



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 9, 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, 51% contained
Total Personnel: 666 total **Engines:** 50 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 12

Community meeting TONIGHT!

Please join us tonight, **Wednesday, August 9, at the Elmo Community Center at 6 PM** for a public meeting. We will hold a second public meeting tomorrow, Thursday, August 10, at the Arlee Community Center at 6 PM. Both meetings will be live-streamed via the CSKT Division of Fire Facebook page, and we will provide status updates for all three fires.

Big Knife Fire

Although fuels in upper elevations are still quite wet, lower elevations and exposed aspects around the Big Knife Fire are drying out following recent precipitation. Heavy equipment operators continue working to tie existing road prisms into constructed firelines along the fire's southwestern perimeter. Additional crews and engines arrived Tuesday to help complete point protection measures and mulch vegetation along Jocko Canyon and Canal roads, should firing operations become necessary to hold the fire south of Jocko River. Firefighters continued improving and mopping up the edge of a strategic firing operation they conducted late last week 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

Firefighters continue to improve firelines around the perimeter of the Niarada Fire. Crews are cooling the fire's edge (mop-up) along Cromwell Creek Road and assessing pockets of unburned fuels west of that line to evaluate whether they pose concerns for containment. Heavy fuels and steep terrain continue hampering efforts along the fire's eastern and southeastern edge; however, crews and equipment operators have constructed initial firelines around much of that perimeter. Firefighters will likely need to perform firing operations to secure portions of the indirect line. Still, those operations will need to be conducted when conditions are right. Firefighters will continue to rely on aircraft to cool hotspots and heavy fuels to slow fire spread and make direct line construction 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.

Yesterday a type 1 helicopter conducting water drops helped firefighters working Mill Pocket Fire cool the northwest side where heat remains in treacherous scree slopes. Firefighters will continue to mop up and monitor the fire's edge.



WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

A dry front approaching western Montana is expected to bring west to northwest winds Wednesday through Thursday, gusting 25-30 miles per hour. Meteorologists forecast warmer temperatures with highs in the 80s. 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, and the firefighters on the ground who rely on aircraft support. Remember, if you fly, we can't!

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 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-1PM, no operating vehicles off designated roads and trails. Residents and visitors are encouraged to visit www.MTFireInfo.org for more fire information across Montana.



A firefighter stands on a constructed dozer line on the southwestern side of the Niarada Fire. Photo Credit: Joe Zwierzchowski

