

Umatilla National Forest Closure FAQs

Last Updated September 9, 2021

Overview

With the Lick Creek Fire 100% contained and in patrol status, Umatilla National Forest officials will reopen most National Forest lands within the Lick Creek Fire footprint today. Additionally, access will be reopened into portions of the Tucannon River drainage.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why are portions of the Umatilla National Forest closed?

Three large wildfires are currently burning on the Umatilla National Forest. Two of these fires are contained, but still present hazards associated with wildfire activity including burned or dead trees, stump holes, uncontained fireline and ongoing suppression operations (such as the presence of firefighting resources, large equipment, and aircraft). Due to firefighter and public safety the modified closure prohibits access on the Pomeroy Ranger District to some roads and trails within the Lick Creek Fire burned area, National Forest lands surrounding the Green Ridge Fire, and lands surrounding the Elbow Creek Fire on the Walla Walla Ranger District.

Public entry is prohibited in the areas identified in the closure, which includes lands, roads, trails and recreational facilities.

Forest Officials will review Area Closure needs as fire activity diminishes to an acceptable level or until the fire area receives a season ending weather event. We understand hunter interest in this area, and we are empathetic that the closure impacts hunting season.

Additional information on the Lick Creek, Green Ridge, and Elbow Creek Fires is available at:

- **Lick Creek Fires: 100% contained** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7615/>
- **Green Ridge Fire: 40% contained** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7628/>
- **Elbow Creek Fire: 100% contained** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7672/>

How do I know if a road is open or closed?

All roads associated with the area closure will be signed. Additionally, barricades or road guards will be put in place where appropriate.

All roads that are county, state, or interstate remain open.

It is prohibited to go into or be upon any area, road, or trail which is closed for the protection of public health and safety, except: All State and County Roads or Highways that travel through the Umatilla National Forest. 36 CFR § 261.53(e)



Are paved roads open?

All roads associated with the area closure will be signed. Additionally, barricades or road guards will be put in place where appropriate.

All roads that are county, state, or interstate remain open.

It is prohibited to go into or be upon any area, road, or trail which is closed for the protection of public health and safety, except: All State and County Roads or Highways that travel through the Umatilla National Forest. 36 CFR § 261.53(e)

If there is not a road closed sign at the entrance of a Forest Service road within the closure area, does this mean it's open for travel?

No. The Umatilla National Forest is in the process of signing portal roads into portions of the Forest that are closed, but they may not all be signed right away. We ask forest visitors to respect the closure for public safety.

It is prohibited to go into or be upon any area, road, or trail which is closed for the protection of public health and safety, except: All State and County Roads or Highways that travel through the Umatilla National Forest. 36 CFR § 261.53(e)

What campgrounds are currently closed?

Campground that are closed due to wildfire activity include Ladybug, Godman, Midway, Misery, Panjab and Teal Springs. In addition, the Umatilla Forks Campground remains closed due to flood damage.

See closure map

Are campfires allowed?

Yes, in developed campgrounds that are open and designated. Designated campgrounds include:

North Fork John Day Ranger District: Bear Wallow Campground, Big Creek Meadows Campground, Driftwood Campground, Frazier Campground, Gold Dredge Campground, North Fork John Day Campground, Olive Lake Campground, Oriental Campground, Winom Creek Campground, and the Fremont Cabin Rentals (metal or brick fire rings only)

Walla Walla Ranger District: Jubilee Lake Campground, Mottet Campground, Target Meadows Campground, Woodland Campground, Woodward Campground and the approved campfire pits in Spout Springs and Tollgate Summer Homes Tract.

Pomeroy Ranger District: Alder Thicket Campground, Big Springs Campground, Boundary Campground, Pataha Campground, Tucannon Campground, Wickiup Campground, and the approved summer tract homes.

Fire danger on the Umatilla National Forest is HIGH. **For areas that will re-open to the public, Phase B Public Use Restrictions are in effect.** Under these restrictions:



- Campfires are ONLY allowed in designated campgrounds and recreation sites. Liquefied or bottled gas stoves and heaters are allowed for cooking and heating. A list of designated recreation sites is available on the forest's website.
- No internal combustion engine operation (including chainsaws), except for motorized vehicles or if authorized by a valid permit (commercial and personal use firewood permits are regulated by the conditions of the permit and separate from restrictions under this public use restriction).
 - Electrical generators operated under the following conditions are allowed:
 - in the center of an area at least 10 feet in diameter that is barren or cleared of all flammable material, or;
 - when fully contained within a pickup truck bed that is empty of all flammable material, or;
 - when factory installed in a recreational vehicle and the generator exhaust discharge is in the center of an area at least 10 feet in diameter that is cleared of all flammable material.
- No off-road/off-trail vehicle travel or travel on roads not cleared of standing grass or other flammable material. Vehicle travel is never permitted on currently closed forest service roads where access has been impeded or blocked by earthen berms, logs, boulders, barriers, barricades or gates, or as otherwise identified in a closure order.
- Smoking is allowed only in enclosed vehicles and buildings, developed recreation sites, or in cleared areas.

Violating closures and fire restrictions is a violation that carries a mandatory appearance in federal court, punishable as a Class B misdemeanor with a fine of up to \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or up to six months in prison, or both.

For more information regarding Restrictions, please contact the Information Hotline at (877) 958-9663.

Can I still rent a recreation cabin?

All cabins on the Pomeroy Ranger District remain closed. The rest of the cabins on the Forest are available to rent via [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).

Can I still hike on trails?

Please refer to the closure map or visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recremain/umatilla/recreation> for trails information. As a reminder, some trails remain closed due to the 2020 flood event.

If I am camped in dispersed areas within the closure area, will I be asked to leave?

Yes. Forest law enforcement will attempt to reach as many people as possible to vacate campsites. The public should cancel any plans for visiting the Pomeroy Ranger District or closed portions of the Walla Walla Ranger District for the next several weeks. This is a temporary closure and the Forest will continually assess conditions and lift the closure once the unprecedented conditions moderate.

Visitors are welcome to camp in dispersed campsites anywhere on the Forest outside of the closure area.

I made reservations through Recreation.gov to stay at a campground or cabin on the Umatilla National Forest. Will



my reservation be canceled, and will I receive a refund?

At this time, all reservations for campgrounds and most cabins have been canceled through August 7, although Pomeroy and Walla Walla canceled reservations until the end of August.

All canceled reservations will receive a full refund, including the reservation fee. The request has already been processed by Forest staff, so cancelations and refunds should have already occurred.

When will the area closure be lifted?

This is a temporary closure and the Forest will continually assess conditions and lift the closure once fire activity diminishes to an acceptable level or until the fire area receives a season ending weather event.

I have a special use permit on the Umatilla National Forest. Does it authorize me to access the National Forest?

Yes, in areas of the Forest not affected by the Area Closure.

For areas associated with the Area Closure - No. It is prohibited to go into or be upon any area, road, or trail which is closed for the protection of public health and safety. This is a temporary closure and the Forest will continually assess conditions and lift the closure once the unprecedented conditions moderate. However, waivers may be authorized, depending on the circumstance. Please contact the local District Ranger to discuss options.

I have a recreation residence on the Umatilla National Forest. Am I allowed to access my residence and/or remain overnight?

Yes, in areas of the Forest not affected by the Area Closure.

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How many large fires are on the Umatilla National Forest and what size are they? When will they be contained?

One large wildfires are currently burning on the Umatilla National Forest.

Additional information on the Lick Creek, Green Ridge, and Elbow Creek Fires is available at:

- **Lick Creek Fires:** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7615/>
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- **Elbow Creek Fire:** <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7672/>

Will the Area Closure be lifted for archery season? What about other hunting seasons?

The public should cancel any plans for visiting National Forest lands within the Area Closure for the next several



weeks. Forest Officials will review Area Closure needs as fire activity diminishes to an acceptable level or until the fire area receives a season ending weather event. We understand hunter interest in this area, and we are empathetic that the closure impacts hunting season.

The Forest is engaging with both ODFW and WDFW for consistent messaging about the states' strategies for hunters impacted by the closure.

How much rain will moderate fire behavior and activity on the Umatilla National Forest?

For fire behavior and activity to moderate the landscape needs multiple wetting rains to hydrate fuels, reducing the likelihood of ignition and potential fire intensity. In eastern Oregon a wetting rain is .10" or greater over a widespread area. The Forest has experienced persistent and extreme hot and dry conditions over an extended period with poor humidity recoveries overnight, which all contribute to critically dry fuels. The Forest Service uses several indices to track fuel dryness and potential fire danger, which have all have been setting records since the end of June. The U.S. Drought Monitor classifies most of the Blue Mountain forests as being in a severe drought or above. Because of these conditions, the Forest needs a significant amount of precipitation or an extended period of increased overnight humidity recoveries and cooler temperatures to affect the fuels enough to moderate fire behavior and activity.

How does the Forest calculate fire danger and fuels conditions?

A good description can be found at <https://www.nps.gov/articles/understanding-fire-danger.htm>

Calculating the fire danger involves incorporating many factors including the National Fire Danger Rating System, relative Humidity, Fuel Moisture (live and dead fuels), fire weather maps, greenness maps, drought maps, Haines Index, Lightning Ignition Efficiency, Lightning Activity Levels, Energy Release Component (ERC), Ignition Component (IC), and Spread Component (SC).

*For definitions of the above terms visit <https://www.nps.gov/articles/understanding-fire-danger.htm>

How severe is the drought in the Pacific Northwest?

The national drought map, which is updated each week, shows conditions described as severe, extreme, and even exceptional in portions of Washington and Oregon. These drought conditions dry out vegetation and can increase the potential for extreme wildfires that spread rapidly and burn with greater severity.

<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

Washington Drought Map and info: <https://drought.unl.edu/droughtplanning/StatePlanning.aspx?st=WA>

Oregon Drought Map and info: <https://drought.unl.edu/droughtplanning/StatePlanning.aspx?st=OR>

For more information visit Drought.gov: <https://www.drought.gov/sectors/wildfire-management>

What is the Energy Release Component?



The Energy Release Component (ERC) is a key indicator firefighters use to predict how changes in the weather will change fire behavior out on the ground. The ERC considers how much moisture is in the timber and brush ahead of a fire to help predict fire intensity. Even better? The ERC has memory. Each daily calculation considers the past seven days in calculating the new number. Daily variations of the ERC are relatively small as wind is not part of the calculation.

Does the Energy Release Component consider cumulative effects?

The Energy Release Component (ERC) is a cumulative or "build-up" type of index. As live fuels cure and dead fuels dry, the ERC values get higher, providing a good reflection of drought conditions. A cool feature of the ERC, it that it has memory. Each daily calculation considers the past seven days in calculating the new prediction. Daily variations of the ERC are relatively small as wind is not part of the calculation.

Why does the Energy Release Component matter?

Across the Okanogan Valley, Willamette Valley, Pendleton area, and most of southeast Oregon, Energy Release Component (ERCs) are at or near record levels. In other words, existing wildfire fires in those areas will continue to burn at very high intensity and new lightning strikes will have a high likelihood of quickly becoming wildfires.

Does rain impact the intensity of fires?

While moisture is always helpful, it takes a lot more than a few hours or even days of rain to change the Energy Release Component (ERC) of a watershed. For example, trees that are three to eight inches in diameter can take up to 1,000 hours to adjust to moisture conditions. So those exceptional drought conditions from earlier this spring are still significantly influencing large swaths of forest lands across the Pacific Northwest Region.

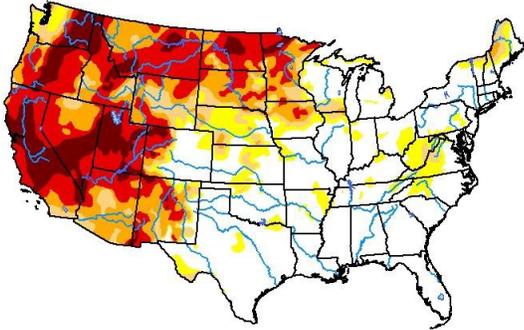
How do the 2021 drought conditions compare to 2020 conditions?

Drought conditions are significantly more severe, widespread, and over longer period compared to conditions in 2020. Additionally, drought conditions are earlier in the season this year. Conditions on the ground currently are comparable to late August-early September on the Umatilla National Forest.



U.S. Drought Monitor
Contiguous U.S. (CONUS)

August 10, 2021
(Released Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

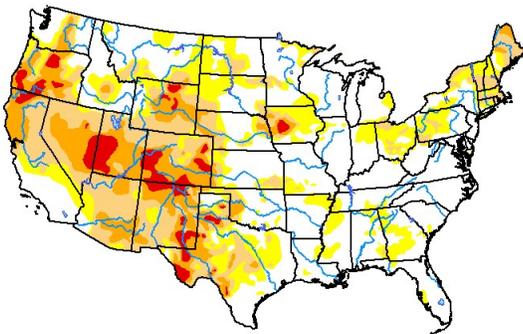
Richard Tinker
CPC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

U.S. Drought Monitor
Continental U.S. (CONUS)

August 11, 2020
(Released Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

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droughtmonitor.unl.edu

