



July 20, 2026, Issue Brief

Wildfire Conditions Update: Air Quality, Evacuation Alerts & Regional Fire Activity

Wildfire conditions across the region continue to evolve, with changing smoke conditions, active wildfires, and evacuation alerts influencing the visitor environment. This issue brief summarizes the latest developments that may affect tourism operations and visitor experiences across the Kootenay Rockies, while highlighting official resources to support ongoing monitoring between issue briefs.

Air Quality Update – Wildfire Smoke Warning Issued

The province has issued an Air Quality Warning for portions of the East and West Kootenays due to wildfire smoke, with poor air quality and reduced visibility expected to continue until weather conditions improve. Smoke concentrations may vary considerably between communities and throughout the day depending on changing weather patterns and wildfire activity.

Wildfire smoke can affect communities even when there are no active wildfires nearby, as smoke can travel long distances from fires burning elsewhere in BC and neighbouring jurisdictions. As wildfire activity continues across the region, periods of degraded air quality may occur.

Tourism partners are encouraged to continue monitoring official air quality information and be prepared to adjust outdoor activities or visitor messaging as conditions change. Current air quality warnings and forecasts are available through the province's [air quality website](#) and the Government of Canada [Air Quality Health Index](#).

Local Wildfire Update – Kimberley Area

Two nearby lightning-caused wildfires near Kimberley – the [Matthew Creek Wildfire \(N11020\)](#) and [Tower Creek 2 Wildfire \(N10947\)](#) – remain Out of Control and have been designated Wildfires of Note by the BC Wildfire Service. As of July 20, the Matthew Creek wildfire is estimated at 567 hectares, while the Tower Creek 2 wildfire is estimated at 250 hectares.

The [City of Kimberley](#) and the [Regional District of East Kootenay](#) have each issued Evacuation Alerts for areas surrounding the fires. An evacuation alert means residents should be prepared to leave on short notice should conditions worsen. At this time, there are no reported impacts to major transportation corridors, although firefighting activity may be visible in the area.

BC Wildfire Service crews continue suppression efforts using an indirect attack strategy due to the steep and inaccessible terrain. Heavy equipment and helicopters remain engaged in establishing control lines and slowing fire growth. Current weather conditions remain hot, dry, and stable, with light winds expected. Smoke may be visible throughout parts of the East Kootenay; however, BC Wildfire Service notes that much of the regional smoke is originating from wildfires burning elsewhere in BC and the Pacific Northwest.

Visitor Considerations

Although there are currently no reported impacts to major transportation corridors or visitor access, the evacuation alerts serve as an important reminder for tourism businesses and organizations to review their own preparedness plans. Businesses in and around the Kimberley area should ensure staff are familiar with local evacuation procedures, how they will communicate with guests if conditions change and be prepared to direct visitors to official sources of information.

Visitors travelling in the area may encounter smoke, firefighting activity, or increased emergency vehicle traffic. Those planning backcountry recreation should check current wildfire conditions before departing and remain aware that conditions can change quickly during periods of active wildfire.

Tourism operators play an important role in helping visitors access accurate, timely information during evolving wildfire situations. Reviewing emergency plans, confirming staff understand evacuation procedures and directing visitors to official information sources can help ensure visitors receive consistent and reliable guidance if conditions change.

Cross-Border Wildfire Update – Upper Smith Wildfire (Idaho)

The [Upper Smith Wildfire](#), burning approximately 10 km south of the Canada-US border northwest of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, continues to be closely monitored due to its proximity to the Kootenay Rockies and its influence on regional smoke conditions. Since the previous issue brief, the fire has grown from approximately 567 acres to 815 acres, and suppression efforts have expanded significantly, with 347 personnel now assigned to the incident.

The Northern Rockies Complex Incident Management Team assumed command of the wildfire on July 17, reflecting the expectation that suppression efforts will continue over an extended period. Firefighters remain focused on preventing eastward spread toward homes, infrastructure, and the Kootenai River corridor while using a combination of direct and indirect suppression tactics in steep, rugged terrain.

Visitor Considerations

Although the wildfire remains in northern Idaho, it continues to influence visitor conditions in the Creston Valley. The fire has been visible from parts of the valley and, together with other regional wildfires, continues to contribute to periods of smoke and reduced air quality. Smoke conditions may change throughout the day depending on weather patterns, wind direction, and fire activity.

At this time, the wildfire is not affecting access to destinations within the Kootenay Rockies. However, visitors travelling in the Creston area may experience reduced visibility, smoky conditions, or see firefighting activity and smoke on the horizon. Visitors planning cross-border travel or outdoor recreation are encouraged to check current wildfire conditions, local air quality information, and any recreation closures before travelling.

Monitoring Resources

Conditions can change quickly between issue briefs. The following official resources provide the most current information on wildfire activity, emergency information, travel conditions, and air quality.

Wildfire Information

- [BC Wildfire Dashboard](#)
- [InciWeb](#) (US)

Emergency Information

- [EmergencyInfoBC](#)
- [Regional District of East Kootenay](#) emergency page
- [DriveBC](#)

Air Quality & Smoke

- [BC Air Quality Warnings](#)
- [Environment Canada Air Quality Health Index](#)
- Government of Canada [FireWork](#)

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