



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 10, 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-4,952 acres, 5% contained | **Niarada**-20,365 acres, 39% contained | **Mill Pocket**- 2,135 acres, 51% contained
Total Personnel: 742 total **Engines:** 46 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 17

Community meeting TONIGHT!

Please join us tonight, **Thursday, August 10, at the Arlee Community Center at 6 PM** for a public meeting. We will live-stream the meeting via the CSKT Division of Fire Facebook page, and we will provide status updates for all three fires.

Big Knife Fire

A passing cold front late Wednesday brought precipitation to the Big Knife Fire area, further dampening fire behavior. Despite the rain, fire managers are evaluating long-term potential fire growth due to the projected weather patterns and season. Heavy equipment operators are tying existing road prisms into constructed firelines along the fire's southwestern perimeter. Crews continue assessing and implementing point protection measures to protect infrastructure and cultural resources identified by Resource Advisors. Firefighters are 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, and fire managers used an Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) to perform reconnaissance and infrared (IR) detection flights in South Fork Jock Canyon and Agency Creek areas on Wednesday.

Niarada Fire & Mill Pocket Fire

Light rain fell over much of the Niarada and Mill Pocket fire areas Wednesday, further wetting small and medium fuels. However, much of the moisture is not penetrating heavy timber canopies. The cooler, wetter weather enabled firefighters to build more direct handline than was possible a few days ago. Crews continue mopping up along Cromwell Creek Road (working inward from the fire's edge) 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. Firefighters will likely need to perform firing operations when conditions are conducive to secure portions of the indirect line in that area. Structure protection crews continue to work outside Elmo towards Big Arm, and a night shift helps keep watch over changing conditions and fire behavior.

A type 1 helicopter conducting water drops cooled hot spots still smoldering in treacherous scree along the Mill Pocket Fire's northwestern edge. At the same time, firefighters on the ground are patrolling and mopping up the remaining fire perimeter.



WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

The cold front passing over the fire areas mid-week will continue to bring gusty winds up to 25-30 miles per hour. Meteorologists forecast warmer temperatures with highs in the 80s and a slow warming/drying trend. By the weekend, small and medium fuels (especially at low elevations) will likely dry out enough to increase fire behavior.

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-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.



The Flathead Hotshots working on the southeast side of the Niarada Fire. Photo Credit: Flathead Interagency Hotshot Crew

