

Montana's 2023 wildfire season begins with Colt and Bowles Creek fires

By Bowman Leigh Montana Free Press



The growing Colt Fire smoke plume on Friday, July 21. Credit: John Adams / MTFP

As a heat wave brought temperatures as high as 102 degrees to parts of western Montana over the weekend, the state's summer fire season kicked off with two lightning-caused wildfires that quickly gained steam.



Aviation resources work to contain the Colt Fire 15 miles west of Seeley Lake on Friday, July 21. Credit: John Adams / MTFP

COLT FIRE

The Colt Fire started 15 miles northwest of Seeley Lake on Monday, July 17, and by the afternoon of Friday, July 21 had grown to approximately 200 acres, as reported by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The Missoula County Sheriff's Office issued an evacuation order on July 21 along Highway 83, between mile markers 27 and 31, after placing an evacuation warning for the area between Rainy Lake and Summit Lake.

By midday on Saturday, July 22, Montana DNRC

estimated the Colt Fire had burned 1,000 acres and was 0% contained. Ground crews focused on protecting structures northeast of the fire, while aviation resources including four CL-415 super scoopers and multiple large air tankers worked to drench hotspots to limit the fire's spread, according to updates posted to Inciweb, the federal fire reporting website, and Montana DNRC's Facebook page.

Northern Rockies Complex Incident Management Team 1 was briefed on Saturday, July 22, and formally took command of the Colt Fire at 6 a.m. on Sunday, July 23. By noon on July 23, the Colt Fire had burned an estimated 1,575 acres and remained 0% contained, actively burning on all sides. Hot, dry, and windy conditions coupled with low overnight humidity allowed the fire to continue burning through the night. According to the Northern Rockies

Incident Management Team, winds are primed to pick up on Monday, July 24, when a "dry cold front" moves through the area. To date, the fire has cost \$6.5 million and has 412 assigned personnel, including 13 crews and five helicopters. No structures have been lost, and the National Interagency Coordination Center estimates containment by late September. Following an infrared flight on the night of July 23, the Colt Fire is currently estimated to have burned 2,927 acres and is still 0% contained.

Additional evacuation warnings for the Colt Fire have been issued between mile markers 25.5 and 27 along Highway 83, for the north and south ends of Lake Inez, and for residents near the summit on Beaver Creek Road. The Missoula County Sheriff's Office has instructed evacuees in need

Continued on page 5

3rd Annual Augusta Junior Rodeo

By Karen McIlwain

The Augusta Junior Rodeo has finished accepting entries. "This rodeo started in 2020 when COVID shut down the American Legion Rodeo. We filled in that Sunday and ever since then people have wanted it. So, we've just kept it going and we've had wonderful

donations," explained Nancy. This is a fun rodeo with free entries and free admission. There are 2 age groups, ages 0 – 6 and ages 7-12. Ages 0 – 6 group includes barrels, dummy roping, goat tail untie, and dollar race. Ages 7- 12 group includes barrels, flags, goat tying, breakaway,

team roping, and steer riding. For more information, please contact Nancy Fuller on Facebook.

Come enjoy a fun filled day at this donation supported event Friday August 4th at 5:00 pm at the American Legion Rodeo grounds.

There will be a lemonade stand by Zorro De La Cruz and soft ice cream by Tin Can Treats. This year's specialty act, the Strain Family will perform a mini hold up scene with their stagecoach.

The Augusta Breeze



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Latigo & Lace Artist Showcase

By Karen McIlwain



Photos courtesy of Christi Levine

This issue's artist is Charles Geary from Ovando, Montana. Charles is a blacksmith who really enjoys working with metal and stone.

"My dad had a blacksmith shop and I started blacksmithing when I was 16. I did that for five years, then I went off to Walla Walla University in Washington. I took an industrial art minor and a theology degree major. When I graduated 7 years later, I took the call for an

intern Pastor."

Charles spent years traveling with Missionaries and doing all kinds of construction, finally returning to Montana in 2000. At that point, he started making tables and hooks and repairing machinery.

"I have the most fun building the equipment to make what I want. I built an almost 3000-pound air-driven blacksmith hammer. I wanted to cut stone, so I bought an old skill saw and put a diamond blade on it and I can cut stuff up to about an inch and three-quarters thick. Then I found a piece of granite that somebody had nibbled on, and I said that wasn't done with a diamond tool. So, I asked around and finally found out they called it a rock nibbler. I went online to see if I could find one, and I did, but I wasn't going to spend \$750 for this tool, so I came to the shop and built one," explained Charles.

"There is a disc that I put a tree on that has fruit on the tree. I learned that from an old blacksmith that lives up toward Lincoln. I asked him if he would teach me how to do that, and he said no, so I asked him if I could take a picture. He let me take a picture, and I came home and spent a month figuring out what he did. It was fun and I learned a lot from that. I've made about eighteen of those disks like that just from a picture," Charles explained. "I really like teaching people how to do what I do. I figure it isn't fair to keep it to myself and it's kind of fun."

To see his work and many others, stop by Latigo & Lace and mention you saw them in The Augusta Breeze.



Artist Showcase proudly sponsored by **Latigo & Lace**

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UPS and Teamsters Reach Deal

By Karen McIlwain

UPS and Teamsters, the union representing approximately 340,000 UPS workers, have reached a tentative agreement on a new five-year labor contract. This contract could potentially avoid a strike, which could have started as soon as next week.

“Together we reached a win-win agreement on the issues that are important to Teamsters leadership, our employees, and to UPS and our customers,” said UPS

CEO Carol Tomé, in her statement. “This agreement continues to reward UPS’s full- and part-time employees with industry-leading pay and benefits while retaining the flexibility we need to stay competitive, serve our customers and keep our business strong.”

Among the issues in the contract negotiations were air conditioning for delivery vans, demands for significantly greater pay, especially for part-time

workers, and the closing of pay gaps between two different classes of UPS workers.

The tentative agreement still needs to be ratified to end the threat of a strike, which will take a little more than three weeks.



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FWP - Woman Killed In Bear Encounter

WESTYELLOWSTONE – A woman was killed in an encounter with a bear Saturday on the Buttermilk Trail near the town of West Yellowstone.

About 8 a.m. Saturday, game wardens with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks were notified that a hiker had found a woman deceased on the trail, about 8 miles west of West Yellowstone. FWP wardens and bear specialists, along with staff from other agencies, found that the woman had wounds consistent with a bear attack. They also found tracks from an adult grizzly bear and at least one cub near the site.

They did not see any bears or signs of a day bed or animal carcass during the investigation.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest implemented an emergency closure of the area as a safety precaution. FWP bear specialists and game wardens notified residents and visitors nearby of the bear activity and the U.S. Forest Service closure. They then began conducting capture operations due to the incident's proximity to residences, campgrounds and a high-use OHV trail system. No bears have been captured to date. FWP staff also searched the area from

an aircraft and did not locate any bears.

The hiker was believed to be alone during the encounter, and no bear spray or firearms were found at the scene. The incident is still under joint investigation by FWP and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

FWP staff express sincere condolences to the family and friends of the hiker who was killed.

FWP thanks the Forest Service, West Yellowstone Police Department, National Park Service, Hebgen Basin Fire, Gallatin County

Sheriff's Office, and Idaho Fish and Game for their collaboration.

For full press release and bear aware information, please go to: <https://fwp.mt.gov/homepage/news/2023/July/0724-woman-killed-in-bear-encounter-near-west-yellowstone>



Sun River Valley Historical

August 3 at 2:00 the Sun River Valley Historical will present the history of the Métis Indians. Where they originated and interesting facts about where they settled in the area. Very knowledgeable speakers, one being Reg Wearley. For a pleasant afternoon join us at the historic Fort at #1 School Loop, Fort Shaw, Mt.

All buildings are open for tours and the event is free.

An advertisement for a live music event. The background is a black and white photograph of a large, circular, tiered metal structure, possibly a water tower or a large grill, with a perspective view looking down its center. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top, it says "blue pine wine presents LIVE MUSIC on the patio". Below that, in a large white oval, it says "BADGER CREEK / MUSIC AUGUST 4TH, 2023 AUGUST 25TH 7PM". Underneath the oval, it lists two acts: "FAITH TAYLOR AUGUST 12TH 11AM - 2PM" and "THE LOOSE MULES AUGUST 18TH 7PM". At the bottom, it provides contact information: "406.562.3838 | augusta, mt | www.bluepinewine.com".

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MUSIC
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Are you a writer? Do you like to write articles? You can submit your articles online at <https://augustabreeze.com/submitting-stories-or-information/>

Fires (continued from From page 1)

By Bowman Leigh Montana Free Press

of shelter to call the Red Cross at (406) 215-1514.

BOWLES CREEK FIRE

On Thursday, July 20, three days after the Colt Fire ignited, smoke was reported three miles southwest of Skalkaho Pass in the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area following a lightning storm. Two different fires were initially spotted in the Bowles Creek drainage: one blaze estimated at 50 acres, and another 1-2 acre fire on the Bitterroot side of the divide. The two fires merged to become the Bowles Creek Fire, which has since burned 1,258 acres and is 0% contained as of Monday, July 24.

Inciweb reports that hot, dry conditions favorable to fire growth are expected to continue for several days, with increasing winds and a slight chance of thunderstorms forecasted for July 24. Fire danger in the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge and Bitterroot national forests increased from “high” to “very high” on July 24, and officials anticipate winds as high as 45 mph on Monday as a similar “dry cold front” moves in.

Northern Rockies Team 8, a Type 3 Incident Management Team, assumed control of the Bowles Creek Fire at 6 a.m. on Sunday, July 23. According to a July 23 update from the management team, firefighters are using natural barriers and existing roads and trail systems —

including fireline used during the 2022 Hog Trough Fire — to create “indirect” fuel breaks away from the fire’s edge. NICC reports an estimated containment date of Oct. 15.

Elsewhere in the region, Red Flag Warnings have been issued by the National Weather Service for eastern Washington, north-central Idaho, and west-central Montana in effect from the afternoon of Monday, July 24, until midnight. In the western portion of north-central Montana, the Red Flag Warning has been extended through Tuesday, July 25. According to the NWS, Red Flag Warnings indicate that “a combination of strong winds, low relative humidity, and warm temperatures” are currently occurring, or expected to occur within 24 hours. Additionally, the Wildland Fire Preparedness Level — which is “dictated by fuel and weather conditions, fire activity, and fire suppression resource availability” — increased from level two to three on Friday, July 21, both nationally and for the Northern Rockies Geographic Area. A preparedness level three indicates that two or more geographic areas require the assignment of “significant amounts of wildland fire suppression resources” from around the country. Prior to the weekend’s heat wave, northwest Montana was already experiencing conditions conducive to wildfire due to moderate to

severe drought and early melt-off of low snowpack. Significant wildland fire potential is projected to be above normal in northwest Montana from July through September, according to the National Interagency Fire Center Predictive Services.

Current projections show a “normal fire season” for the rest of Montana, but that doesn’t mean fires won’t happen, according to Northern Rockies Geographic Area Meteorologist for the Bureau of Land Management Dan Borsum, who presented to Gov. Greg Gianforte during a fire season outlook briefing on Tuesday, July 18.

“When we say normal fire potential . . . that still means fire,” Borsum said, adding that Montanans in the rest of the state should be prepared for fire risk to increase, especially as summer heat kicks in.

Over the last four decades, the area annually burned by wildfires in the American West has doubled, according to a 2023 study. The National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration identifies anthropogenic climate change as the “main driver” of an increase in weather that favors wildfire due to rising global temperatures and atmospheric thirst, which dries out fuels and contributes to wildfire intensity.

This story was originally published by Montana Free Press at montanafreepress.org

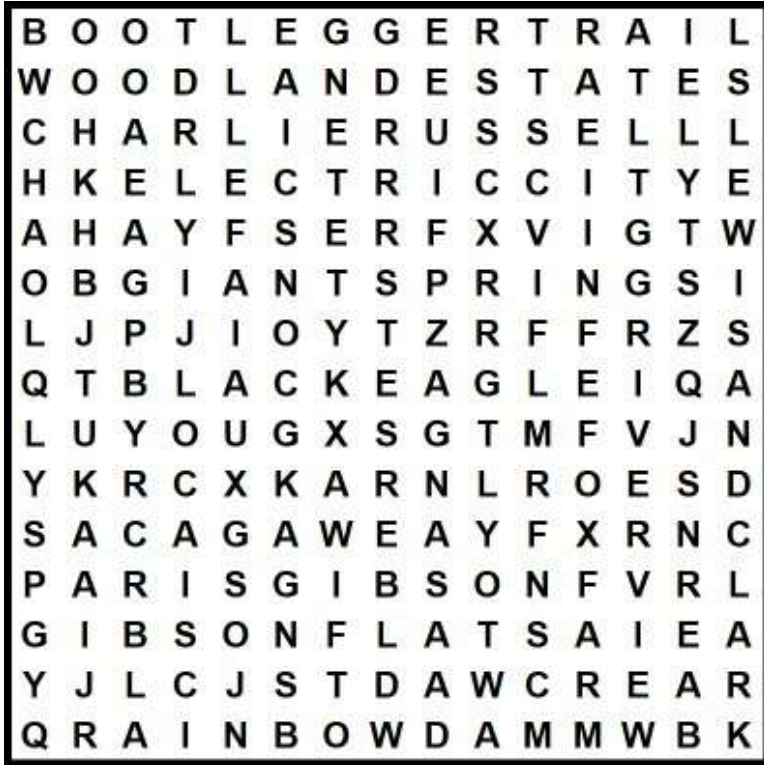


Bowles Creek Fire smoke column on July 21, 2023. Credit: Inciweb.

Puzzle Page

Solutions to this issues puzzles will be in issue # 92

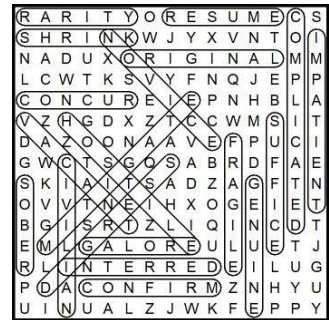
Answers to issue 90 puzzles



Word Search

- Black Eagle
- Bootlegger Trail
- Charlie Russell
- Electric City
- Fox Farm
- Giant Springs
- Gibson Flats
- Lewis and Clark
- Paris Gibson
- Rainbow Dam
- Riverview
- Sacagawea
- Skyline
- Woodland Estates

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7	2	3	4	1	9	6	5	8
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1	5	6	8	4	7	3	2	9
8	7	9	2	3	5	4	6	1



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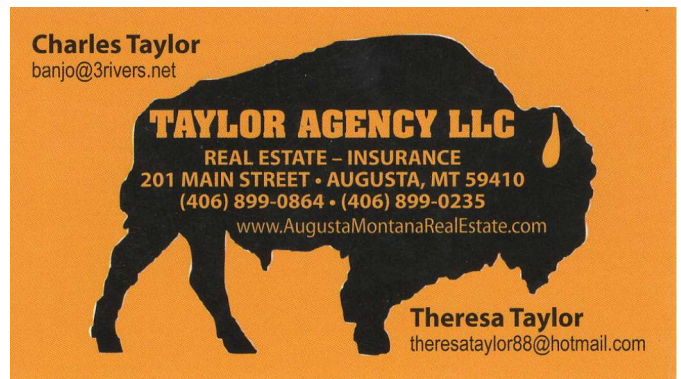
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The Augusta Breeze is focused on people in our community. Subscriptions are available online, and we can be found in many local business for free!

We welcome reader submissions, and love to hear what you think. Feel free to contact us at the address or phone numbers on the left.

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Church Email: umc@3rivers.net

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