

Chetco East Zone Fire Update

Wednesday, September 7, 2017 – 9:00 a.m.

<https://inciweb.nwcmg.gov/incident/5385/>
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According to an infrared (heat detecting) flight last night, the **Chetco Bar Fire** is **177,301 acres**, an increase of 530 acres from the last measurement. It is generally located in Curry County, but enters Josephine County at the north end of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and at the headwaters of Canyon Creek, south of Babyfoot Lake on the east. The Fire is **eight miles west** of the National Forest's eastern boundary.

In order to effectively address its current complexity, as of 8:00 pm on Wednesday, September 6, the east side of the Chetco Bar Fire is being managed by Northwest Incident Management Team #13 as the "**Chetco East Zone**". This provides the opportunity to focus more efficiently on the local operational mission and give more detailed information to communities of Josephine County such as Selma, Kerby, Cave Junction, Takilma and O'Brien. Extensive cooperation and resource sharing will continue among all the fire managers.

The **Chetco East Zone** has been divided into Divisions V, W, X, and Y that span from Bear Camp Overlook to the California border.

Current operational work makes deliberate use of successful firefighting strategies from the Biscuit Fire in 2002. Initiated August 31, as the fire started nudging toward the ridgeline that marks the Curry-Josephine County border, current work includes protecting homes and structures along the Illinois Valley Road and constructing fire containment lines well west of the communities along Hwy 199.

There are approximately 40 structures along the Illinois River Road within the Rogue River - Siskiyou National Forest boundary west of Selma, such as Store Gulch, McCaleb Ranch and Oak Flat. These buildings have been receiving protection from future fire through common "Firewise" strategies such as removing nearby vegetation, firewood, and other flammable items, enhanced with firefighting preparedness techniques such as installing hose lines and sprinklers. Although many of these buildings have received attention in the past, vegetation grows back and improvements were needed. This work is 90% completed, with additional effort planned at Store Gulch today.

Starting September 1, firefighters have been using dozers to construct fire containment lines along the East Zone. Many of these lines are being reestablished on the lines that succeeded in stopping the 2002 Biscuit Fire. Although pieces will be linked in coming days, initial priority was given to installing segments that were most important to immediately protect communities. Accomplishments include:

- **Four miles** of dozer line were re-opened three miles west of Hwy 199, west of Cave Junction, from Tennessee Pass to Woodcock Creek.
- **Two miles** of line were opened north from Rough and Ready Creek, followed by **4 miles** south from Rough and Ready Creek to Lone Mtn. These pieces were particularly important because, this far south, the Biscuit Fire didn't cross the ridge into Josephine County, and the current abundant heavy fuel loading could create extreme fire conditions which would potentially threaten O'Brien.
- West of Eight Dollar Mtn, approximately **3 miles** of **both** the 016 and 023 roads were brushed out and improved for driving. Having parallel tracks available ensures one route for travel, even if one line is needed for fire control.
- About **9 miles** of dozer line and roads were re-opened north from the Illinois River Road at the Siskiyou Field Institute, around Squaw Mtn and Spalding Pond, to meet Road 4105 north of Sixmile Creek.

Today: Five dozers will continue to increase and join the segments of containment line. Fallers remove nearby snags to secure these lines, increasing safety for firefighting efforts and effectiveness of fire barriers. Three 20-person hand crews follow the dozers to ensure that smaller brush gets cleaned away. Aircraft operations have been limited due to weather and smoke. If helicopters can safely fly, reconnaissance of the

fire's position and assessing protection needs at Pearsoll Peak Lookout and communication sites at Eight Dollar Mtn and Fiddler Mtn are priorities.

As more containment lines are completed and fire behavior moderates, more direct fireline routes will be sought from safe anchor points, closer to the areas that are currently burning.

Weather and Fire Behavior: Thunderstorms brought widespread rain that briefly cleared the air Wednesday evening. There's a 25% chance of additional wetting rain Thursday, which drops to a 10% chance Friday. Cool weather is forecast with temperatures in the upper 60s and 70s, and humidity over 50%. Winds from the W-NW will generally not be strong (4-8 mph, with gusts to 12 mph). Fire behavior will moderate, but remains variable because rain did not penetrate and wet all parts of the fire and fine fuels such as leaf litter will dry quickly. Short uphill runs can occur where winds and uphill slopes align. Spotting is not expected. The weather will become hotter and drier starting Saturday and Sunday.

Smoke: Heavy smoke has affected many parts of Josephine County for many days. Today's smoke level in Grants Pass is forecast as "very unhealthy" indicating that everyone should avoid prolonged or heavy outdoor exertion. Public information about forest fires and smoke conditions is available at <http://oregonSmoke.blogspot.com>.

Closures and Restrictions: Many areas and activities are closed or restricted due to current and expected fire activity and hazard. Full details are available on <https://inciweb.nwccg.gov/incident/closures/5385/> In Josephine County, a **Level 1 "Ready" Evacuation Notification** affects private and BLM land on the west side of Hwy 199 from Hays Hill to the California border. This action is intended to raise awareness of fire in the vicinity and get people thinking about necessary steps they'd take if later asked to evacuate. Ten miles along the Illinois River Road from the National Forest boundary two miles west of Selma to Oak Flats is under **Level 3 "Go" Evacuation Notification**. Residents were advised to leave this area and it is closed to everyone except firefighting personnel. People can view maps of the current Evacuation Notification areas at <http://arcg.is/2vWQ2N>. By typing their address into the dark blue line, they can see where their home is located in relation to the current Evacuation warnings.

Fire At a Glance:

Size: 177,301 acres

Started: July 12, 2017 by Lightning

Containment: 5%



Bureau of Land Management



Oregon State Fire Marshall



Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest



Oregon Department of Forestry



Illinois Valley Fire District