

American Fork, Balsinger, and Woods Creek Fires Update

Wednesday, August 18, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.

Rocky Mountain Type 1 Incident Management Team

Dan Dallas, Incident Commander



Information phone: 406-426-9612

Email: 2021.divide@firenet.gov

Information staffing hours: 8:00 am – 8:00 pm

Current Situation: A strong cold front came into the fire area from the north yesterday, bringing high winds, cooler temperatures, and rain showers. This weather pattern is expected to continue for several days, dampening fire behavior and providing firefighters an opportunity to increase containment on all three fires. The Balsinger and Woods Creek fires saw additional containment yesterday. Night patrols continue, staffing the fires around the clock.

American Fork Fire

Acres: 21,876 | **Containment:** 57% | **Start date:** July 17, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 99

The American Fork Fire is burning in the central part of the Crazy Mountains, approximately 24 miles southwest of Harlowton, Montana. Yesterday, in Division A, engines and aerial resources supported mop up of a small slop-over fire. Crews patrolled and added more depth to containment line along the southern edge. Firefighters are working on the small piece of uncontained line near Buck Creek. Progress is slow because of difficult terrain; they will continue today with direct attack. On the west side, in Division P, crews are patrolling, mopping up, and adding depth to the containment line. Line is in place at the north edge in Division M from Crandall Creek Road to Shields River Road. Work today will be on improving that section. A new anchor point is now established by Dugout Creek so firefighters can go direct, working north toward the Blacktail Fire scar. They burned out a pocket of fuels in that area yesterday. Active fire behavior continues in the northern “fingers” but is not hampering the overall suppression effort. Firefighters are engaging the southern and eastern uncontained areas, with the objective of fully containing these in the next several days.

Balsinger Fire

Acres: 8,614 | **Containment:** 70% | **Start date:** July 9, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 126

The Balsinger Fire is in the Little Belt Mountains, approximately five miles west of Neihart, Montana. The cold front reached this fire early in the day, limiting fire behavior and spread. Firefighters increased containment yesterday on the south edge in Division I. On the west side, near Pilgrim Creek, crews hiked in south of Thunder Mountain to put check line around a one-acre hot spot. On the east side in Division T, the focus is on improving the existing containment line. Crews are patrolling the containment line in Division I. Over the next few days, the goal is to fully contain the south edge of the fire. Fire officials are examining options for the northern edge.

Woods Creek Fire

Acres: 55,834 | **Containment:** 49% | **Start date:** July 10, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 538

The Woods Creek Fire is burning in the Big Belt Mountains, approximately 16 miles northeast of Townsend, Montana. A hotshot crew continues direct attack in Division AA, working south from the containment line along the North Fork of Elk Creek. They placed hose lays and national guard crews are working behind them, mopping up. In Division YY, another hotshot crew is constructing direct line to the east, working toward Division AA, with a third hotshot crew in-between, working west. The goal is full containment of the northern edge in the next several days and improvement of the indirect and contingency lines. In Division OO, firefighters tied indirect line to the boundary of the Helena National Forest yesterday, using dozers and feller-bunchers. Wind hit late in the morning and pushed the fire around in this area before the rain arrived; however, crews kept it contained. There was very little fire behavior or visible smoke yesterday in Division QQ. Crews strengthened indirect line there and tied into the burn scar to the east. In Division SS, the fire hasn't moved in several days. There is a little heat in the area near North Fork Duck Creek. Yesterday firefighters extinguished a persistent smoke that was visible in that area from the southwest. Crews in Division YY reinforced and strengthened line at the western edge. On the east edge, crews will monitor, patrol and strengthen the containment edge, and work to contain the remaining piece of line near Big Birch Creek. They have started suppression repair in this area, mitigating the effects of fire suppression activities on natural and cultural resources. The plan for the next several days is to continue work at the south edge, where it is safe to do so in the steep, rocky terrain. In the unlikely event of fire growth in Divisions SS or QQ, firefighters can burn out fuels from the indirect line they constructed.

Weather and Fuel Conditions: Cool, wet weather is forecast to remain in the area through Saturday. The high temperature today will be 45°F at 7500 feet elevation. There is an 80% chance of rain. Winds are from the north, gusting up to 25 mph.

Evacuation Notices

The interactive web map now depicts evacuation areas. Please see

<https://bit.ly/WoodsCreekBalsingerAmericanForkFires> or contact your local county sheriff's office for details.

American Fork Fire: The Park County Sheriff's Office has Shields River Road in pre-evacuation status. Meagher County has done the same with the Smith Creek area. County roads in the area are open. However, there are still closures in the National Forests.

Balsinger Fire: An evacuation order for Belt Park, issued by the Cascade County Sheriff's Office, remains in place. There is a pre-evacuation order for the area from the Belt Creek Ranger Station to Monarch and from west of Monarch to the confluence of Pilgrim Creek and Belt Creek.

Woods Creek Fire: Effective August 11, the Broadwater County Sheriff's Office lifted the evacuation order covering everything east of Highway 284 between Gravelly Lane in the north and Dry Gulch Road in the south. Highway 284 remains open. Residents of Upper Duck Creek Road, Upper Gurnett Creek Road, Upper Confederate Road, Ambush Drive, Battle Drive and from Upper Gurnett to White's Gulch east and west of Highway 284 may return to their homes. All areas are currently in pre-evacuation. A mandatory evacuation of six cabins and Big Birch Creek is in place. The Meagher County Sheriff's Office issued a pre-evacuation notice for residents on Birky Road and Ramspeck Lane and for Grassy Mountain residents.

Closures and Advisories

Areas around the fires are closed for public safety. Please respect the closure signs.

Temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) remain in place on all three fire areas. TFR violations can disrupt aerial firefighting operations and may force fire managers to ground essential aircraft. Wildfires are a no-fly zone for unauthorized aircraft, including drones. **If you fly, we can't.** <http://knowbeforeyoufly.org>

Most of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is in Stage 2 fire restrictions. There are also closure areas for the Balsinger and Woods Creek fires. See: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/hlcnf/alerts-notices>

Stage 1 fire restrictions remain in place for the Custer Gallatin National Forest. There is also a closure area for the American Fork fire. See: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/custergallatin/alerts-notices>

The Bureau of Land Management Butte and Lewiston Field Offices issued an area closure for lands affected by the Woods Creek Fire. See: <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/article/7649/63667/>

For more information:

Information Phone: 406-426-9612

Facebook: <https://bit.ly/2XiK1Et>

Email: 2021.divide@firenet.gov

Web map: <https://bit.ly/WoodsCreekBalsingerAmericanForkFires>

American Fork InciWeb: inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7681

Balsinger InciWeb: inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7624

Woods Creek InciWeb: inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7649

Smoke information: <https://fire.airnow.gov/#>

Statewide fire restrictions: www.MTFireInfo.org

