



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 11, 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, 47% contained | **Mill Pocket**- 2,135 acres, 51% contained
Total Personnel: 721 total **Engines:** 46 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 16

Big Knife Fire

Despite recent rain, the Big Knife Fire area is expected to warm and dry over the coming days. Historically, fire seasons often persist until early fall in this area. As a result, fire managers are evaluating the long-term potential fire growth of the Big Knife Fire. Heavy equipment operators continue to tie 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 helicopters dropped water on hot spots in the Agency Creek drainage.

Niarada Fire & Mill Pocket Fire

Firefighters working on the Niarada Fire capitalized on Wednesday's rain. Specialized crews of skilled sawyers are cutting down fire-killed snags (dead-standing trees) south of Highway 28. This will allow hand crews access to previously hazardous areas to build direct handline. Crews continue to work directly along the fire's eastern and southeastern edge where feasible. Firefighters are preparing lines in some areas that may eventually need strategic firing operations. These operations will be done when conditions allow and used to secure portions of the indirect fireline along the fire's southeastern perimeter. Structure protection crews continue to work outside Elmo towards Big Arm, and a night shift helps keep watch over changing conditions and fire behavior. On the north perimeter, crews are still mopping up near Cromwell Creek Road and assessing patches of unburned vegetation west of that line to evaluate whether it poses concerns for containment.

Much of Mill Pocket Fire is in mop-up and patrol status. However, crews are still working along the fire's northwestern perimeter near Mill Creek, in steep scree slopes, mopping up hot spots where they can access. Helicopters dropping water continue to support crews by cooling hot spots in unsafe or inaccessible areas.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

A slow warming and drying trend is returning to western Montana as a weak high-pressure system builds over our area, and meteorologists forecast warmer temperatures with highs in the 70s-80s. 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. 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.



Crews working on the southwest side of the Big Knife Fire, patrolling fireline and identifying hazard trees. Photo Credit: Joe Zwierzchowski

