



Matts Creek Fire Update Sunday November 19, 2023

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

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

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

Acres: 7,614

Cause: undetermined

Containment: 15%

Total personnel: 286

Start Date: Sunday, November 12, 2023

Location: James River Face Wilderness
and Blue Ridge Parkway

Fuels: Mixed hardwoods, shrubby
vegetation, and leaf litter

Please note: Firefighters will use a helicopter to ignite ridgetops in the northwestern portion of the fire this afternoon, east of Greenlee, between the James River and Belfast Creek. Firefighters will take advantage of today's favorable weather conditions to produce a low-intensity fire which will remove vegetation and protect private communities as well as the forest. This strategy is in response to an anticipated easterly wind tomorrow which could cause the fire to move to the west. Firefighters hope to proactively engage the fire "on our terms."

Operations: A new fire was detected near Snowden this morning that burned roughly half an acre. Crews quickly located the new start and will work to secure it today. Yesterday, firefighters directly engaged the main fire in the southeastern fire perimeter. By working closer to the active fire front, crews kept the fire away from a section of privately owned land.

The fire was also active in the southwestern portion and burned laterally along the slope. Firefighters worked to build contingency lines (backup firelines) by using road systems to help control the forward progression of the fire. Fire Operations staff reported that there are still fire-weakened trees along the Blue Ridge Parkway that may pose a threat to public safety.

A drone was used for tactical firing operations along a ridgeline to check the fire's progression. This is an area where steep terrain and hazard trees make it dangerous for firefighters on the ground. Drones can perform precise firing operations, which produce less smoke.

Today, firefighters will continue to improve existing fire containment lines and patrol the Blue Ridge Parkway for burning material rolling into the roadway. Crews continue to improve and strengthen handline to the James River. Firefighters will continue to work with local fire departments to assess structures along Hunt Camp Road and along the western side of the fire. They will continue to work throughout the night to monitor and contain the fire.

People and equipment on the fire include 6 hand crews, 11 engines, 4 helicopters, 2 water tenders and 1 drone.

Weather and Fire Behavior

Today is expected to bring west/northwest winds of 5-10 miles-per-hour and temperatures in the upper 50s. The fire area will see poor relative humidity recovery of between 35-40 percent on the ridgetops and humidity will drop as the day progresses. Monday will bring mostly cloudy skies with moderate moisture of 60 percent. Northeast winds should be around 4-9 mph with temperatures in the low 50s. Fire activity is expected to increase due to drier conditions overnight. Active fire behavior is expected all day, particularly on the eastern flank. The fire continues to move to the southeast, particularly in areas where winds align with terrain.

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. Please use caution when driving in low-visibility areas.

Temporary Flight Restrictions: A Temporary Flight Restriction is in place around the fire area. Further information can be found at https://tfr.faa.gov/save_pages/detail_3_4016.html

Road Closures: Petites Gap Road (FSR35) is closed to all public use between the Belfast Trailhead and the Blue Ridge Parkway. **This closure may be extended to the intersection of Arnold Valley Road (SR 781) and Black Run Road due to fire activity.**

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)
- 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.