

American Fork, Balsinger, and Woods Creek Fires Update



Sunday, August 22, 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

Special Notes: Tonight at 8pm, the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) Type 2 Incident Management Team will assume command of the Balsinger and Woods Creek Fires. The Albuquerque Zone Type 3 Incident Management Team will assume command of the American Fork Fire.

Current Situation: Cool, wet weather continues to limit fire behavior. Firefighters are strengthening containment and contingency lines and working to add containment on the Woods Creek and American Fork fires. Due to more accurate mapping, the acreage estimates for the Balsinger and Woods Creek Fires are slightly different today.

American Fork Fire

Acreage: 21,876 | **Containment:** 57% | **Start date:** July 17, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 132

The American Fork Fire is burning in the central part of the Crazy Mountains, approximately 24 miles southwest of Harlowton, Montana. On the east side of the fire, crews in Division A are working with engines to contain the remaining line near the Middle Fork American Fork Creek. The southeast portion of the fire is in patrol status. In Division P, firefighters will continue constructing direct fire line from Buck Creek Road, working east. Engines and crews are improving containment lines. There has been no change in the fire perimeter for ten days on the west side. They are backhauling pumps, tanks, and equipment around structures. In the northern part of Division P, firefighters are using direct attack to tie into the roadless area to the north. Work continues in the Dugout Creek area of Division M with firefighters anchoring to the containment edge constructing line to the east. There is very little heat in the Lebo Fork area in Division M and there has been no fire growth for several days. Crews are looking at options to connect fireline in this area with the Blacktail Fire scar.

Balsinger Fire

Acreage: 8,584 | **Containment:** 77% | **Start date:** July 9, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 68

The Balsinger Fire is in the Little Belt Mountains, approximately five miles west of Neihart, Montana. Firefighters yesterday patrolled and mopped up along containment lines, addressing any hot spots. Today they will continue adding depth to the line in Division I on the west side of the fire. Firefighters are working throughout the eastern edge of the fire in Division T, increasing depth on the containment line. Fire officials are analyzing the north edge of the fire in Division R, formulating a longer term management plan. Backhauling continues today, retrieving hoses and equipment to be cleaned and refurbished.

Woods Creek Fire

Acreage: 55,882 | **Containment:** 52% | **Start date:** July 10, 2021 | **Cause:** Lightning | **Personnel:** 562

The Woods Creek Fire is burning in the Big Belt Mountains, approximately 16 miles northeast of Townsend, Montana. A hotshot crew continues to mop up and strengthen containment line at the north edge of the fire in Divisions YY and AA. Most of the eastern edge of the fire, in Divisions AA and OO, is in patrol status. Control line is in place, but some heat remains in the drainage near Big Birch Creek. Firefighters are working to fully contain that edge. Another hotshot crew directly engaged a spot fire yesterday near Russell Fork Deep Creek. The UAS (firefighting drone) had flown over the area and provided data on the terrain, fire behavior, and hot spots. In Division QQ, firefighters are working near Gurnett Creek to add containment. Crews in Division SS are patrolling, mopping up, and improving contingency lines. A hotshot crew is working to add containment near Horse Creek. Direct attack continues in Division YY near North Fork Duck Creek.

Weather and Fuel Conditions: During the day, storms barely clipped the Balsinger and Woods Creek Fires. Overnight there were additional storms with 45 mph wind gusts and rain on all three fires. Today and tomorrow will see strong westerly winds at a sustained 18-24 mph with gusts up to 40 mph. It will remain cooler and more humid than usual for this time of year, with a 10% chance of rain. The high temperature today will be 58°F at 7500 feet elevation. Fire behavior is currently moderated by the wet fuels and weather conditions. Long-term fire modeling shows a low probability of major fire spread.

Evacuation Notices

The interactive web map 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: The Cascade County Sheriff's Office has issued pre-evacuation orders for Belt Park, 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 20, the Broadwater County Sheriff's Office lifted all evacuation and pre-evacuation orders and warnings for all areas of the Woods Creek Fire on the Broadwater County side.

Effective August 18, the Meagher County Sheriff's Office has lifted the pre-evacuation for the area east of Camas Creek Road and north of North Fork Woods Gulch Creek to Luppold Road. On the east side of the fire, the area south of Burt Ranch Road and west of Camas Creek Road has been moved from mandatory to pre-evacuation status. A pre-evacuation notice remains in place 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 the Woods Creek and American Fork 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

