



Matts Creek Fire Update Saturday, November 25, 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: 11,020

Cause: undetermined

Containment: 91%

Start Date: Sunday, November 12, 2023

Location: James River Face Wilderness
and Blue Ridge Parkway

Fuels: Mixed hardwoods, shrubby
vegetation, and leaf litter

A Type 3 Incident Management Team assumed command of the Matts Creek Fire yesterday. Fire Management Officer Brent Foltz is effectively leading the work of fire suppression and repair as an Incident Commander trainee, under the mentorship of Incident Commander Frank Guzman.

With the help of an aerial drone and pilot, fire crews found and extinguished several remaining hotspots yesterday. Firefighters continue to patrol and repair fire line around the area's perimeter, including the Blue Ridge Parkway, which remains open. Wet, muddy conditions yesterday prevented use of heavy equipment to repair line outside of the wilderness.

The entire fire area, including all road and trails, remains hazardous and closed to the public during the fire suppression repair phase. Firefighters made progress removing hazards, including burned trees and stump holes, which are impeding safe use of trails through the burned area. Crews are working throughout the weekend, ahead of predicted high winds late Sunday, which will create additional blow-down of fire-weakened trees.

"We are still moving around the fire and have several days of work ahead of us to assess and remove hazards in the fire area," said Incident Commander Guzman. "Thank you to the public for staying heads up on the roads and staying off trails as we work to make the area safe for reentry."

Forest resource advisors are on-site with firefighters again today, as they reduce hazardous conditions and prevent erosion along more than 35 miles of trails by using techniques that minimize impact to wilderness. Crews will begin hand-spreading seed on some burned area to facilitate regrowth of vegetation.

Weather and Fire Behavior: Drier and much cooler conditions will extend over the next several days. Winds will remain light through Sunday, with gustier winds overnight Sunday and into the day Monday as a dry cold front moves through the area. As wet conditions dry out, smoldering will continue in leaf litter and snags, with no fire spread. Afternoon humidity will be 50-60%.

Operations: The aerial drone and certified pilot are working again today to search for any remaining heat, as handcrews focus on clearing roads and trails, and repairing fire-damaged areas. Engines continue to patrol the fire perimeter and assist with fireline repair. Fire personnel and equipment on the ground today includes 3 hand crews, 4 engines, 1 dozer, and 1 ambulance, along with a Safety Officer, fireline supervisors, and a field medic.

Smoke and Air Quality: Air quality reports can be found at <https://outlooks.wildlandfiresmoke.net/outlook>. For more information, visit AirNow.gov.

Temporary Flight Restrictions: None.

Road Closures: Petites Gap Road (FSR35) remains closed to all public use between the local spring and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Blue Ridge Parkway is now open along the fire perimeter (from milepost 66.3, near US Highway 501, to milepost 85.9, at VA Route 43).

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 remaining hazards and fire suppression repair.

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.

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.