



Southwest Area Incident Management Team

TEAM 3 – MATT RAU – INCIDENT COMMANDER



Ignitions planned to begin today Daily Update: September 8, 2024

West Fire - 46 Acres
Start Date: August 28, 2024
Location: Payson Ranger District, AZ
Personnel: 464

Preacher Fire - 3 Acres
Cause: Lightning
Containment: 0%
Fuels: Ponderosa Pine, Mixed Conifer, Chaparral

Highlights/Operations: Yesterday firefighters put the finishing touches on the prep work around Preacher Fire. On the West Fire, the remaining work removing fuels on Milk Ranch Road, finalizing structure protection plans in Camp Geronimo and completing dozer line east of Pine remained the focus.

Despite the moisture, fire managers plan to test ignitions today. Winds predominately out of the southwest over the next several days provide a good opportunity to begin. With ignitions beginning, residents should expect to see increased smoke production from both fires starting mid-day. Southwest winds should carry much of the smoke away from the most populated areas during the day, although smoke may still settle into drainages at night.

On the West Fire, ignitions are planned to begin on the northeast corner of the planned fire perimeter then working south to Bray Creek Ranch and west along Milk Ranch Road, firefighters will allow fire to slowly burn down from the tops of drainages using both hand and aerial ignitions. This methodical firing technique is designed to create lower intensity fire that removes fuel while minimizing smoke impacts and impacts to the watershed. The entire firing operation is expected to take about a week due to the number of drainages.

On the Preacher Fire, ignitions will start along the Control Road near Tonto Village. Firefighters will then work around to the Diamond Point Road bringing fire towards the southwest as they go. The ignitions are expected to take about two days. While decent smoke dispersion is expected, there may be smoke impacts to State Highway 260, especially in the evenings and mornings.

Due to the ignitions, additional firefighters will begin night shift on both fires tonight. Engines will patrol, mop up and provide structure protection until they are relieved by day-shift resources. The 24-hour coverage is an extra precaution.

Weather: Isolated to scattered thunderstorms will return Sunday afternoon, with mostly clear and rain-free weather expected the rest of next week. Southwesterly winds will increase Wednesday and Thursday with frequent afternoon gusts over 25 mph.

Safety: Two Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR) are now in place over the area, which includes uncrewed aircraft systems or drones. Reminder that if you fly we can't, unauthorized drone flights pose serious risks to firefighter and public safety and the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations.

Closure: The Tonto National Forest has issued a closure for land surrounding the West Fire, this includes Pine Trailhead. <https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/incident-publication/aztnf-2024-west-fire-tnf/us-forest-service-closure-order-for-west-fire-09-04-2024>

Evacuations: Some residents east of Payson near the Preacher Fire have been moved to the SET level. An interactive map is available to stay up to date with evacuation levels related to both the West and Preacher Fires. <https://nifc.maps.arcgis.com/.../sidebar/index.html>

Smoke: During ignitions, smoke may settle in low-lying areas overnight. Residents are encouraged to close windows at night to avoid smoke impacts. Talk with your doctor and plan for how to manage your health conditions when it is smoky. Additional resources for how to prepare for wildfire smoke can be found at <https://www.airnow.gov/wildfire-guide-factsheets/>

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Phone Number: (928)-291-7354 (7 a-7 p) **Media Phone Number:** (928)-291-6528 (7a -7p.)
Inciweb: <https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/incident-information/aztnf-2024-west-fire-tnf> **Email:** 2024.west@firenet.gov