



Pacific Northwest Region
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
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www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman

News Release

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Fire Status on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

Baker City, Oregon – “The trail closure on the Cougar Ridge Trail (#1668) and Bearwallow Trail (#1677) in the Eagle Cap Wilderness located within the Cougar Fire has been lifted immediately,” announced Kris Stein, Eagle Cap District Ranger.

The Hurricane Creek (#1807) trail remains closed from the trailhead to the junction with Trail #1824 near Billy Jones Creek **UNTIL 8:00 am THURSDAY, JULY 31st**. The trail closure will be lifted; **HOWEVER an AREA CLOSURE** will be implemented as of Thursday, July 31st.

Further information will be forthcoming regarding the area closure map etc. (see the Forest website for further information on closure: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman>). The area closure will be located to the east of the Hurricane Creek trail, which will open the trail on July 31st. The trail will remain open unless fire activity necessitates re-closure of the trail.

The Hurricane Creek Fire is currently at 502 acres and is burning in the Hurricane Creek/Dunn Creek drainage in the Eagle Cap Wilderness. During initial attack on the fire, the response was to suppress the fire to the smallest size possible; however due to the extreme terrain this was not possible. The terrain forced the Fire Managers into a strategy of keeping the fire from moving northward, towards private land. Due to steep terrain and natural fuel breaks, limited action will be taken on the south and east sides of the fire, which is located within the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

"The public should know that we are actively monitoring this fire and evaluating the potential for increased activity and are ready to take appropriate action if the fire heats up again," said Stein. For now, there is a helicopter dropping water on hot spots to minimize or reduce spread. There is also a field observer on scene to watch fire behavior and gather information on fuel conditions and weather on the fire.



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The data collected daily at the fire site are used in computer models to help predict potential direction of fire spread. Rita Chandler, a Long-term Fire Analyst is trained in running computer models that are designed to look at existing fire situations (such as fuel type, fuel condition, and topography), factor in forecasted weather (temperature, humidity, wind, etc.), compare it to the outcomes of thousands of simulated fires and their responses to similar weather conditions, and provide a map showing where and how far the fire is most likely to spread. This information provides Ranger Stein and her fire managers some idea of what to expect and help them make decisions on what actions to take, if any and what resources may be needed.

Modeling done by Chandler indicates that the Hurricane Creek Fire spread is unlikely to reach values at risk in the foreseeable future. The models do indicate that if the fire does grow, it is most likely to spread slowly to the south, staying within the wilderness and away from private land. The current observed fire behavior and the information from the computer models is good news and confirms the decision to pull back and not put people at risk. "We will continue to watch the Hurricane Creek Fire and be ready to respond if it threatens private property," said Stein. "As there is some burning in the interior of the fire, smoke will likely be visible from time to time, potentially throughout the summer; however our actions along the perimeter will minimize or reduce spread," added Stein.

The Divide Fire is currently 160 acres and is 85% contained. Most of the fire burned in grass and the edges of the burn are cold. A few hotspots are visible in the interior. The northeast corner is the primary area of concern where the fire is moderately active in a very steep, rocky area with brush and timber present.

The Cougar Fire is currently 45 acres and 100% contained, with monitoring by air and on-the-ground visits. Lifting the trail closures on the Cougar Fire will allow access within the footprint of the fire. "People should use caution when entering a recently burned wildfire area," warned Nathan Goodrich, Wallowa Mountains District Fire Management Officer. "It's important they understand the increased hazards created by the wildfire itself." Hazard trees or snags tend to pose the most imminent threat. Dead or dying fire damaged trees that remain standing after a wildfire are unstable, especially in high winds. "People are more likely to pay attention to obstacles on the ground but don't often look up to assess danger," said Goodrich.

Other hazards to be aware of in any recently burned wildfire area include:

- Burned-out stump holes can make the ground weak and subject to failure.
- Loose rocks and logs are unpredictable and present the hazard of rolling debris.
- Ash and fallen needles are slippery and can make for treacherous footing on trails.

NEWS RELEASE

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- Flash floods and mud flows may occur, especially in areas without vegetation.
- People intending to hike into, or near, the fire area should remain alert and aware of their surroundings at all times. Know the forecasted weather before entering the area, assess the weather conditions while in the area, and stay clear of burned trees. Don't camp or hang out in the wildfire area. As always, let someone know your planned route, destination, and expected return time.
- The public can expect to encounter increased traffic as crews monitor the fire area and begin rehabilitation activities.

Additionally, there were 4-5 lightning strikes across the Forest last night, all under 1 acre with initial attack deployed.

Forest officials encourage everyone to be safe and careful when recreating or using the national forest. The Wallowa-Whitman continues to be in Phase A of the Public Use Restrictions (PURs), which also includes the Seasonal Campfire Restrictions. Conditions may change through the week pending predicted weather, and the Forest Fire Managers will be evaluating the PURs by weeks' end.

More information on the PURs can be found at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/PURS>.

Visit the Blue Mountains Interagency Dispatch Center (BMIDC) web site 24 hours a day at:

www.bmidc.org or www.inciweb.nwccg.gov for current information about fires, weather, and fire

closure information. For more information about the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, please call **541-523-1246 or 541-523-1302**. Public-use restrictions will be updated on a recorded message line at: **Baker City (541) 523-1234, La Grande (541) 962-8679, and Enterprise (541) 426-5552**, and are also available online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman/>.

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