

**News & Features**

# Evacuation Order Issued for Waterton Lakes National Park

Crews brace for windy weekend conditions; historic structures wrapped with protective material

BY BEACON STAFF // SEP 8, 2017



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- *Canada agency issues evacuation order in Waterton Lakes National Park*
- *Crews install protective wrap around historic Wheeler Cabin in Glacier National Park*
- *Firefighters brace for forecasted weekend wind storm*

Updated: Sept. 8, 3:30 p.m.

Parks Canada has issued an immediate evacuation order for Waterton Lakes National Park, including Waterton Park townsite, and all front-country and back-country trails, facilities, and areas as a result of significant public safety risk from the **Kenow Fire**, which is burning primarily in nearby British Columbia.

The park, located across the border from Glacier National Park, is closed to all incoming traffic except emergency vehicles.

The [Kenow wildfire started west of Waterton Lakes](#) in the Canadian Flathead Valley and is currently not contained. It has expanded to over 19,000 acres in size and has advanced into Waterton Lakes National Park. The townsite of Waterton is home to more than 80 permanent residents and 181 sites.

British Columbia is suffering its worst fire season in history with more than 2.2 million acres and counting burning so far this year. The unprecedented year has seen more than 1,000 fires across the province, costing more than \$315 million.

Faced with tinderbox conditions, Montana is plagued by similar circumstances with more than 1 million acres burned this year, costing more than \$284 million and counting so far. An estimated 4,000 firefighters are assigned to incidents across the state right now.

Montana U.S. Sen. Jon Tester invited President Donald Trump to visit the state and witness the impact of the firestorm.

“Wildfires are raging across our great state and we need folks in Washington D.C. to understand the challenges we are facing,” Tester said. “I invited President Trump to Montana so he can hear from the folks on the ground about what resources we need to fight these fires and what our communities need to recover from this brutal fire season.”

Western Montana remains in “extreme” fire danger and has been under **Stage 2 Fire Restrictions** for 43 days, meaning campfires are prohibited and other outdoor uses. Local authorities are reminding residents to obey the regulations or face citations. Officers have

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responded to 17 illegal burns since Sept. 1, as well as 30 illegal fireworks.

Fire managers are concerned about strong westerly winds that are forecasted to arrive Saturday and Sunday, potentially fanning the flames even further. In recent days, heavy smoke and calmer conditions have helped stall growth in many area fires, including the **Sprague Fire in Glacier National Park**.

The advantage of the oppressive smoke is the dampening effect it has had on the **Sprague and Adair Peak** fire behavior, which has allowed firefighters a window to work on putting structure protection in place, according to officials. The disadvantage has been the inability to use aircraft.



Firefighters focus efforts on fuels reduction and structure protection at the historic Wheeler cabin. Courtesy Glacier National Park

Firefighters have focused efforts on fuels reduction and structure protection at the historic Wheeler cabin on the north end of Lake McDonald. The historic cabin is named after Burton K. Wheeler and was built in 1941.

Crews have also focused their efforts to protecting Lake McDonald Lodge, which is surrounded by engines and a sprawling sprinkler system.

An evacuation order remains in effect from the south end of Lake McDonald north to Logan Pass. This includes the North McDonald Road. It does not include the Apgar area at this time. Logan Pass is still accessible from the east side of the park. The duration of the evacuation is unknown at this time, park officials say.

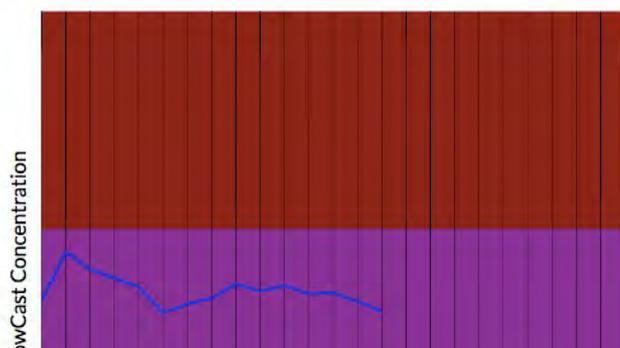
Amenities have increasingly closed up for the season in Apgar. Apgar Village Inn closed for season due to smoke. Dozens of people are canceling reservations all over the park every day, according to Marc Ducharme, general manager of the Glacier Division at Xanterra Parks & Resorts. There are 20 rooms available at Many Glacier. Glacier Park Inc. continues to operate other sites with limited hours.

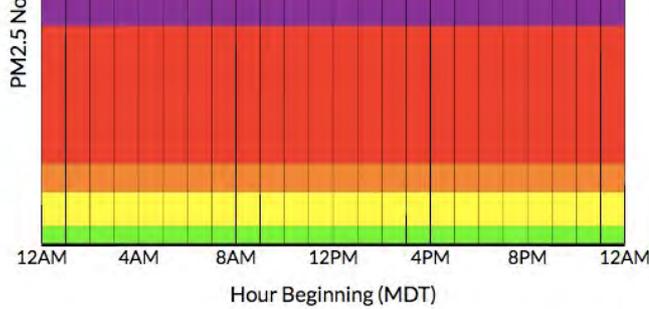
“Apgar is a ghost town,” Ducharme said.

**SMOKE CONDITIONS:** The smoke conditions blanketing the Flathead Valley are listed as “very unhealthy” on Friday. When air quality is considered “very unhealthy,” health officials recommend that people with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly, and children should avoid any outdoor activity. Everyone else should avoid prolonged exertion.

Local events have been canceled due to the hazardous air quality, including the Montana Dragon Boat Festival, the Two Bear Marathon and the Flathead Invitational cross country meet.

#### PM2.5 NowCast Concentration Characterized by 24-Hour Health Effect Category





Air quality conditions in the Flathead Valley on Friday. The purple level is "very unhealthy" and brown is "hazardous." Courtesy Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Crews reported minimal growth on the **Gibraltar Ridge Fire**, located about seven miles east of Eureka. The fire has burned 7,443 acres and is 27 percent contained. Firefighters will continue to mop-up, patrol and monitor the fire's gradual growth toward William's Creek. Firefighters are patrolling for hot spots around the Grave Creek and the fire perimeter.

Structure protection, along with sprinkler systems, is currently in place if needed. The firelines continue to hold and fire growth is minimal, according to officials. Pre-evacuation warnings and closure orders are still in place in the fire areas.

The **Caribou Fire** has grown to 21,005 acres and is now at 25 percent contained. The fire, about 21 miles northwest of Eureka, has forced evacuations in the West Kootenai area north of Tooley Lake. A pre-evacuation warning is in effect for the West Kootenai area south of Tooley Lake and the Basin Creek area.

Additional resources have been assigned to the fire, and with the potential for better visibility aircraft will be used to assist firefighters on the ground, officials said Friday. Structure protection will continue to be the priority and area closure orders remain in place for the Caribou Fire.

The **West Fork Fire** is estimated at 8,705 acres and remains zero percent containment. The fire, burning seven miles northwest of Libby, is exhibiting moderate fire behavior and backing in multiple directions, according to officials. The planned burnout over the last two days has been successful with approximately 900 acres accomplished in the Bobtail Ridge and Bobtail Ridge Road and Quartz Creek Road areas. The burnout operations will increase the buffer zone between the active fire area and the residences in the area.

Structure protection and evaluating values at risk remain the priority. The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office issued evacuation orders for Kootenai River Road from Quarts Creek to end of Bighorn Terrace; the north side of Kootenai River Road from North Central to Quartz Creek; and Lower Bobtail, including Burrell and Indian Pipe. Residents were advised to flee by noon Thursday. Those evacuations are in addition to prior orders for residences in the 17 Mile Community of Pipe Creek Road; Upper Bobtail Road, north of and including Hutton Drive, along with Milton Drive, Bobtail Lane, Verna Court; and Quartz Mountain Road.

The **Moose Peak Fire**, burning east of Trout Creek in Sanders County, is estimated at 6,196 acres and remains zero percent contained.

An information meeting is scheduled for Friday night at the Thompson Lake Baptist Camp, 593 ACM Road. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the event will begin at 6 p.m.

Additional fire crews have arrived to assist constructing fire line. Plans are currently in the works to construct additional line from Sylvan Lake east to McGinnis Meadows. Structure protection assessment and evaluating homes are on-going in the Fisher Creek and McGinnis Meadows areas.

The **Highway 200 Complex** fires total 19,811 acres. Minimum fire growth have occurred over the last few days and suppression tactics have been largely successful, according to fire managers. Cooler weather and additional resources have benefitted fire operations on the ground. Structure protection assessment and strengthening existing containment lines will continue to be the priority. Once visibility improves, aircraft will again be able to fly and assist ground crews.

There will be a community meeting for the Highway 200 Complex fires Sept. 8 at 7 p.m. at the Thompson Falls High School.

Several wildfires are also burning in the Flathead National Forest and forcing trail and road closures. The **Scalp Fire** has burned 11,425 acres about three miles south of Gooseberry Cabin, on Bow Mountain, in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Structure protection at Sabido Cabin was completed.

The Reef Fire, near Count Peak in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, has burned nearly 11,000 acres. Structure protection was completed at Jumbo Lookout. Two personnel remain at the lookout for fire monitoring. Structure protection will be completed Friday at Basin Cabin.

The only evacuation warnings on the Flathead National Forest involve the Moose City area north of Polebridge. There are no planned evacuations in the North Fork Flathead area at this time, according to Forest Service officials.

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