

Balsinger, Woods Creek, and American Fork Fires Update



Wednesday, August 25, 2021 – 10:00 am

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: Incident personnel will be at the Livingston Farmers Market this evening (Wednesday, August 25th), to provide fire information and answer any questions. Please join us for a virtual community meeting tomorrow night (Thursday, August 26th) at 7:00 pm on Facebook Live. Your questions are welcome. The virtual meeting will be recorded and available for viewing afterward: <https://www.facebook.com/WoodsCreekBalsingerAmericanForkFires/>.

Current Situation: Work continues today on strengthening containment and contingency lines and mopping up hot spots. Four helicopters remain assigned to the fires to assist with dropping buckets of water to cool areas of heat.

Balsinger Fire

Location: 5 miles W of Neihart, MT | **Acres:** 8,584 | **Containment:** 77% | **Start date:** July 9, 2021 | **Personnel:** 65

Yesterday, firefighters and engines patrolled and mopped up along containment lines. There are no hot spots threatening the fire perimeter. Today, crews will continue adding depth to the containment lines in Divisions I and T, focusing on areas of heat identified by infrared mapping. 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. 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 | **Acres:** 55,411 | **Containment:** 61% | **Start date:** July 10, 2021 | **Personnel:** 384

The north edge of the fire is contained. Crews are patrolling the perimeter and mopping up hot spots in Divisions Y and A. Firefighters are engaging small hot spots in this area. In Division A, the suppression repair crew will clear berms today. 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. Engines and ground crews 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. Equipment was backhauled from the south end of the fire yesterday to be used in suppression repair on the west side. 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. Interior smokes are visible in this division, but there is minimal heat near the fire perimeter. Interior fuels may continue to burn until there is a season-ending event. Duck Creek and Windy Ridge road washouts are now repaired.

American Fork Fire

Location: 24 miles SW of Harlowtown, MT | **Acres:** 21,876 | **Containment:** 58% | **Start date:** July 17, 2021 | **Personnel:** 205

The American Fork fire is under the command of the Albuquerque Zone Type 3 Incident Management Team. Resources composed of hand crews, engines, and heavy equipment are securing line and beginning repair actions on the western and southern flanks of the fire. Saw crews will continue to work toward the northwest flank, falling hazard trees. Interagency hand crews from multiple states, and Montana National Guard crews, put in handline and assisted in repair efforts in that area. Resources on the northern flank continue to look for opportunities to put in direct line to secure the northern edge of the perimeter. Fire behavior was minimal, with spread described as smoldering, mostly confined to the interior. Crews today will continue to work interior hot spots from all flanks of the fire. Firefighters will continue to work along a dozer line on the North side of the fire, constructing and reinforcing fire line to the east, toward the 2017 Blacktail burn scar. On the east side, crews will hold, improve, and mop up hand line, and repair surface disturbance caused by dozer line. Firefighters will continue to improve containment line on the south side of the fire. This section of line is nearing completion. Downsizing of the organization continues, to meet all operational needs and optimal effectiveness to carry forward the mission of full suppression and rehabilitation. As such the Melville spike camp will be consolidated to the SVR basecamp on Thursday.

Weather and Fuel Conditions: Warmer temperatures and mostly sunny skies are expected early in the day. There is a chance of rain showers and thunderstorms in the late afternoon through evening. The high temperature today will be 65°F at 7500 feet elevation. Winds are moving from east to southwest today, at 5-10 mph sustained, gusting up to 20 mph.

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. Traffic on closed roads creates safety hazards for firefighters and emergency vehicles.

Temporary flight restrictions remain in place over the American Fork Fire area. 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. For details see: <https://go.usa.gov/xFMGd>. There are closure areas for the Balsinger Fire (<https://go.usa.gov/xFMGk>) Woods Creek Fire (<https://go.usa.gov/xFMG5>) and American Fork Fire (<https://go.usa.gov/xFMGy>).

Stage 1 fire restrictions remain in place for the Custer Gallatin National Forest. For more information, see the first item in the Alerts section at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/custergallatin/alerts-notice>. There is an updated closure area for the American Fork Fire as of August 24th. See: <https://go.usa.gov/xFMGf>.

The Bureau of Land Management Butte and Lewiston Field Offices issued an area closure for lands affected by the Woods Creek Fire. See: <https://go.usa.gov/xFMGG>.

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

