

Crews Continue Battling 4,250-Acre Lake George Fire

by K_Guice

Firefighters continue to battle the 4,250-acre Lake George fire within the Mt. Washington Wilderness. Despite unexpected weather conditions, fire officials say things have been going well.

The fire is six miles from the Black Butte Ranch resort area, five miles from Big Lake and 13 miles from the town of Sisters.

“We are going to continue to see winds from the northwest continue to challenge fire fighting on the southeast and east side of the fire,” said Donna Hummel, a fire information officer.

Wildland Firefighter Kati Nmetz Wildland Firefighter Peter Bidwell from South Coast, Australia The western side of the fire is burning near the base of Mount Washington. Hummel says it is has a strong inclination to burn up the hill, but personnel are working to hold it back.

As of Wednesday, August 16, 831 staff had worked to contain 20 percent of the fire. Twenty-one, 20-person hand crews, eight helicopters, 27 engines, 10 bulldozers and 12 water tenders were reportedly working to secure fire lines and put out spot fires.

The area's terrain is difficult and the fire's growth potential is high. It is reported that firefighters are facing moderate surface fires with occasional torching and spotting throughout the area.

Tuesday, August 15, crews experience some setbacks. Firefighters were pulled back for safety reasons. However, Wednesday, higher humidity helped crews in their efforts to fight the blaze more aggressively.

“Overall, things have been going well on this fire, but we are up against a lot of terrain, vegetation and weather,” Hummel said. “We are doing what we can and we are doing it well.”

In addition, it is reported that the fire has been relatively predictable. “Nothing in this fire has been a surprise,” Hummel said. “It has been well managed and well predicted.”

As for what the future holds, officials say there is always some level of uncertainty. “We are expecting the weather to move towards a drying trend, so we should see a reduction in the wind,” Hummel said.

“But, it’s a double edge sword,” she added. “With that, we are expecting warmer temps and lower humidity,” she added.

While the situation is not ideal, overall Hummel think the sense is that conditions will be good for aggressive firefighting.

A portion of Highway 242 remains closed. Initially, the Oregon Department of Transportation closed a section down due to smoke from the fire.

However, Hummel says that while it is still very smoky, the primary reason has changed.

“Now, the issue isn’t so much the smoke,” she said. “We are very aggressively fighting on the southeast corner and using helicopters and they must cross 242 with buckets and there is an inherent risk.”

That closure is from the Cold Spring Camp to mile marker 76, west of the Dee Wright Observatory.

As an additional precaution, Wednesday officials prepared an evacuation and structure protection plan for the Big Lake Youth Camp.

Two possible strategies were being evaluated for the fire on the west side of the Pacific Crest.

The first would use a combination of direct and indirect strategies to minimize exposure to firefighters and reduce costs.

The second would be an indirect strategy along the wilderness boundary on the north, near Big Lake and then south to the lava flow.

Hummel says it is crucial to understand these plans are put in place simply as a precaution. "The fire isn't threatening anything or anyone," she said. "That is where we would like to keep the fire and that is what we're working hard to do."

She added that there are persistent rumors of evacuations, especially after a recent evacuation related to the Black Crater fire.

“There is smoke in the air, ash falling on their cars so there are concerns that the fire is marching towards their community,” Hummel said. “It simply isn’t and nothing in the weather forecast indicates that there will be a strong push towards any communities in the immediate future.”

For additional information and maps visit www.inciweb.org/incident/410.

Lake George Fire
Reddish tint is fire retardant from aerial drops
Fire-line view of the Lake George Fire
Sunriver Crew taking a brief rest
Wildland firefighter Peter Bidwell
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