Firefighters Hold Back Black Crater, Maxwell Blazes

by K_Guice

Hundreds of fire crews and good weather worked in tandem to help bring both the Black Crater and Maxwell fires under control. However, weekend weather may present concerns.

The Black Crater Fire, that started July 23 after a lightning strike in the 3 Sisters Wilderness, is now at 9,000 acres and 40 percent contained as of Wednesday, August 2.

Structure firefighters and their equipment no longer dominate the streets of the once-evacuated subdivisions of Tollgate, Crossroads and Edgington Road where 1500 people had been displaced from over 600 homes.

The state fire marshal's structural incident management team had sent 41 fire engines, 15 water tenders and over 200 personnel helping to protect structures. The structural resources from across the state have now been demobilized, according to an Oregon State Fire Marshal press release.

â€œEveryone is home now and it is open to both residents and non residents,â€• said Scott Brayton, fire information officer for the Black Crater fire.

â€œMonday we let in the Tollgate residents back in and Tuesday at 5 p.m. we started letting everyone else back in,â€• Brayton said.

However, they were also reminded to be aware of the potential for dangerous flare-ups. â€œThey were told to be prepared, donâ€™t completely unpack yet,â€• he added.

Meanwhile, there are 28 fire crews made up of 20 member teams, 15 bulldozers, 8 water dropping helicopters, 8 helitac crews and 50 engines steadily working to both reduce and continue to contain the fire.

In addition, the fire crews are utilizing technology to battle the monstrous blaze. â€œWe're doing some infrared flights over the fires to identify hot spots so we can go right in and attack it either on the ground or through water drops,â€• Brayton said.

Six miles southwest of Mitchell, the lightning-sparked Maxwell fire has grown to 5,242 acres and is now 45 percent contained.

â€œMuch of the reason the acreage has gone up is for the burn out operations which are used to help contain and control the fires,â€• said Robb Hannawacker, the information officer for the Maxwell fire.

The fire, which began on July 24, has a total of 989 firefighting personnel working on the blaze. â€œWe have increased resources, increased aircraft and added helicopters,â€• Hannawacker said.

There are some areas where crews are reportedly already doing mop-up operations, going into the perimeter and making sure all of the small hot spots are out.

"While the terrain is considered to be extreme, fire growth potential is considered to be high and nothing is for sure; as of now it sounds like things are going really well,â€• he added.

The only major concern now is the forecast that calls for a slow warming and drying trend, with a possibility for wind events and lightening over the weekend.

Brayton said, "If we can get through this next weather system and the lines hold we will be in the home stretch."

Black Crater fire updates are available at: http://www.inciweb.org/incident/377. Updated information on the Maxwell fire can be found online at: www.wa-imt2.org.

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