performed a strategic firing operation late Friday to keep the fire north of Agency Creek. Aircraft are aiding crews as conditions allow, although limited visibility has hindered some air operations.

Niarada Fire & Mill Pocket Fire

The Niarada Fire was extremely active Friday on the south and southeast sides. Hand crews, heavy equipment, engines, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft continue to work the fire, building firelines from safe anchor points and protecting structures in the area. Firefighters continue to work along Cromwell Creek Road, improving and holding that line. Erratic winds and heavy fuels are hampering containment along the fire's eastern and southeastern heads. One flank of the fire south of Highway 28 spread rapidly Friday afternoon, requiring authorities to close Highway 28 temporarily. The fire's southeastern head made a strong push late Friday. Due to concerns about another push Saturday, the Lake County Sheriff's Office implemented evacuations of approximately 150 residences (see details below). Firefighters working the Mill Pocket Fire completed initial fireline around a spot fire along the fire's northwestern perimeter. They will continue to try to hold and improve that line.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

Low pressure began moving into the general area late Friday, bringing slightly cooler temperatures, increased relative humidity, and even light precipitation early Saturday to the Arlee area. Conditions around Niarada and Mill Pocket fires continue to be drier than those around the Big Knife Fire. Meteorologists forecast increased potential for thunderstorms and light precipitation over the weekend, with a slight drying trend into next week. Although incoming moisture may help to temporarily moderate potential fire behavior (lessening the chance of long runs and torching in the short-term), thunderstorms also bring concerns related to erratic, outflow winds, which could gust to 30 miles per hour over the weekend. Based upon weather conditions and trends, there is continued potential for active fire behavior and large fire growth.



CLOSURES AND SPECIAL MESSAGES

The Lake County Sheriff has placed several areas near the base of the mountains west of the Big Knife Fire in PRE-EVACUATION status. See the map for those locations in yellow (Jocko, Canal, Francis). In the Tribal Primitive Area, Belmore Slough and Burnt Cabin Roads are closed.

Near the Niarada Fire, the Lake County Sheriff placed several residences in the following areas in-EVACUATION status: Alexander Road, Early Dawn Road, Spring Lane Road, Walking Horse Lane, Windward Heights Road, Wildhorse View, Buffalo Bridge Road, Saddle Drive, Island Butte Lane, Bridle Path, Ten Deuce Way, Cliffview Drive, and Ricketts Road. The remainder of the town of Elmo is in READY status. The Flathead County Sheriff's Office has issued a PRE-EVACUATION WARNING for Hubbart Dam Rd/NF-544 from the intersection of Crossover Rd South to Hwy 28. A MANDATORY EVACUATION remains in place from the top of the Pass on Brown's Meadow Road South to Hwy 28, Nirada. This mandatory evacuation also includes Kofford Ridge Rd.

Use extreme caution when driving on Highway 28. Authorities reduced speed limits to 45 mph due to poor visibility, and firefighters and equipment are still working in the area.

