

Ravalli County Commissioners Office

From: McKay, Tod G -FS <tgmcKay@fs.fed.us>
Sent: Saturday, August 15, 2015 12:51 PM
Subject: Bitterroot NF Fire Update -- Aug. 15
Attachments: Wildfire Update - 8-15-15.docx



FACT SHEET

Wildfire Update

August 15, 2015 12:30 P.M.

Contact: Tod McKay **Phone:** 406-363-7122

What: General Fire Update

Location: Bitterroot National Forest

Summary: Firefighters responded to 10 new lightning caused wildfires on the Bitterroot National Forest overnight associated with the passage of a cold front. Due to the quick response of initial attack crews from the Bitterroot NF and local volunteer fire departments, all of the fires were kept under 2 acres. Crews remain on three fires this afternoon and will continue mop up work until fires are controlled. See below for the latest fire information and lightning statistics associated with last night's storm.

Buck Horn Fire: Lightning caused fire burning east of Hamilton in the Sapphire Mountains near Buck Horn Saddle and Gird Point Lookout. The fire grew overnight, pushed by 25 mph winds associated with thunderstorms. The fire area received little rain but did experience frequent lightning. The blaze is currently estimated at 50 acres and is burning in timber and grass. Current resources include 12 firefighters, three engines, one water tender, one helicopter which has been assisting with bucket work. One twenty person (Type 2) crew is expected to arrive later this afternoon.

Today's plans include building hand line around the south and east flanks of the fire, off the 1361 road. All efforts are being made to keep the fire from moving to the southeast towards Skalkaho Highway. The fire is burning approximately one mile from Skalkaho Road which remains open at this time. There are no structures threatened. An emergency road closure is in place for Gird Road #714 for public and firefighter safety.

Canyon Creek Fire: Lightning caused fire burning west of Hamilton in upper Canyon Creek, south of Blodgett Canyon. The fire did not grow overnight, despite getting hit by gusty and erratic winds from thunderstorms. It is currently estimated at 17 acres and is burning in scattered timber, one mile northeast of Canyon Lake. Current resources include 14 firefighters which were flown into the area due to extremely steep and rocky terrain, and one helicopter which is assisting with bucket work.

Crews were successful yesterday and have currently built line around the south and east flanks of the fire. The western edge is also secure, due to natural barriers such as rock outcroppings which are helping to confine and contain the fire. All efforts are being made to keep the fire from moving east towards private property and homes while ensuring firefighter safety in extremely steep and rocky terrain. There are currently no structures threatened and no trail closures.

Air Statistics: The helicopter working on the Canyon Creek fire yesterday dumped approximately 26,000 gallons of water on the fire. The helicopter working on the Buck Horn fire yesterday dumped approximately 8,000 gallons of water on the fire.

Lightning Strikes: There have been more than 1,000 confirmed lightning strikes on the forest in the last 24-hours. Crews will be on the lookout for more fires today and over the next several days.

Additional Resources: Five 20 person crews, two helicopters, two skidgeons (cross between a bulldozer and engine) have been ordered.

Smoke/Air Quality: Wildfire smoke has prompted an air quality warning for much of Western Montana. Strong westerly winds have brought in an enormous amount of smoke due to a rapid increase in fire activity yesterday in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Montana. The Department of Environmental Quality has issued an alert for Ravalli and Missoula counties until 4pm Saturday. As of noon, air quality was considered Very Unhealthy in Hamilton and Unhealthy in both Missoula and Frenchtown. All children and adults with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion today. For the latest information visit <http://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair/>

Weather: Much cooler day is in store today with temperatures 20 degrees cooler than yesterday with many locations only reaching the upper 70s or low 80s. Gusty west winds will continue through much of the day. With a cooler air mass in place tonight and clearing skies, some valley locations will likely get quite chilly by Sunday morning. The next weather system will move in on Monday bringing scattered rain showers and isolated thunderstorms.

Safety Concerns: Safety of the public and firefighters is always a primary concern. Also, Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) or "Drones" are not permitted to fly in areas that have Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR) in place, including near wildfires.

Cooperating Agencies: Ravalli County Sheriff's Office, Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department, Ravalli County Office of Emergency Management.

Inciweb: For more information about these fires and other fires across the country visit <http://inciweb.nwcg.gov>

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Tod McKay
Public Affairs Officer
Forest Service
Bitterroot National Forest