

News & Features

Wildfire Intensifies in Waterton Lakes National Park, Burns Visitor Center

Firefighters actively defending Prince of Wales Hotel, other buildings in Waterton

BY [DILLON TABISH](#) // SEP 12, 2017



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The Latest

- *Evacuation orders remain in effect throughout Waterton north of Glacier National Park*
- *Firefighters working 'tirelessly' to defend Prince of Wales Hotel, townsite*
- *Red flag warning issued for Tuesday as gusty winds arrive*

Updated: Sept. 12, 1:15 p.m.

The townsite of Waterton, including the iconic Prince of Wales Hotel, is under threat from a raging wildfire and crews are working “tirelessly” to defend against flames and embers, according to fire officials.

A fleet of heavy aircraft, including so-called water bombers and air tankers, have been unleashed to try and slow the **Kenow Fire**, which ballooned on Monday and nearly doubled in size, from 29,000 acres to more than 50,000 just north of Glacier National Park across the U.S.-Canada border.

Fueled by tinderbox conditions and heavy winds, the fire has traveled southeast nearly three miles in recent days and on Monday entered the west side of Waterton Lakes National Park.

Burning intensified on Monday as the fire rapidly moved down the Cameron Valley along the Akamina Parkway, [fire officials said Tuesday morning](#). A large plume of smoke was visible in the Flathead Valley by Monday evening. Flames were visible from the townsite and on the north side of Crandell Mountain as the fire began to move north at a high rate of spread through the grasslands along the park’s entrance road, according to fire managers.

The Parks Canada Visitor Information Centre, located on the Entrance Parkway just before the townsite of Waterton, burned down overnight and the trailhead to Bear’s Hump was also severely charred. Details of additional damages remain limited at this time, according to parks officials.

“At this time, the majority of the townsite appears to be intact,” fire officials said in a statement. “Extensive fire protection measures were effective in safeguarding the majority of infrastructure and facilities within the community and at the Prince of Wales Hotel.”

Flames burned into Waterton last night, gutting the visitor centre and the trailhead to Bear’s Hump. Video by [@TheDewser pic.twitter.com/sirjfQkfBU](#)
 — CBC Calgary (@CBCCalgary) [September 12, 2017](#)

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The fire is sending embers throughout Waterton and the Cameron Valley, creating concerns over new spot fires sparking up.

High volume pumps and sprinkler systems, in combination with planning and fuel management done in previous years, ensured the townsite's perimeter held, according to fire officials.

"Crews worked tirelessly throughout the night to extinguish spot fires, monitor sprinkler protection, and protect facilities," fire managers said.

The fire has crossed into the Forest Protection Area in the Castle drainage area and is moving upslope.

A red-flag warning was issued for the region on Tuesday, predicting gusty winds that could fuel significant fire growth. The National Weather Service did deliver welcome news, forecasting rainy conditions starting Wednesday followed by low temperatures and frost across much of the region throughout the weekend.

Calgary Fire has been trusted with the daunting task of protecting the Prince of Wales hotel, a World Heritage Site [#WatertonFire pic.twitter.com/1e3xxsLIn2](https://twitter.com/1e3xxsLIn2)
— Bryan Passifiume (@BryanPassifiume) September 9, 2017

Parks Canada, the agency in charge of the national park, has closed Waterton and issued a mandatory evacuation on Sept. 8 for the entire townsite and park. Additional evacuation orders were issued late Monday for the areas north of Waterton, including Cardston County. The Chief Mountain border crossing station along the U.S.-Canadian border in Northwest Montana has been temporarily closed. The Blood Tribe in southern Alberta has issued a mandatory evacuation and declared a state of emergency.

"Parks Canada understands that this is a very difficult situation and our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the fire," the agency said in a statement. "The safety of residents, staff and fire crews and the protection of infrastructure in the community of Waterton are Parks Canada's priorities."

The townsite of Waterton is home to more than 80 permanent residents and 181 sites, including the famed Prince of Wales Hotel. [The prestigious seven-story hotel opened in 1927](#) and is a Canadian landmark.

"It's been inspiring to see everyone come together and work throughout the night to protect the hotel," Rebecca Baker, marketing and public relations manager for Glacier Park, Inc., the hotel's operator, said.

"We're relieved the Prince of Wales is intact."

The Prince closed Sept. 8, two weeks earlier than scheduled. Baker said it was a great summer for the hotel as it celebrated its 90th anniversary at the same time Canada celebrated its 150th anniversary and opened its national parks to free visitation.

South of Waterton in Glacier National Park, the **Sprague Fire** continues to burn east of Lake McDonald and along the north of Mt. Brown. Helicopters are actively suppressing the flames near the lookout as well as on Snyder Ridge. Gusty winds are forecasted for Tuesday but cooler weather could combat the intensity. The fire has scorched 14,750 acres.

Structure protection remains in effect at Lake McDonald Lodge and along the north end of the lake. A large system of sprinklers was established to create "rainforest conditions," fire managers say, and pumps and hoses are installed at Avalanche Creek campground and along the Trail of the Cedars to defend against encroaching flames. Firefighters wrapped the historic Wheeler Cabin with protective material.

The **Elder Creek Fire** is 40 miles north of West Glacier along the U.S.-Canada border and has showed little movement in recent days. The fire has burned 282 acres and forced the closure of the Kishenehn Trail from the Patrol Cabin to the border and the Kintla Trail from Kishenehn Creek to Boulder Pass Trail.

The **Adair Peak Fire** is 18 miles north of West Glacier and continues to actively burn in mixed conifer stands along Logging Lake. The fire has burned 2,890 acres.

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.

The **Caribou Fire** continues to actively burn about 21 miles northwest of Eureka. Firefighters focused on the south and southwest side of the fire, building containment line and engaging direct attack when possible near Lime Creek. Heavy equipment and crews continued building line along the north side of Marias Mountain into the South Fork of Young Creek and Blacktail Creek area.

All areas in West Kootenai remain in pre-evacuation warning. This includes West Kootenai North and South of Tooley Lake, Spring Creek, Dodge Creek, and Basin Creek.

The **Gibraltar Ridge Fire**, located about seven miles east of Eureka, progressed south along Williams Creek toward Locke Mountain on Monday. Fire managers are evaluating fire activity in the area and using helicopters or aircraft to check fire growth. Crews continue prepping Grave Creek Road and will remain in the area to patrol and mop up hot spots.

A pre-evacuation warning remains in effect for the Sherman Creek, Griffith Creek, Therriault Pass Road, Stevens Creek, Glen Lake and Sinclair Creek (south/east of West Road) areas.

Grave Creek Road and the Ten Lakes Recreation area are closed above the Grave Creek/Foothills Road junction.

The **Scalp Fire**, located three miles south of Gooseberry Cabin on Bow Mountain on the east side of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, has burned more than 17,00 acres. The fire continues to move down Park Creek toward to confluence of Bowl and Strawberry creeks. It is also working around Mount May. To the west, the fire is slowly moving uphill towards Dean Lake and the Trilobite Range.

A public information meeting for the Scalp Fire will be held Sept. 13 at the Heart Butte School and on Thursday at the Dupuyer Community Hall. Both meetings start at 6 p.m.

The **Strawberry Fire**, about two miles north of Sabido Cabin between Strawberry Creek and East Fork Strawberry Creek on the northeast end of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, has burned more than 10,500 acres. Increased activity prompted the Pondera County Sheriff to initiate evacuations for four to five ranch owners in the vicinity of Swift Reservoir and the dam keeper's residence. A pre-evacuation notice has also been issued for residences farther east along Swift Dam Road toward Dupuyer. A pre-evacuation notice tells property owners to be ready to leave on short notice.

U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., announced that he will host a teletownhall on Wednesday, Sept. 13 to discuss the wildfires raging across the state. Daines said he would answer questions about the fires and what can be done on a federal level. Montanans can join Daines' teletownhall by texting "SenatorDaines" (one word) to 828282 or by calling any of Daines' offices to get registered for the event. [Office locations and phone numbers are available here.](#)

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