

Balsinger, Woods Creek, and American Fork Fires Update



Tuesday, August 24, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.

Fire Department City of New York Type 2 Incident Management Team

Richard DePrima, Incident Commander – Balsinger and Woods Creek Fires

Albuquerque Zone Type 3 Incident Management Team

Zach Saavedra, Incident Commander – American Fork Fire

Information phone: 406-426-9612

Email: 2021.divide@firenet.gov

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

Special Notes: Yesterday's smoke outlook was the last one that will be produced for the fire areas. For information on local air quality and smoke conditions, please visit <https://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair/smokemostrecentupdate.aspx> or <https://fire.airnow.gov/#>

Current Situation: Firefighters added containment yesterday on the north edge of the Woods Creek Fire. Work continues today on strengthening containment and contingency lines and mopping up hot spots. Backhauling continues, preparing equipment for its next use.

Balsinger Fire

Location: 5 miles W of Neihart, MT | **Acreage:** 8,584 | **Containment:** 77% | **Start date:** July 9, 2021

Cause: Lightning | **Personnel:** 65

Firefighters and engines yesterday patrolled and mopped up along containment lines. There are no hot spots threatening the fire perimeter. Some heat and visible smokes remain in the interior of the fire. Today, crews will continue adding depth to the containment lines in Divisions I and T, focusing on areas of heat identified by infrared mapping. They will ensure resources are in place near structures. Steep, inaccessible terrain and heavy fuels in Division R make direct attack along the north edge unsafe for firefighters. There is very little heat and no fire growth in that division, and fire officials have identified Management Action Points. In the unlikely event the fire reaches these points, alternative tactics will be implemented.

Woods Creek Fire

Location: 16 miles NE of Townsend, MT | **Acreage:** 55,411 | **Containment:** 61% | **Start date:** July 10, 2021

Cause: Lightning | **Personnel:** 409

Firefighters added containment yesterday on the north edge of the fire between Debauch Gulch and Blacktail Road, and from Pyatt Gulch to Blacktail Creek. With more accurate mapping last night, the above acreage and containment is now reflected. The entire north edge of the fire is now contained. The eastern edge of the fire, in Divisions A and O, is in patrol status, except for a small "finger" near Big Birch Creek. Control line is in place, but some heat and interior smokes remain in this drainage, where the fire is burning in heavy timber. Firefighters will continue direct attack in the area today. At the southeast edge, a hotshot crew is working near Russell Fork Deep Creek to contain a hot spot burning in snags and timber. Crews in Division S are patrolling, mopping up, and strengthening contingency lines. This includes chipping and masticating fine fuels to further reduce the risk of fire crossing these lines. There are some interior smokes in this division, but very little heat near the fire perimeter. A rock face is available for controlling a burn out operation, in the unlikely event this is needed.

American Fork Fire

Location: 24 miles SW of Harlowtown, MT | **Acreage:** 21,876 | **Containment:** 58% | **Start date:** July 17, 2021

Cause: Lightning | **Personnel:** 207

The American Fork fire transitioned to the Albuquerque Zone - Type 3 Incident Management Team on August 22. Yesterday, resources composed of hand crews, engines, and heavy equipment cold trailed and secured line on the western and southern flanks of the fire. Resources on the northern flank looked for opportunities to put in direct line to secure the northern edge of the perimeter. Fire behavior was minimal with spread described as creeping and smoldering fire, confined to the interior. Crews today will continue to work interior hot spots from all flanks of the fire. In addition, firefighters will continue to work along a dozer line on the north side of the fire, building and reinforcing fire line to the east, toward the 2017 Blacktail burn scar. On the east side, crews will hold, improve, and backhaul hand line, and repair surface disturbance caused by a dozer line. Firefighters will continue to improve containment line on the south side of the fire; that is nearing completion. The Albuquerque Zone - Type 3 Operations Branch Section Chief, Marc Wheeler, in collaboration with the

Incident Commander, is continuing to downsize the organization to ensure a manageable span of control. This downsized organization will meet all operational needs and optimal effectiveness to carry forward the mission of full suppression.

Weather and Fuel Conditions: The forecast today is sunny and cool, with lighter ridgetop winds. The high temperature today will be 59°F at 7500 feet elevation. Easterly ridgetop winds will be 10-15 mph sustained, gusting up to 25 mph. Wednesday and Thursday are predicted to bring afternoon showers and a chance of thunderstorms. Fire behavior continues to be moderated by wet fuels and weather conditions.

Evacuation Notices

For questions or more information on evacuations, please contact your local county sheriff's office.

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.

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: The Broadwater County Sheriff's Office has lifted all evacuation and pre-evacuation orders and warnings for all areas of the Woods Creek Fire on the Broadwater County side. 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 is in pre-evacuation status. A pre-evacuation notice remains 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 over the American Fork fire area. The Woods Creek TFR has been lifted. 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 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 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

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/#> or

<https://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair/smokemostrecentupdate.aspx>

Statewide fire restrictions: www.MTFireInfo.org

