



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](mailto:2023.BigKnife@firenet.gov)

<https://tinyurl.com/BigKnifeFire>

<https://tinyurl.com/NiaradaMillPocketFires>



**August 12, 2023**

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**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, 7% contained | **Niarada**–20,365 acres, 59% contained | **Mill Pocket**– 2,135 acres, 66% contained  
**Total Personnel:** 708 total **Engines:** 46 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 16

## Big Knife Fire

The warming and drying trend over the Big Knife Fire resulted in smoldering fuels in lower to mid-elevations burning more actively again. Aircraft are aiding firefighters as conditions allow, and helicopters dropped water on hot spots in the Agency Creek, Jocko Canyon, and Big Knife Creek drainages Friday. Firefighters have completed line preparation and vegetation reduction along Jocko Canyon/Canal Road. Equipment operators and crews completed control lines along the fire's southwestern edge to Agency Creek. They will continue working southward if the fire moves in that direction. On the fire's eastern side, crews began performing structure and point protection measures in South Fork Jocko River. Some measures included strategically wrapping Jocko Lookout and placing pumps and sprinklers around other resource values at risk. A specialized assessment team continues evaluating the long-term potential fire growth of the Big Knife Fire.

## Niarada Fire & Mill Pocket Fire

Firefighters working on the Niarada Fire are pushing hard toward containment, and much of the fire's northern and western perimeter is now in mop-up and patrol status. Crews along the eastern and southeastern fire perimeter continue progressing, building more direct lines and working off the fire's black edge. Some indirect line will remain the only viable option around the fire's southerly perimeter, where terrain is treacherous and fuels are heavy. Strategic firing operations will likely be necessary during favorable conditions to secure those portions of indirect line. Specialized crews of skilled sawyers continued cutting fire-killed snags (dead-standing trees) south of Highway 28, enabling safe access for hand crews to previously hazardous areas. Structure protection crews continue to work outside Elmo towards Big Arm. Due to current conditions and progress, a night shift is no longer deemed necessary; however, it could be reinstated if conditions change.

Much of Mill Pocket Fire is in mop-up and patrol status. However, with the support of helicopters dropping water, crews are still working along the fire's northwestern perimeter near Mill Creek, in steep scree slopes, mopping up hot spots that are accessible.

## WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

High pressure is building over the fire areas, bringing warmer temperatures and progressively lower relative humidity as the weekend passes. As humidity drops and fuel moistures return to levels observed before last week's storms, heavy fuels that have been smoldering are returning to life. Fire activity and behavior will likely increase through 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.

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](http://www.MTFireInfo.org) for more fire information across Montana.



Photo of crews installing structure protection wrap on the Jocko Lookout.  
Photo Credit: Amy Helena, Division Supervisor.

