



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 7, 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, 5% contained | **Niarada** -18,366 acres, 7% contained | **Mill Pocket**- 2,135 acres, 35% contained
Total Personnel: 548 total **Engines:** 33 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 9

Big Knife Fire

Continued moisture over the Big Knife Fire continues to moderate fire behavior and growth, primarily smoldering, creeping, and backing in the heavy fuels. Heavy equipment operators completed a mastication line along the fire's southwestern edge to reduce fuels and have started work mulching vegetation along Jocko Canyon Road. Firefighters continued holding and improving a strategic firing operation they conducted Friday and Saturday to keep the fire north of Agency Creek, and structure protection crews are assessing structures in the Jocko Canyon area. Aircraft are aiding firefighters as conditions allow, although limited visibility has hindered some air operations. Resource Advisors are working with fire managers to ensure cultural and natural resource values are evaluated and protected during suppression activities.

Niarada Fire & Mill Pocket Fire

The Niarada Fire continued to receive light precipitation over the weekend, further moderating fire behavior and allowing crews more opportunities to construct direct fire lines immediately adjacent to the fire in some areas. Additionally, a large complement of engines and hand crews arrived Sunday to help bolster suppression efforts. Firefighters continued working to secure lines along Cromwell Creek Road on the fire's northeastern perimeter, cooling hotspots and mopping up inward from control lines approximately 15-20 feet. Crews also continued assessing and preparing structure protection measures outside Elmo towards Big Arm. However, heavy fuels and steep terrain still hamper direct containment in certain areas along the fire's southeastern perimeter. Fire managers are shifting some crews from other areas of the Niarada and Mill Pocket fires to the southern and eastern sides of the fire to prepare for potential firing operations over the next few days. These operations reduce fuels between firelines and the active fire edge, helping to build a fuel break along the constructed line. Firefighters working the Mill Pocket Fire continue to improve constructed firelines, and much of the line is secure enough to consider the fire approximately 35% contained. However, work continues on the northwestern edge.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

Precipitation totals from the weekend vary significantly across the Mission and Jocko valleys, but moisture over the Big Knife and Niarada fires has significantly moistened the smaller and medium size fuels. Meteorologists forecast chances for showers and thunderstorms through at least Monday, with a slight drying trend through the week. Although incoming moisture may help temporarily moderate potential fire behavior (lessening the chance of long runs and torching in the short term), trends show potential for drying and 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 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.



A Type 2 crew from Georgia conducts mop-up operations along Cromwell Creek on the northeaster perimeter on Sunday, August 6. Photo Credit: Joe Zwierzchowski

