

Saddle Complex Fire Update

September 15, 2011
Bitterroot and Salmon-Challis National Forests

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Date Started: 8/10/2011

Cause: Lightning

Size: 32,287 acres (16,649 on SCNF, 15,588 on BNF)

Percent Contained: 0%

Resources: 3 Helicopters; 1 Water Tender
11 Engines; 6 Crews

Total Personnel: 237

Residences: 20 threatened, 0 destroyed

Residence: 20 threatened; 0 destroyed

Outbuildings: 10 threatened; 0 destroyed

Injuries to Date: 5

Location:

The Complex was comprised of two fires – the Saddle and Stud Fires – which merged on August 22nd into one fire which is burning on the Salmon-Challis and Bitterroot National Forests in Lemhi County, Idaho, and Ravalli County, Montana. Portions of the fire are within the Frank-Church River of No Return Wilderness.

Overview:

MONTANA: The Stage 1 Evacuation was lifted for all homes south of Painted Rocks Reservoir on Sunday September 4, 2011. However, if fire activity increases and causes a threat to private property, the evacuation warning could be re-instated.

Yesterday the fire continued to exhibit fire behavior similar to previous days. While single and group torching trees were observed in limited areas, most of the fire activity consisted of slowly moving surface fire later in the day. Fire operations had a relatively quiet day continuing to strengthen the firelines and complete the hoselays and sprinkler systems in the northeast corner of the fire between Woods Creek and Devil Creek in preparation for the predicted wind events, associated with a dry, cold front.

Helicopters dropped water on the east edge of the Saddle fire to limit fire spread towards the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. The KMAX helicopter dropped water on an initial attack fire in Sheep Creek, early in the day, in an area that was unsafe for ground crews.

Actions planned today are a continuation of those yesterday. Helicopters may be used in all divisions of the fire. Direct suppression and mop-up activities by fire crews will continue in the northeast corner of the fire.

Today, temperatures will be in the 70's. Later in the evening, southwest winds with gusts up to 20 miles per hour on ridge tops and 15 miles per hour in the valley are predicted. There is a 30% chance of rain. Fire activity may increase with the passing of strong winds. Wind speeds on Sunday may reach 25 mph.

The historic Alta Ranger Station will be wrapped today with aluminum fire shield material as a preventative measure to protect it. The Alta Ranger Station is being wrapped now so crews will be available for structure protection during the wind event should the fire become active.

Three rural fire engines, with one agency engine, will be activated and staged at the Painted Rocks Fire Department, or near homes, for increased protection of private property as a precaution for the predicted wind events.

The Smoke Monitoring Station near Painted Rocks Reservoir indicates unhealthy sensitive to good air quality for the last 24 hours. On-line access to real-time smoke monitoring for the local area is available at; <http://www.satguard.com/USFS/aqi.asp>, once on the site select real time data, location Montana.

Closures and Restrictions:

Stage 1 fire restrictions, prohibiting campfires, with certain exceptions, and prohibiting smoking, except in a vehicle, building, developed site or 3 feet diameter cleared area, are in effect in portions of the Bitterroot National Forest that lie within Montana, except the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, AP wilderness and developed sites listed in the closure order.

The previously reported area closures are still in effect on the Bitterroot National Forest; and will remain until access is safe for the public and firefighters. The Salmon-Challis National Forest has lifted the Closure Order for the area between the Squaw Creek road, west to the Spring Creek road, with a south boundary of the Salmon River road and a north boundary of the Idaho/Montana border. The remainder of the closure area is still in effect. (New Closure Order 9/10 at inciweb.org.)

For additional information on the closure areas, as well as the entire Saddle Complex, visit www.inciweb.org/incident/2496, or contact the **West Fork Ranger District (Bitterroot NF) at 406-821-3269** or **North Fork Ranger District (Salmon-Challis NF) at 208-865-2700**.