

Petes Lake Fire Update – September 4, 2023 – 9:30 a.m.

Deschutes National Forest and Willamette National Forest

Fire Information: (541) 801-3564 Email: 2023.Peteslake@firenet.gov

Inciweb: <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident-information/orwif-petes-lake-fire>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/PetesLakeFireInfo

Resources: 229 Total Personnel | 3 Hand Crews | 4 Dozers | 4 Helicopters | 9 Engines | 6 Masticators | 2 Water Tenders

Central Oregon – The Petes Lake Fire was started by a lightning strike on Friday, August 25, near the border of the McKenzie River Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest and the Bend Fort-Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest in the Mink Lake Basin area of the Three Sisters Wilderness. The fire has burned 320 acres and is burning in the Willamette National Forest five miles west of Elk Lake.

Fire behavior has been minimal with the remaining hot spots creeping and smoldering in the Wilderness area. Along the Cascade Lakes Highway between Lava Lake and Elk Lake, hand crews and heavy equipment operators continue to remove a portion of the trees and slash within 200' from the edge of the road. Removing these combustible materials helps strengthen fire control features that could save structures and other values at risk.

The planned construction length of this shaded fuel break is 9.7 miles and 6% has been completed so far. This important fuel reduction work is based on specific tree spacing. In addition, it will help protect the area from wildfire for many years. The work along the Cascades Lake Highway is expected to continue for several more days, but drivers will have the option of driving the Elk Loop detour (River Summit Drive to Highway 40).

The heavy equipment requires occasional use of the highway to fell trees and transport brush to temporary landings, where the slash is processed, loaded and hauled off. The masticators fling wood debris and cannot be operated safely near traffic. By using heavy equipment to create the shaded fuel break, the risk of injury to hand crews when felling trees is minimized.

Today, similar to the previous two days, a marked pilot car will be used to guide vehicles through the work area. Motorists are asked to stay with the pilot car and not turn around or stop for photos. Cooperation from the public will help fire crews and equipment operators get this work done safely and with minimal impact to local businesses.

Weather: Today, there could be light rain in the morning, but the relative humidity is predicted to drop in the afternoon. Looking ahead to Tuesday and Wednesday, the weather is expected to be drier and more typical for this time of year. Less cloud cover and warmer, drier conditions increase the likelihood of increased fire activity.

Evacuations: The Deschutes County Sheriff lifted the Level 1 Evacuation Notice for the areas east of the Cascade Lakes Highway around Elk and Lava Lakes. The Level 3 (Go Now) Evacuation Notice is still in place for all areas west of the Cascade Lakes Highway from the Lucky Lake Trailhead north to the Mirror Lake Trail. This includes the areas around Lucky Lake, Leech Lake, Doris Lake, Blow Lake and Mirror Lakes. Evacuation notices and updates can be found at: www.deschutes.org/emergency.

Closures: The closure order on the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests for the Petes Lake Fire remains in place and information can be found at: fs.usda.gov/detail/deschutes/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD1134682. Resorts along the Cascade Lakes Highway remain open for business, though visitors may encounter delays with road flaggers and pilot cars. Wanoga and Kapka SnoParks are being used by firefighting resources and closed to the public.

Safety: The public can help by obeying the National Forest trail closures. There will be a stronger law enforcement presence in the area to enforce trail closures and help firefighters continue their work safely. Be aware of your surroundings and follow all fire restrictions.

