

Petes Lake Fire Update – September 6, 2023 – 9:00 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 | 3 Dozers | 4 Helicopters | 8 Engines | 8 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 328 acres, five miles west of Elk Lake.

The fire continues to hold within its perimeter, creeping and smoldering with minimal smoke dispersal. The fire is burning in an area with rock outcroppings and difficult access. Limited fire growth has allowed firefighters and equipment operators to have a productive day working on the shaded fuel break along the Cascade Lake Highway. Part of the strategy for this fire involves identifying and strengthening fire control features, such as this one.

To achieve the fuel break specifications, hand crews and heavy machinery operators need to be able to work safely near the edge of the highway. One piece of heavy equipment, called a masticator, is highly efficient but often flings large chunks of wood debris for hundreds of feet. It cannot be safely operated near traffic.

To ensure that work can be completed as safely and efficiently as possible, Cascade Lakes Highway will be closed from Elk Lake to Lava Lake from 8 a.m. – 7 p.m. for the next two days.

Drivers can detour around the closure using the primitive Forest Service Road 4625/Elk Lake Loop. A marked pilot car will be used to guide vehicles. Motorists are asked to stay with the pilot car and not turn around or stop. Additional traffic signs, variable message boards and road guards are in place to increase safety. Cooperation from the public will help fire crews and equipment operators complete this work quickly and with minimal impact to local businesses. Fire managers thank the public for their patience. Travelers can avoid delays (and the detour on the primitive forest road) by accessing the lower portion of the Cascade Lakes Highway area via Forest Road 40 from Sunriver.

Fire managers have developed a Structure Assessment and Protection Plan for the Elk Lake community. The plan has maps that show locations of homes and lists firefighting resources needed to protect structures and other values at risk. In the event that Petes Lake or future fires approach this community, the plan will help firefighters be more efficient in their efforts to defend structures.

Weather: In the next few days, the weather is expected to be warm and more seasonable, with lower humidity. Solar heating and light winds could increase the potential for 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. The Wanoga SnoPark, Kapka SnoPark, Mirror Lake Trailhead and Point Campground are temporarily closed to the public.

Safety: The public can help firefighters by obeying trail closures and following the detour instructions in the shaded fuel break work areas. Keep vehicle and bike speeds low near work areas. Follow all fire restrictions.

