



Matts Creek Fire Update Monday, November 20, 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: 10,106

Cause: undetermined

Containment: 27%

Total personnel: 317

Start Date: Sunday, November 12, 2023

Location: James River Face Wilderness
and Blue Ridge Parkway

Fuels: Mixed hardwoods, shrubby
vegetation, and leaf litter

Operations: Yesterday, firefighters conducted a strategic firing operation south of Glasgow, and east of Greenlee between the James River and Belfast Creek using a helicopter. Removing this fuel will provide added protection for surrounding communities, and the forest and will help firefighters prevent spread of the fire. This operation will decrease the risk of intense fire behavior and long-duration smoke. Crews took advantage of favorable conditions, and the operation was successful in producing a low intensity burn with no spot fires reported. A low intensity fire can decrease leaf litter, remove brush, moderate fire behavior and will cause little to no damage to the trees, similar to a prescribed fire. The strategic firing operation helped move the fire over slopes and into flatter terrain. This will allow firefighters to engage the fire in a safer area and provide a greater chance to successfully stop the fire from spreading to the west.

In the northeastern portion of the fire, near Snowden, crews continued to improve fire lines and the area is looking very good and forward progression has stopped. Crews will search for and extinguish any “hot spots” in logs, stumps and under the ground.

In the southeastern portion of the fire near Big Island and Powells Store, fire activity was minimal. Firefighters patrolled the area and removed fire-damaged trees.

In the southwestern area fire lines have held well, increasing containment to 27 percent.

Firefighters continued to watch the Hercules Fire, a small fire that started yesterday across the James River. A local volunteer fire department had responded and contacted crews on the night shift for additional help. The fire was slightly under one acre in size. Crews will continue to monitor this fire throughout the day.

Today, firefighters will work within the strategic burn operation to locate and extinguish areas of heat and monitor the fire. Crews will also continue to improve existing fire containment lines and patrol the Blue Ridge Parkway for burning material rolling into the roadway. Firefighters continue to improve monitor handline to the James River. They will continue working to assess structures along Hunt Camp Road and along the western side of the fire and to develop a protection plan for the area if needed. The fire will be monitored overnight.

Personnel and equipment on the fire include 6 hand crews, 15 engines, 4 helicopters, 2 water tenders and 1 drone.

Weather and Fire Behavior

Today, temperatures are expected to be in the lower 50s with humidity between 40-60 percent. East winds will be between 5-10 miles per hour, turning east/southeast during the afternoon. Tonight will bring increased clouds and possibly some light winds after midnight. For Tuesday, rain is expected to remain steady and may possibly become heavier at times. Rainfall may be 1-2 inches and is anticipated to fall throughout the day. Winds will remain 5-10 mph with an occasional gust of up to 14 mph. Fire activity is expected to pick up later this afternoon. The strategic firing operation helped move the main fire front over slopes and into flatter areas. This will provide safer access to firefighters and allow a greater chance to successfully stop the fire from spreading to the west.

Smoke and Air Quality: Heavy smoke is likely in communities and along roadways near the fire area 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://www.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 Back 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.