

Saddle Complex Fire Update

September 10, 2011
Bitterroot and Salmon-Challis National Forests

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Date Started: 8/10/2011

Cause: Lightning

Size: 30,511 acres (15,612 on SCNF, 14,899 on BNF)

Percent Contained: 0%

Resources: 3 Helicopters; 2 Water Tenders

12 Engines; 4 Crews

Total Personnel: 200

Residences: 20 threatened, 0 destroyed

Commercial: 0 threatened; 0 destroyed

Outbuildings: 10 threatened; 0 destroyed

Injuries to Date: 4

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 reinstated.

Helicopters continued to drop water on hot spots on the northeast corner and eastern side of the fire yesterday, in late morning, after the inversion lifted. Helicopter operations prefer visibility of two miles. Over one-half million gallons of water have been used on helicopter bucket drops, to date, on this fire. These helicopter actions are successfully slowing the spread of the fire towards the West Fork of the Bitterroot River and keeping it from establishing in the Deer Creek drainage. Water hoses and firelines were completed in preparation of a planned burnout in Coopers meadow. The burnout will occur when weather and fire behavior conditions are favorable. Water hose-lays and sprinklers will be set up along Woods Creek Rd. 5669 to the west and Salt Creek Rd. 091 to the south, from the junction of these roads, in order to hold the fire from crossing these roads.

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/ajl.asp>, once on the site select real time data, location Montana.

IDAHO: Today's operation went well, in part with help from the weather. Overall it was a quiet day. The inversion kept things calm until early afternoon. When the inversion lifted the fire area became clouded over for the remainder of the afternoon from cumulus cloud development. Crews in Gattin scouted all the trails to the north, northwest, west, and south, and assessed them for use as contingency lines in the event the main fire moves to the west of the East Fork of Reynolds Creek. Firefighters continued to secure and mop-up portions of the previous day's burn out along Horse Creek. Crews mopped up below the Oreanna Lookout road.

All lookouts reported minimal activity on the Idaho side, though the fire appears to have reached the saddle on the MT/ID divide. Firefighters conducted hand and aerial ignition on Alligator Ridge and Cabin Creek. The Spring Creek road continues to be improved by the Forest grader, and should be nearing completion of the project. The majority of personnel are staying overnight at Gattin Ranch. This is minimizing traffic and exposure on the Spring Creek road.

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 both the Bitterroot and Salmon-Challis National Forests; and will remain until access is safe for the public and firefighters. 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**.