



## Matts Creek Fire Update Saturday November 18, 2023

**Hours:** 8 am-8 pm **Phone:** (504) 313-4859 **Email:** [2023.MattsCreek@firenet.gov](mailto:2023.MattsCreek@firenet.gov)

**InciWeb:** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident-information/vavaf-matts-creek-fire>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/GWJNF>

**Acres:** 5,978

**Cause:** undetermined

**Containment:** 2%

**Total personnel:** 184

**Start Date:** Sunday, November 12, 2023

**Location:** James River Face Wilderness  
and Blue Ridge Parkway

**Fuels:** Mixed hardwoods, shrubby  
vegetation, and leaf litter

*Residents and motorists in areas south and east of the fire today should expect smoke due to a wind shift. To protect you and fire personnel, motorists on SR 501 should not stop to observe the fire. Please drive slowly and cautiously due to smoke, wildlife, and firefighting personnel and traffic.*

**Operations:** Yesterday firefighters continued to build, strengthen, mop up and monitor firelines, focusing on the southeastern side of the fire in anticipation of northwest winds today. They improved completed handline from the James River to the Blue Ridge Parkway. As fire continued to come down to containment lines, firefighters secured and tactically fired, as needed, to maintain and meet control objectives, including bringing fire down to containment lines east of the Pine Ridge Trail. They also assessed structures on private land in the Hunt Camp Road area. Along the southern side of the fire along the Blue Ridge Parkway, they cleared fallen and hazard trees and logs that rolled onto the roadway. In the Sulphur Springs area on the southwest side of the fire, the fire grew slowly, flanking. Firefighters kept the fire in check, holding it up in the Sulphur Springs drainage. Along the western side of the fire, bulldozers from the Glenwood Pedlar Ranger District cleared all but 1,500 feet of fireline along the Glenwood Horse Trail. This made it accessible for firefighting vehicles to manage fire spread as it comes down to control lines and features using tactics such as tactical firing. Areas on the northern side of the fire were scouted for potential firelines.

Today work will continue to focus on holding the fire along the south and southeast with the potential for northwest winds to push fire in those directions. This includes a structure protection group that will protect the most threatened structures along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Hunt Camp Road. Crews will work to strengthen the handline from the James River to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Firefighters will patrol the Blue Ridge Parkway for burning material rolling into the roadway or spot fires to “hold on to what we’ve gained,” as Operations Section Chief Troy Floyd said. They will continue to keep the fire in check where it was active yesterday in the Sulphur Springs area. Areas on the north side of the fire continue to back down and naturally check against the James River. Firefighters continue to monitor its spread from lookout locations and from the air. As personnel and equipment arrive, structure protection along the western side of the fire will be assessed. Firefighters will continue to work throughout the night to monitor and contain the fire.

People and equipment on the fire include 2 hand crews, 9 engines, 3 large helicopters and 1 drone.

## **Weather and Fire Behavior**

Last night's rain and higher humidities will slow fire activity this morning. By early afternoon relative humidity will quickly drop, and burnable vegetation will dry out. "If we were playing football it would be halftime and we'd be in the lead," stated Safety Mike Cook in the morning briefing, "but with the expected weather today we all need to be defensive." Winds will be out of the northwest 10-15 mph with gusts to 25 mph. A Fire Watch is in effect today due to a combination of gusty northwest winds and critically low humidity. By afternoon, humidities will be 15-20% increasing fire activity and smoke. Temperatures will be in the upper 50s.

With higher winds and lower humidity, firefighters will be vigilant today looking for spots outside containment lines staying ahead of fire progression. The potential for very active fire behavior exists, especially in pine trees with low branches and areas where dead trees and leaves are falling. Areas of unburned vegetation between the fire's edge and control lines are also of concern.

**Smoke and Air Quality:** Heavy smoke is likely in communities and along roadways southeast of the fire today. An incident air resource advisor issues smoke reports at <https://outlooks.wildlandfiresmoke.net/outlook>. For more information on air quality visit [AirNow.gov](https://airnow.gov). Air monitoring equipment has been installed in Big Island and Bedford. Monitor installation is planned at Natural Bridge State Park today.

**Closures and Restrictions:** The entire James River Face Wilderness is closed to all public use.

**Road Closures:** Petites Gap Road (FSR35) is closed to all public use between the Belfast Trailhead and the Blue Ridge Parkway. **Arnold Valley Road (SR 781) is closed for firefighter and public safety.**

**Blue Ridge Parkway Temporary Closure:** The Blue Ridge Parkway is closed from milepost 66.3, near US Highway 501, to milepost 85.9, at VA Route 43 until further notice. Park visitors should plan for a detour from the north or south using adjacent routes and Interstate 81.

**Closures:** The James River Face Wilderness and all associated trails, including a section of Appalachian National Scenic Trail, are closed to all public use due to the on-going wildland fire.

The following areas are temporarily closed to allow for public and fire fighter safety:

- Locher Tract
- Glenwood Horse Trail (FT#3004) from the Blue Ridge Parkway to the Hellgate Trailhead
- Appalachian Trail (FT #1) from James River Foot Bridge to Petites Gap Road (FR #35)
- James River Foot Bridge Parking Lot
- Matts Creek Trail (FT #4/Old A.T.)
- Piney Ridge Trail (FT #2)
- Balcony Falls Trail (FT #7)
- Gunther Ridge Trail (FT #8)
- Belfast Trail (FT #9)
- Sulphur Springs Trail (FT# 3001)

Use caution and obey all road signs for your safety. Motorists should be alert for firefighter vehicles and smoke.

## **Fire Restrictions:**

**Stage 1 Fire Restrictions in effect:** For the protection of public health and safety, the following acts are prohibited on all lands administered by George Washington & Jefferson National Forest.

1. Building, maintaining, attending, or using a fire or campfire outside of developed recreation sites.
2. Possessing, discharging, or using any kind of firework or other pyrotechnic device.

Campfires in a Forest Service provided metal fire pit, ring or grill at a developed recreation site are allowed.