

Hundreds of Acres Burn Across Region After Lightening Storm

by *K_Guice*

FEMA Offers Warning to Area Residents

Over one-hundred firefighters battled upwards of 50 blazes across central Oregon that erupted after thunderstorms rolled through area Sunday, July 23rd.

More than a thousand acres burned over the past week. The Black Crater and Maxwell fires spread in portions of on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests. In addition, the Geneva-III fire burned on Crooked River National Grasslands and private land.

Incident command teams began directing suppression efforts Wednesday on the Black Crater and Maxwell fires, according to Roland Giller in a press release from the Deschutes National Forest.

On Wednesday, Incident Commander Carl West and approximately 40 personnel set up a command center at Sisters Middle School to manage firefighting resources for the Black Crater fire located about eight miles southwest of Sisters.

As of Tuesday, the fire was had six 20-person crews, three bulldozers and five water tender trucks working to contain the 100-acre fire, according to Ronda Bishop, the fire information officer for Central Oregon.

At the height of the fire, two military C-130 MAFFS (modular airborne firefighting system) air tankers were called in Kingsley Air Center in Klamath Falls to help douse the flames.

Washington Incident Management Team 2, led by Incident Commander Rex Reed, also began suppression efforts Wednesday on the 400-acre Maxwell Fire from the Ochoco Ranger Station.

As of Tuesday, three 20-person crews, two fire engines and two water tender trucks were on the blaze as it continued to burn about six miles southwest of Mitchell.

Fire teams were able to significantly decrease the Geneva-III fire that was fueled by smoldered grass, sagebrush and juniper trees.

As of Tuesday, a heli-tanker, two 20-person crews, 10 fire engines, a bulldozer and two water tender trucks were on the 400-acre blaze, located about five miles west of Culver, according to Bishop.

“These are all lightning caused,” she said. “There have been 2,500 lightning strikes as of Sunday.” That coupled with the ground being so dry and low humidity has brewed ideal grassfire conditions.

“No homes are in danger at this time,” Bishop said. However, an alert has been issued from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) warning that it is not too soon for homeowners to wade into the fray.

“Dry conditions have increased wildfire risks for both sides of the Cascades. With almost unlimited fuels and denser underbrush, western wildfires can burn hotter than their eastern counterparts, can be even more difficult for firefighters to combat, and can threaten more densely populated communities,” said U.S. Department of Homeland Security Acting FEMA Regional Director Dennis Hunsinger.

However, he says that people being aware and cautions could play a major role in saving both property and lives in the region.

FEMA is encouraging everyone to exercising extreme caution with campfires, fireworks, trash fires, grills and other heat sources.

In addition, Hunsinger reminds homeowners that they need to make a commitment to wildfire prevention that is required for people living in wildfire-prone areas.

“Now is the time to create defensible perimeters by clearing flammable debris away from homes and structures, particularly those in urban interface areas and near forested tracts,” Hunsinger said. “Cut back dry weeds and brush, and trim tree branches up at least 15 feet.”

“Fire escapes and evacuation plans are a must and should include current phone numbers for emergency service providers, just in case,” he added. “By all means make sure property entrances are clearly posted.”

Other suggestions include:

• Clean roof surfaces and clear gutters of pine needles, leaves and branches regularly.

• Treat wood siding, cedar shingles, exterior wood paneling and other highly combustible materials with a fire retardant.

• Space landscape plants to limit a fire from spreading to surrounding vegetation or structures.

• Only store gasoline in approved containers and away from occupied buildings.

• Store firewood and other combustibles away from structures.

• Keep firefighting tools (ladders, shovels, rakes and buckets) nearby and leave water hoses connected.

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