

Human-Caused Fire Threatens Homes, Closes Hwy 97 Off-ramp

by Cheryl McDermott

A brush fire on a seven-acre vacant parcel south of Bend closed a Highway 97 off-ramp at Baker Road, threatened homes in Deschutes River Woods (DRW), and prompted warnings of a possible evacuation on Sunday afternoon.

Scenes from the Highway 97 and Baker Road Fire. Photos by Richard Burton. On August 20 shortly after noon, deputies with the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene to find the fire burning on the west side of Highway 97 and north of Baker Road. Bend Fire Department personnel were on scene attempting to extinguish the fire, which was rapidly moving west towards homes in the DRW subdivision. According to Sgt. Dan Swearingen with the Sheriff's Office, deputies began notifying residents of the fire threat and possible need to evacuate.

Additional firefighters with the Oregon Department of Forestry and United States Forest Service, in addition to Bend Fire extinguished the blaze in about 45 minutes, and were successful in containing the blaze to about one acre.

According to Lisa Clark, a fire information officer with the Central Oregon Interagency Dispatch Center, while still under investigation the fire has been determined to be human caused. The lack of evidence indicating natural causes such as lightning strikes is the determining factor for fire causality, said Clark. When natural causes have been eliminated then the only factor remaining is human intervention, she added.

A joint investigation by the Bend Fire Department, ODF, USFS, and the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office is continuing to determine the specific cause of the fire, including whether it was accidental or intentionally set.

Human-Caused Fire Threatens Homes, Closes Hwy 97 Off-ramp by Cheryl McDermott