



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 15, 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, 81% contained | **Mill Pocket**-2,135 acres, 89% contained

**Total Personnel:** 616 total **Engines:** 33 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 16

## Big Knife Fire

On Monday, fire activity increased as expected as temperatures got hotter and humidity levels lower. On the north perimeter in the Gold Creek drainage, helicopters utilized water to check the fire's edge. Crews will continue to call on aircraft for water drops, reconnaissance flights, and sling loads 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 preparing canal roads for better egress and removing vegetation around power poles.

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 pumps and 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

With the hotter and drier weather, expect increased smoke this week as interior pockets of vegetation burn out. Strategic firing operations were successful Monday as firefighters burned approximately 50 acres on the south side of the Niarada Fire to secure some of the indirect lines. These firing operations are essential to building containment in areas where crews cannot be inserted safely and are only conducted when conditions allow. While these operations can put substantial smoke in the air, they ultimately reduce the duration of the fire and long-term harmful impacts. Crews will hold and improve this line in the coming days.

Crews continue to assess, patrol and mop up (cool areas containing heat) around much of the remaining fire perimeter. Suppression repair work has begun in these areas, including pulling in dozer line berms and blading roads.

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



Much of the remaining perimeter is in mop-up and patrol status on the Mill Pocket Fire. Some heat remains in steep scree slopes on the northwestern side, where firefighters continue to cool hot spots, using helicopter water drops as needed. An excavator is helping with suppression repair, pulling in dozer lines. This equipment is also used to turn over bigger stumps to reduce the remaining heat.

### **WEATHER AND FIRE BEHAVIOR**

Hot and dry weather is forecasted to continue through midweek. Temperatures will be in the high 80s to almost 100 degrees across the fire areas. Relative humidity recovery at night will be poor. Expect increased winds, resulting in critical fire weather conditions.

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



A firefighter with the Wyoming Interagency Hotshot Crew uses a drip torch for the strategic firing operations conducted on Monday on the south side of the Niarada Fire.

Photo Credit: Matt Butler, Fire Behavior Analyst Northern Rockies IMT 3

