



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 6, 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 **Structures Lost:** 4
Big Knife- 4,864 acres, 0% contained | **Niarada** –17,514acres, 0% contained | **Mill Pocket** – 2,135 acres, 0% contained
Total Personnel: 505 total **Engines:** 27 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 8

Big Knife Fire

Saturday's moisture over the Big Knife Fire area helped moderate fire behavior and growth, and the fire primarily burned in the heavy fuels- backing, flanking, and creeping. The fire is burning in extremely steep terrain, fueled by heavy timber and significant dead and down fuels. Heavy equipment operators completed a mastication line along the fire's southwestern edge to reduce fuels, and firefighters continued holding and improving a strategic firing operation they completed 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 also received some very light precipitation Saturday, sufficient to help moisten fine (grassy) fuels but insufficient to be considered a "wetting rain." Heavy fuels near the fire's southeastern perimeter continued to torch Saturday. Fixed-wing scooper planes supported ground crews to help cool heavy fuels and catch the fire as it came into the grass west of White Earth Creek. Crews continued to assess and prepare structure protection measures northwest of Elmo if erratic winds push the fire in that direction again. Firefighters also continued holding and mopping up line north of Highway 28, along Cromwell Creek Road. This weekend's moisture will allow crews to capitalize on reduced fire behavior. Firefighters will be working on a direct line along the fire's southeastern fire edge where it is safe. Firefighters working the Mill Pocket Fire continue to hold and improve the fireline around the fire's northwestern perimeter, which is hung up in scree fields.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

Much-needed precipitation began occurring over all fire areas Saturday; however, amounts vary significantly between Arlee and Elmo. Humidity and fuel moistures around the Niarada and Mill Pocket fires continue to be drier than those around the Big Knife Fire. Meteorologists forecast increased potential for thunderstorms and precipitation Sunday, with a slight drying trend into next week. Although incoming moisture may help temporarily moderate potential fire behavior (lessening the chance of long runs and torching in the short term), thunderstorms also bring concerns about erratic, outflow winds. Weather conditions and trends show continued potential for active fire behavior in the coming week.



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 Friday afternoon: 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.

Fire managers are working with the Lake and Flathead County sheriff's offices to constantly address the current evacuation orders. The decision to lift or expand any evacuation areas or status is made based upon the current and predicted fire conditions, done in concert with all decision-making parties, and will be announced through official channels.

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.

