



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 14, 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, 7% contained | **Niarada**-20,365 acres, 79% contained | **Mill Pocket**-2,135 acres, 89% contained

Total Personnel: 623 total **Engines:** 42 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 15

Big Knife Fire

On Sunday, fire activity increased as expected as temperatures got hotter and humidity levels lower. On the north perimeter at Gold Creek, helicopters utilized water to check the fire's edge. Crews will continue to call on aircraft as needed.

Around the southwest edge, crews are assessing the fire's progress to see if it comes down the slopes to control lines. Crews are also preparing canal roads for better egress.

On the south end of the fire in the Agency Creek drainage, the Craig Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew began work to finish hazard tree mitigation and scouted opportunities to go direct. They installed hoses to tie into several prominent scree slopes and will continue working the fire's edge, moving further up the canyon.

To the east of the fire, sprinkler systems and pumps are in place around several pieces of infrastructure and the Jocko Lookout. The lookout has been covered with a fire-resistant wrap.

Niarada & Mill Pocket Fires

Strategic firing operations to help add to containment are likely to occur today on a small section on the south side of the Niarada Fire. Fighting fire with fire, firefighters will ignite the vegetation along prepared firelines to burn fuels between the lines and the wildfire's edge. This is done when weather conditions and fuel moisture levels align to manage the fire on firefighter's terms. Ultimately, a deeper black line is created and secured, increasing containment and reducing risk. These operations will cause additional smoke in the afternoon and will be conducted if conditions are right.

Crews continue to assess, patrol and mop up (cool areas containing heat) around much of the remaining fire perimeter. Areas on the fire's east and south sides show increased smoke with the hotter and drier conditions. These are primarily interior pockets of fuels continuing to burn out. With the predicted hot weather, expect more smoke in the coming days.

Structure protection crews continue to work outside Elmo toward Big Arm, testing sprinkler systems and pumps while working with landowners on additional vegetation management around structures.

Progress continues on the Mill Pocket Fire as containment increases. Much of the remaining perimeter is in mop-up and



patrol status. Some heat remains in steep scree slopes on the northwestern side, and firefighters continue to work in this area, mopping up hot spots where they can access them. Helicopters continue to drop water as needed.

WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR

A high-pressure ridge will cause hotter temperatures and drier conditions throughout the week. Tuesday likely will be the hottest day. Poor relative humidity recovery will result in more active fire behavior. Winds will remain light.

CLOSURES AND SPECIAL MESSAGES

Several areas near the base of the mountains west of the Big Knife Fire remain in PRE-EVACUATION status by order of the Lake County Sheriff. See the map for those locations in yellow (Jocko, Canal, Francis). In the Tribal Primitive Area, Belmore Slough and Burnt Cabin Roads are closed.

Near the Niarada Fire, the Lake County Sheriff's Office has a PRE-EVACUATION WARNING in place for the area that 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. The remainder of the town of Elmo is in READY status.

A PRE-EVACUATION WARNING means you may be in your home. However, as there still is a risk from both fires, those in this status should not bring back evacuated livestock until the area is downgraded to 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!

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 from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m., 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 is cold trailing, which is feeling the ground with his hand for heat to eliminate if found.

Photo Credit: Joe Zwierzchowski

