



Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Bitterroot National Forest



Bowles Creek Fire

INCIDENT COMMANDER: Greg Schenk

Fire Information: 406-865-0941

Email: Terina.hill@usda.gov

Inciweb: <https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/incident-information/mtbdf-bowles-creek>

Facebook: facebook.com/usfsbdfn

facebook.com/DiscoverBitterrootNF

July 22, 2023 (9:00 a.m.)

Location: 3 miles southwest of Skalkaho Pass in the Bowles Creek drainage

Start Date: 7/20/2023 **Cause:** Lightning * **Size:** 831 acres **Completion:** 0%

Total Personnel: 53 **Engines:** 0 **Helicopters:** 1 **Hand Crews:** 2

A Type 3 Incident Management Team is mobilizing.

The Forest received a smoke report in the Bowles Creek drainage area, following a lightning storm on the evening of July 20, 2023. Ground resources and a helicopter flight confirmed the location. Additional smoke reports, received by the Bitterroot Dispatch Center, were checked and confirmed by ground resources.

Ground resources and an early morning helicopter flight on July 21st estimated the Bowles Fire to be approximately 50 acres and the Daly Creek fire on the Bitterroot side of the divide to be approximately 1-2 acres. Initial attack resources lined and “plumbed” (with water and hoselays) the Daly Fire. Fire operations officials pulled those individuals off the active fireline for safety reasons. Due to this active fire behavior and resulting growth, these fires have merged and will be referred to as the Bowles Creek Fire. Active fire behavior due to receptive fuels and hot and dry weather conditions resulted in extensive fire growth throughout the day.

The fire is located approximately three miles southwest of Skalkaho Pass in the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in steep terrain, just north of the 2022 Hog Trough Fire. Fuels consist of thick timber and a heavy dead and downed fuel component. Two 20-year-old fire footprints from previous fires are located adjacent to this area. No structures are currently threatened.

CURRENT SITUATION & PLANNED ACTIONS

* Last evening’s helicopter flight and additional information from the ground resources have mapped the fire area at 831 acres, highlighting yesterday afternoon’s active fire behavior and the merger of the two fires.

Firefighting crews and resources from both Forests will be working to establish “indirect” (away from the active fire edge) firelines, utilizing natural barriers and the existing road and trails systems. On the west side, resources will be prepping the Daly Creek Road (711Rd), constructing a fuel break adjacent to the road. On the east side, crews will be hiking into the fire area along a trail and fireline used in the 2022 Hog Trough fire, working to the south from the Bowles Creek Road (5071Rd) to the 313 Trail. Other resources will be working on establishing a landing zone for use by aviation resources.

The two Forests will in-brief the incoming Type 3 Incident Management Team (Northern Rockies Team 8) this afternoon, and Transfer of Command of the fire is scheduled for Sunday morning.

WEATHER & FIRE BEHAVIOR

The fire is located at 7,800 feet in elevation. The weather forecast calls for **CRITICAL FIRE WEATHER**, with high temperatures in the mid-80s, relative humidity in the 10-20% range, and southwest winds in the 5-15 mph range. Warmer and drier conditions, conducive to active burning conditions, are predicted to last through the weekend.

Early fire behavior included creeping through ground fuels and isolated and group torching of trees, with high potential for spotting. Fire behavior increased to running, torching, and spotting, given the afternoon weather condition (hot and dry with moderate upslope winds). Similar fire behavior is expected today. The fire is producing smoke that is visible from numerous locations along the Skalkaho Highway and in the Bitterroot Valley and Philipsburg.

CLOSURES

Closures surrounding a fire area are necessary to protect the safety and welfare of the public and provide for safe firefighting efforts and access. Area closure often involve specific trail and road sections. The Forests are assessing the need and potential boundaries of a closure. Specific closure information and maps will be posted on the Forest websites and the fire's Inciweb page as they are implemented.

The Skalkaho Pass Road remains open. Those recreating or traveling in the fire area are encouraged to be aware of the situation and to pay attention to increased fire traffic.

A Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) is in effect over the fire area for the safety of the aviation resources.