



NORTHERN ROCKIES TEAM 3

INCIDENT COMMANDER: MIKE BEHRENS

Big Knife, Niarada, & Mill Pocket Fires

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Fire Information: 406-426-9595 | 2023.BigKnife@firenet.gov



<https://tinyurl.com/BigKnifeFire>

<https://tinyurl.com/NiaradaMillPocketFires>

August 16, 2023

Location: Big Knife - 5 miles east of Arlee, MT | Niarada - 12 miles west of Elmo, MT | Mill Pocket: 3 miles West of Hwy. 28
Start Date: Big Knife - 7/24/2023 | Niarada - 7/30/2023 | Mill Pocket - 7/30/2023 **Cause:** Lightning **Structures Lost:** 4
Big Knife-6,106 acres, 7% contained | **Niarada**-20,370 acres, 81% contained | **Mill Pocket**- 2,135 acres, 89% contained
Total Personnel: 629 total **Engines:** 33 **Aircraft:** 1 + others available as needed **Hand Crews:** 14

HOT AND DRY WEATHER IS FORECASTED TO CONTINUE UNTIL THE WEEKEND. TEMPERATURES WILL BE NEAR 100 DEGREES IN THE VALLEY WITH NEAR 90 AT ELEVATION. RELATIVE HUMIDITY RECOVERY AT NIGHT CONTINUES TO BE POOR AND WINDS ARE EXPECTED TO INCREASE TO 20-30 MPH. RED FLAGS WARNINGS ARE FORECAST FOR THE AREA TODAY AND THURSDAY.

Today is the final shift for the Northern Rockies Complex Incident Management Team 3. Thursday, August 17 at 7a.m., the Type 3 Northern Rockies Incident Management Team 8, Incident Commander Brad Bergman, will assume command of the Big Knife Fire. At the same time, a CSKT Type 3 team, Incident Commander Rob Berney, will assume command of the Niarada and Mill Pocket fires.

Big Knife Fire

Activity dramatically increased in the Big Knife Creek drainage Tuesday afternoon as temperatures got hotter and humidity levels lower. The fire pushed to the east up the drainage toward the Tribal Primitive Area and away from Jocko, Francis and Arlee. More smoke production and fire growth can be expected today as weather conditions remain extremely hot and dry with increased winds starting southerly in the morning and shifting to northwest in the afternoon.

Around the southwest edge, crews are assessing the fire's progress as it moves down the slopes to control lines. Firefighters are preparing canal roads for better access and removing vegetation around power poles.

On the south end of the fire in the Agency Creek drainage, the Craig Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew worked to go direct along the fire's edge where safe to do so. With pumps and hoses in place, they will continue to work up canyon and tie into scree slopes.

Pumps and sprinkler system are in place to protect infrastructure east of the fire as well as Jocko Lookout which has water systems in place as well as a fire-resistant wrap around the base.

Niarada & Mill Pocket Fires

The Niarada Fire remained relatively quiet Tuesday as crews continued to build line as direct as possible along the fire's eastern edge closest to Elmo. With the hotter and drier weather, increased smoke is likely interior pockets of vegetation burn out. Crews continue to assess, patrol and mop up (cool areas containing heat) around much of the remaining fire perimeter. Suppression repair work has begun in these areas, including pulling in dozer line berms and blading roads.



Structure protection crews remain outside Elmo near Big Arm, testing sprinkler systems and pumps while working with landowners on additional vegetation management around structures.

The majority of the Mill Pocket Fire is in mop-up status as crews work to ensure the fire's edge are cool and pose little to no threat to containment. Some lingering heat remains in steep scree slopes on the northwestern side, where firefighters continue to cool hot spots, using helicopter water drops as needed.

CLOSURES AND SPECIAL MESSAGES

Several areas near the base of the mountains west of the Big Knife Fire remain in PRE-EVACUATION WARNING by order of the Lake County Sheriff. See the map for those locations in yellow (Jocko, Canal, Francis). In the Tribal Primitive Area, Belmore Slough and Burnt Cabin Roads are closed.

Near the Niarada Fire, the Lake County Sheriff's Office has a PRE-EVACUATION WARNING in place for the area that includes Alexander Road, Early Dawn Road, Spring Lane Road, Walking Horse Lane, Windward Heights Road, Wildhorse View, Buffalo Bridge Road, Saddle Drive, Island Butte Lane, Bridle Path, Ten Deuce Way, Cliffview Drive, and Ricketts Road. The remainder of the town of Elmo is in READY status.

A PRE-EVACUATION WARNING means you may be in your home. However, as there still is a risk from both fires, those in this status should not bring back evacuated livestock until the area is downgraded to READY status.

A temporary flight restriction (TFR) is in effect around both fire areas. Do not fly unmanned aircraft (drones) near the fire areas, as that is hazardous for pilots, and the firefighters on the ground who rely on aircraft support. Remember, if you fly, we can't!

FIRE RESTRICTIONS

Stage 2 fire restrictions are in place across the Flathead Indian Reservation. No campfires are allowed, no smoking outside of vehicles, no operating combustible engines from 1 p.m. to 1 a.m., no operating vehicles off designated roads and trails. Residents and visitors are encouraged to visit www.MTFireInfo.org for more fire information across Montana.



The Big Knife Fire showed signs of extreme fire behavior Tuesday as interior pockets of unburned fuel ignited under increased temperatures and low humidity. Red Flag Warnings are forecast for the area for the next two days.

