



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 8, 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**-20,365 acres, 25% contained | **Mill Pocket**- 2,135 acres, 35% contained
Total Personnel: 501 total **Engines:** 44 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 7

Big Knife Fire

Monday ushered in a return of a warming and drying trend around the Big Knife Fire. Although the fire behavior is still reduced (primarily smoldering and creeping), fuels are beginning to dry out again. Heavy equipment operators completed a mastication line along the fire's southwestern edge to reduce fuels and have been using existing road prisms to help extend and improve constructed firelines. Crews are assessing and implementing point protection measures, as well as mulching vegetation along Jocko Canyon and Canal roads, in the event firing operations are necessary to hold the fire south of Jocko River. Firefighters continued holding, improving, and mopping up the edge of a strategic firing operation they conducted Friday and Saturday to keep the fire north of Agency Creek. Aircraft are aiding firefighters as conditions allow. 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

Conditions around the Niarada Fire are drying out, although fire behavior was reduced enough that Flathead and Lake County sheriff's offices downgraded some evacuation statuses Monday afternoon (see details below). Firelines around the northern perimeter continue to hold, and crews on the fire's northeastern perimeter along Cromwell Creek Road made progress mopping up. Heavy fuels and steep terrain continue hampering efforts along the fire's eastern and southeastern edge. Therefore, firefighters are trying to tie pieces of line together using direct fireline construction, dozer lines, and indirect lines (which will likely require firing operations to secure). Firefighters rely on aircraft to cool hotspots and heavy fuels sufficiently, so direct fireline construction is feasible.

Structure protection crews continue to work outside Elmo towards Big Arm, and a night shift helps keep watch over changing conditions and fire behavior. Firefighters working the Mill Pocket Fire continue to improve constructed firelines, and aerial resources help cool hotspots in the steep, treacherous scree slopes along the fire's northwestern edge.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

Precipitation totals from the weekend vary significantly across the Mission and Jocko valleys. Still, the moisture could be short-lived, as a warming and drying trend is expected in our area. Meteorologists forecast warmer temperatures, returning to highs in the 80s, and gusty winds by Wednesday. By mid-week, small, medium, and heavy fuels will likely be dried out sufficiently to result in active fire behavior once again.



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.

The Lake County Sheriff's Office is downgrading those in EVACUATION status near the Niarada Fire in Lake County to a PRE-EVACUATION WARNING. This area includes 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.

A PRE-EVACUATION WARNING means you may return to your home. However, as there is still a potential threat from the Niarada Fire, please do not bring back evacuated livestock until the area is downgraded to READY status. The remainder of the town of Elmo is in READY status.

A temporary flight restriction (TFR) is in effect around both fire areas. Do not fly unmanned aircraft (drones) near the fire areas, as that is hazardous for pilots, as well as the firefighters on the ground who rely on our air resources.

Use extreme caution when driving on Highway 28. Although authorities have removed the modified speed limit on Highway 28, firefighters and equipment are still working in the area.

Fire managers will host a public meeting tomorrow, Wednesday, August 9 in Elmo, 6 PM, at the Elmo Community Center, as well as a public meeting Thursday, August 10 in Arlee, 6 PM, at the Arlee Community Center.

FIRE RESTRICTIONS

Stage 2 fire restrictions are in place across the Flathead Indian Reservation. No campfires are allowed, no smoking outside of vehicles, no operating combustible engines between 1PM-1AM, no operating vehicles off designated roads and trails. Residents and visitors are encouraged to visit www.MTFireInfo.org for more fire information across Montana.



Firefighters working directly along the southwestern edge of the Niarada Fire.
Photo Credit: Joe Zwierzchowski

