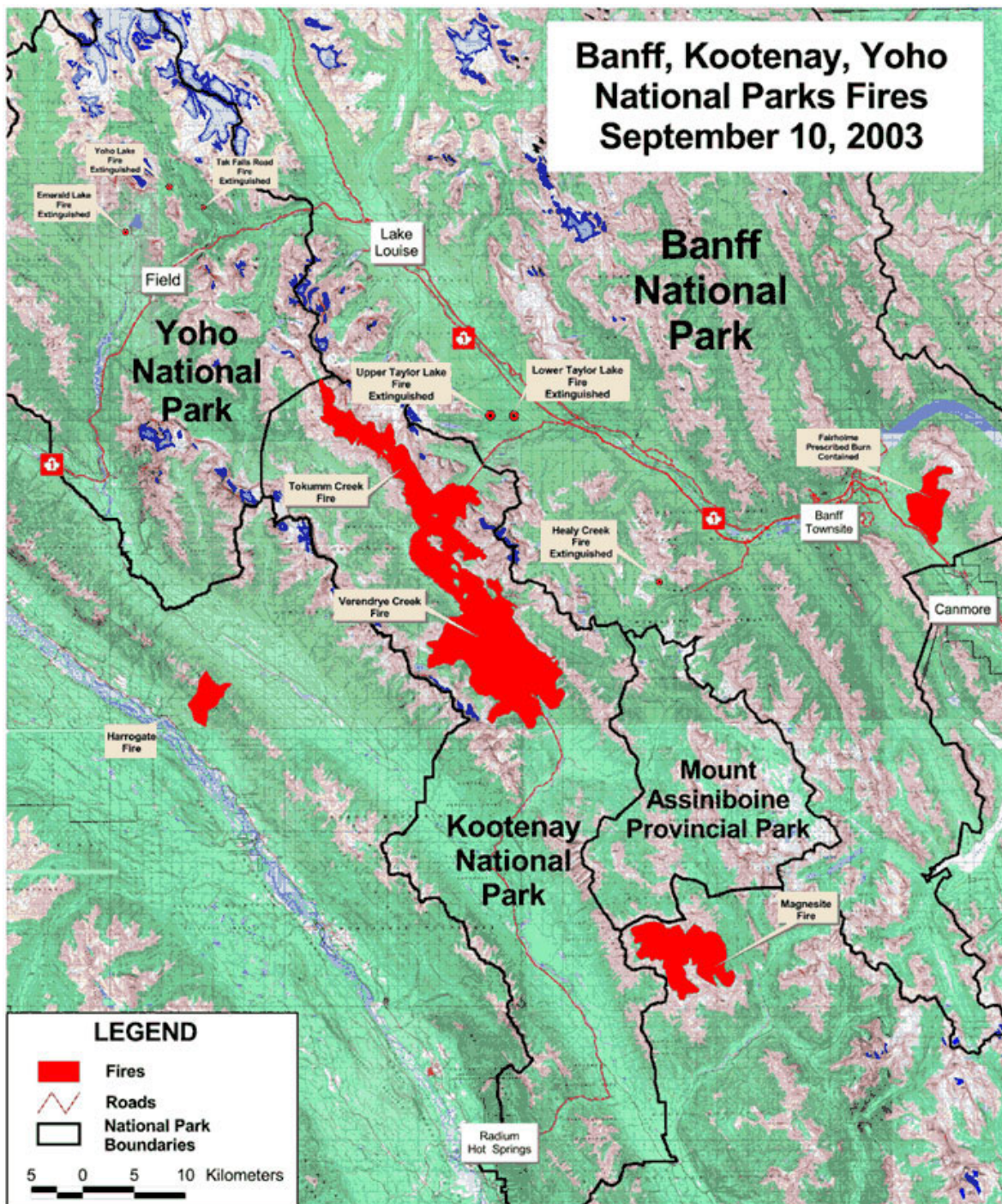


KOOTENAY AND YOHO NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA
Fire Information Update

Final fire update Wednesday, September 24, 2003

It was a busy fire season with crews responding to 24 fires in Yoho, Banff and Kootenay. All fires were started by lightning. Most fires were extinguished immediately while very small. The largest, the Tokumm-Verendrye fire, burned 12.6% of Kootenay National Park.

At its peak the fire base at Kootenay Crossing had over 160 personnel and 17 helicopters. In total nearly 400 people assisted over the fire season of 2003. Over 20 national parks across Canada provided firefighters. People came from Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Yukon.



Tokumm-Verendrye Fire (17,409 ha) In total 30 to 40 mm of precipitation has fallen over the past ten days in the form of rain and snow, at higher elevations. Cool damp weather conditions have extinguished most of the active fire. Some hot spots deep in tree roots will remain and smoulder for some time, but these spots are well contained and are not expected to spread under these weather conditions. With the recent precipitation, smoke levels in the area have been very low. The fire will be regularly monitored. In some areas, deep burning of tree roots will last for another couple of months until considerable precipitation falls and these hot spots are completely extinguished.



*Marble Canyon trail after the fire,
Kootenay National Park
September 2003
© Parks Canada*

Highway 93S through Kootenay N. P. The highway has been re-opened to unrestricted use. Smoke on the highway has not been a concern recently, but conditions will be monitored and cautions put in place when necessary. Preliminary debris cleanup and hazardous tree removal has been completed. Access to some washroom and garbage facilities along the highway will be permitted. **Please observe barriers and closure tape:** if there is not a barrier in place to enter a parking lot along the highway, motorists may use the facilities at that location. For up-to-date road information, call the Mountain Parks Road Report at (403) 762-1450.

Fire Bans Lifted: Precipitation and cooler temperatures have reduced the fire hazard to a point where fire bans have been lifted in all areas of Jasper, Banff, Yoho, Kootenay and Waterton Lakes National Parks. A fire ban remains in effect for the backcountry only of Glacier National Park only.

Backcountry Overnight Use: Wilderness Passes that permit overnight use in backcountry areas are being issued in all Mountain National Parks except Kootenay. Trails in Banff and Yoho that access fire affected areas of Kootenay National Park remain closed.

Area Closures Kootenay National Park: Due to remaining fire and danger from falling trees in the Vermilion valley all areas north of Simpson River trail are closed for public use **with the exception of** the Continental Divide parking lot, Fireweed Trail, Stanley Glacier parking lot, Paint Pots parking lot and interpretive trail, Numa parking lot, and Kootenay Park Lodge.

All front country facilities and backcountry trails south of and including Simpson River Trail south to Kootenay West Gate. Park trails south of Settlers Road are open for day use. Redstreak campground, Radium Hot Springs Pools, McLeod Meadows campground and Crook's Meadows Group Campground are open

Yoho National Park: All Trails and facilities are open for day use with the exception of the Eagles Erie (upper end of Tokumm Creek/Yoho). The normal route up Mt. Hungabee (west ridge) is open, but the high traverse from Opabin Pass to Wenkchemna Pass remains closed. Check the trail report on the website or at Visitor Centres for information.

Clean-up and Rehabilitation Equipment and supplies have been brought in from all fire fighting and staging areas. The final fire crew did sweeps of the working areas picking up any leftover equipment and garbage, cleaning equipment and drying hoses.

Rehabilitation of the fireguards and cat lines is well underway. Re-contouring of catlines and erosion controls has been completed. Reseeding of these areas will be completed by the end of September.

Assessment of the environmental impact of fire fighting will help improve future wildfire activities. Parks Canada and Environment Canada are monitoring of aquatic ecosystems for residues of retardant and surfactant chemicals.

Nature Recovers Fire is an agent of ecological change - both a destroyer of established forests and a creator of new ones. The forests in Kootenay, Yoho and Banff National Park are fire dependent. They require fire to regenerate. Fire frees nutrients, opens clearings for sunlight to reach undergrowth, and frees the seeds within Jack Pine cones.

Some areas of Kootenay National Park burned by this summer's fire had not had a major fire for between 300 and 500 years. Now the cycle of growth will begin again and has already started. New grass and strawberry plants can be seen growing in month old burnt areas. In the coming decades this year's burn areas will become some of the most productive areas of the park with increased diversity of wildlife and plants. In the last 2 days several sightings have been made in the Vermilion Valley fire area of wolf, moose, bear and hawks - an early indication of the increased biodiversity to come.

Examples of beneficial impact of fire can be found within Kootenay. The area of the 2001 Mount Shanks fire is one of the best places to see woodpeckers. The 1968 Vermilion Pass fire is now full of wildflowers and is prime habitat for the endangered lynx. Find out more about the recovery of forests after fire visiting the award winning Fireweed Interpretive Trail at the Continental Divide parking lot.

Where to from Here? A thorough review of the fire affected trails and facilities will be required before some locations can be reopened. It is a big job with approximately 40 km of trails directly affected and another 120 km indirectly affected. Please be patient.

Thanks for your Support! Throughout this summer of fires many businesses and residents, both local and regional, helped to provide food, supplies, rooms and equipment to firefighters and other related workers. Others did what they could to post updates, host displays and spread the word to get information out to visitors and others. The Highway 93S closures and delays affected everyone.

Your assistance and support is greatly appreciated – thanks!!

For More Information:

Parks Canada Visitor Information Centres

<http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/banff>

<http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/yoho>

<http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/kootenay>

Rocky Mountain National Parks Road Report: (403) 762-1450

Mountain Parks Trail Report: (403) 760-1305

Radium Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce: (250) 347-9331

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