

ANIMAL SHELTER
PROTECTS PETS

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Express photo by David N. Seelig

A helicopter makes a water drop on the Guyer Ridge area on the north face of Bald Mountain Wednesday. Fire managers say the Castle Rock Fire is beginning to meet containment objectives, but protecting world-famous Bald Mountain remains a concern.

Crews make headway on Castle Rock Fire

Officials express cautious optimism ahead of expected windy conditions this weekend

By JASON KAUFFMAN
Express Staff Writer

In slow, measured and methodical steps, the hardworking firefighters on the 44,111-acre Castle Rock Fire are beginning to gain ground on the stubborn, two-weeks old blaze.

Despite official warnings that suggested the opposite could come to pass, Wednesday proved almost calm. Gusting winds sent a fast-moving wall of flames up from the bottom of Bassett Gulch to the 9,151-foot summit of Bald Mountain.

While a plume of gray-colored smoke continued to rise behind Bald Mountain throughout the day Wednesday, no major spot fires were reported to fire officials, Fire Information Officer David Olson said late Wednesday afternoon.

"There's been a lot of good progress made," Olson said. "It's not doing anything like it did yesterday."

Despite the day's success, Ketchum city officials apparently were not ready to send Warm Springs residents back to their homes. As the afternoon turned to evening, the mandatory evacuation order covering up to 1,400 homes in Ketchum's Warm Springs neighborhood west of the Warm Springs Bridge remained in effect.

Speaking by cell phone from the Warm Springs Creek area below Guyer Ridge—the major landmark graced by the International ski run on Bald Mountain's north face—Olson said he could spot isolated torching of trees, smoldering, drifting of smoke and low flame lengths. He said the extent

of flame activity Wednesday afternoon was nothing like that of the day before, with fire activity in Bassett Gulch being quiet compared to the day before.

"It's not a solid, sustained crowning run," Olson said.

Crowning refers to the fire behavior phenomenon where fast-moving flames reach the forest treetops and can cover significant stretches in little time.

Olson projected a degree of caution as he spoke by phone at 4:30 p.m., saying several critical hours remained before fire conditions would lesson.

"Things could really become much more active," he warned.

On the north slopes of Bald Mountain within the lower Warm Springs Creek drainage Wednesday, firefighters continued to extend a burnout zone west from the International, Upper Cozy and Cozy ski runs into an extensive area of conifer forest. Their work was to reinforce the fire-line construction and back-burning operations that took place in the same area between nightfall on Tuesday and daybreak Wednesday.

As the firefighters worked to

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"We're starting to reach some containment objectives."

David Olson
Castle Rock Fire information officer

Community meeting tonight

Another community meeting regarding the Castle Rock Fire will be held tonight at Hemingway Elementary School at 111 8th Street in Ketchum. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.



Express photo by David N. Seelig

A diabetic cat was among the pets evacuated from the mid-valley last weekend after the Castle Rock Fire kicked up. The feline has found a temporary home at the Animal Shelter of the Wood River Valley in Hailey.

Shelter takes in evacuee animals

Volunteer bank finds temporary homes for pets

By ANDY STINY
Express Staff Writer

When Heatherlands residents Heidi and Scott Watanabe got the evacuation call Saturday as the Castle Rock Fire kicked-up, they grabbed a few things and their rabbit, Cous Cous, and headed south.

After one night in a Bellevue motel the caged Cous Cous was distressed.

"Our rabbit was a little bit stressed in a small cage," said Heidi.

She didn't know that the Animal Shelter of the Wood River Valley was helping by taking in animals of those evacuated, but she checked.

"I called them at 7:30 in the morning. We just didn't know what to do with her," she said.

The shelter took in Cous Cous and a handful of other pets. The shelter works with a volunteer bank that works to match evacuee's pets with folks willing to care for them.

"It was great," said Heidi, adding that the shelter could expect a donation.

The Sunday following the start of the Castle Rock Fire staff and volunteers for the Animal Shelter realized what they needed to do. They got 15 cat and dog carriers so it was easier to move pets during an evacuation. Since the shelter is not a boarding facility they needed to pair up the displaced pets with those who could care for them, said JoAnne Dixon, executive and medical director for the shelter.

"Our rabbit was a little bit stressed in a small cage."

Heidi Watanabe
Pet owner

"We try to match up people that are willing to take evacuees' pets with those individuals (pet owners)," Dixon said.

There was a list of people willing to take in displaced animals.

The shelter took in six animals after the mid-valley evacuation including Cous Cous, several dogs and a diabetic cat, Dixon said.

They haven't received any animals yet from Tuesday afternoon's mandatory Warm Springs evacuation. They manned telephones at the shelter until midnight the Saturday of the mid-valley evacuation.

Hundreds of people have offered their homes for displaced pets, and an unknown number of pets have been sheltered with non-evacuated valley residents, said Dixon and shelter manager Robin Potts.

After Tuesday's Warm Springs evacuation, Potts stayed late to field inquiries.

"I had a few calls, not too many" she said.

Those needing information about Animal Shelter of the Wood River Valley and the services it offers may call 758-4351. The shelter is located at 100 Croy Creek Road in Hailey.

The rabbit Cous Cous spent two nights at the shelter but is now back home in Heatherlands, said Watanabe.

"She's happy to be home, and she has the run of our basement," she said.

Fire crews meeting containment objectives

Continued from Page 1

strengthen the line in that area, they were backed up by helicopters making water drops on hot spots that flared up, Olson said.

"The helicopters come in and cool that off. The idea is to keep the fire cool," he said.

Also aiding in the effort along the International, Upper Cozy and Cozy ski runs was the continuing use of snowmaking equipment. The snow guns have been modified to spout water in defense of the ski runs.

"That's a very big help," Olson said.

Elsewhere on the Castle Rock Fire, momentum seems to be building up behind firefighters working on the northern, western and southern fronts.

A large spill-over of the fire line mid-way down the Fox Creek drainage was contained Wednesday, Olson said. A combination of hot-shot crews and other firefighting crews was able to successfully dig line around the large spill-over area, he said.

Similar successes are also being seen on the west and southwest perimeters of the

fire, which official maps show lined in black, an indication of a contained fire perimeter.

"We're starting to reach some containment objectives," Olson said. "That said, there's still a lot of work to do."

For fire managers overseeing the Castle Rock Fire, the name of the game is fast becoming something of a waiting game.

"You're still tense. You're still holding your breath," Olson said. "We're crossing our fingers."

Weather forecasters are calling for a chance of wet thunderstorms Thursday, he said.

Olson said that could be either a good or bad thing.

He said it all comes down to what areas receive rain and what areas remain dry. In those areas where rain does not fall, strong thundercells may produce significant downdrafts of wind.

In the days ahead, Olson said the National Weather Service is calling for nearly a doubling of wind speeds by Saturday and into Sunday. That would bring wind speeds up to 15-30 mph, he said.

Firefighters are aware of just how important the Sun

Valley ski area is for Wood River Valley locals, the Incident Commander Jeanne Pincha-Tulley said Wednesday morning.

"It's near and dear to people's hearts," she said.

"We need to close the door on the fire's advance on to Bald Mountain," she told firefighters. "We don't want it to come into town after all this hard work."

Fire Information Officer Judith Downing said while firefighters are trained to deal with the sometimes-harsh effects of wildfire, local residents living near advancing flames are not. This is especially so when a wildfire is threatening a locally loved landmark like Bald Mountain, Downing said.

"There were some residents that got teary-eyed when the flames came over the mountain (yesterday)," she said.

At last count Wednesday evening, the Castle Rock Fire had grown to 44,111 acres and was 49 percent contained. A total of 1,642 firefighters, 15 helicopters, 7 bulldozers and 121 engines were working the blaze. No lives or structures had been lost.



Express photo by David N. Seelig

Snow guns on Baldy are firing water to protect the world-famous ski runs of the nation's first ski resort.



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CASTLE ROCK FIRE

Lighting Strike - Thursday, August 16, 2007

CRITICAL CONCERNS
Areas where fire managers are the most concerned. The most likley areas where spot fires can jump over the lines. Concentrated firefighting efforts like aggressive back-burn operations and heavy air assaults.

ACTIVE FIRE
Where fires are burning the hottest. Torching, spotting and crown runs.

FRONT LINES
Lines are established by combining info from the field with infrared scans. Crews construct dozer and hand lines.

CONTAINED LINES
Lines that Fire Managers feel comfortable with. Crews have created 100-200 ft. of black. The areas behind them are still smoldering.

ALL EVACUATIONS ARE STILL IN EFFECT

- MANDATORY EVAC**
- VOLUNTARY EVAC**
- ADVISORY EVAC**

DAY 14 Wednesday, August 29 **STRUCTURES LOST: 0 INJURIES: 1**

CRITICAL CONCERNS
Crews held the line late Tuesday with the help of snowmaking equipment modified to shoot water over ski runs, an extensive aerial campaign of water and retardant drops, structure support from fire engines and a major backburning operation on the Guyer Ridge area west of the International, Upper Cozy and Cozy ski runs.

Tuesday
Strong winds sent a wall of flames from the bottom of Bassett Gulch racing up to the summit of 9,151-foot Bald Mountain. The ensuing plume of smoke sent embers raining over the north and east sides of the mountain within the Sun Valley ski area boundary. A quick response by ground and aerial crews kept the advancing flames on the west side of the mountain and helped douse several spot fires.

Wednesday
More favorable weather gave firefighters a breather and allowed them to continue strengthening fire line constructed by crews after nightfall Tuesday. In the areas of International, Upper Cozy and Cozy ski runs, fire crews continued with burnout operations west into dense conifer forest on Guyer Ridge. In support of ground crews, helicopters laid down a continual barrage of water and retardant on the Guyer Ridge area.

CASTLE ROCK FIRE- ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Here is the latest information released **Wednesday, Aug. 29, (5:30 p.m.)** by Blaine County and other local authorities.

FIRE STATUS
The approximately 44,111-acre Castle Rock Fire is 49 percent contained and is being fought by 1,642 firefighters.

Fire crews put out hot spots and patrolled the Fox Creek area. Near Bald Mountain, burnout operations continued, with firefighters continuing to manage active areas of the fire. In support of fire crews on the ground, helicopters made repeated trips to the Guyer Ridge area to drop water on hot spots. Fire crews in Greenhorn Gulch made good progress constructing fire line east to tie in with hand line near Timber Gulch. Hand line on the western perimeter of the fire was completed. Firefighters continued putting out hot spots 500 feet in from the hand line as they worked north and south.

LAND CLOSURES

- The Sawtooth National Forest closure area spans north and east of Highway 75 from the Silver Creek drainage near the Russian John Guard Station and east to Trail Creek. The order extends south of Baker Creek Road to Dollarhide Summit and east including the entire Deer Creek drainage. The area east of Trail Creek Road south to East Fork canyon is also closed.
- Bald Mountain is closed to all traffic and recreation.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

- All Blaine County public schools except for Carey are closed this week. They will reopen next Tuesday, Sept. 4.
- The Community School and Silver Creek Alternative School will also be closed through the week.

MANDATORY EVACUATION

- All areas along Warm Springs Road west of the Warm Springs Bridge in Ketchum, on both the north and south sides of the road. Residents were ordered to be out of their homes by 6 p.m. Tuesday.
- All residences north of Greenhorn Gulch and south of St. Luke's Hospital bridge on the west side of Highway 75, including Golden Eagle.

VOLUNTARY EVACUATIONS

- Areas along Highway 75 north of Ketchum including Adams Gulch, Hulen Meadows, Lake Creek, Eagle Creek Loop, and Eagle Creek.
- West Ketchum residents (Washington Street neighborhoods west) are under an "advisory" to be on guard.
- Areas east of state Highway 75 from Ohio Gulch north to the bridge at St. Luke's Wood River Medical Center.

ROAD CLOSURES

- Warm Springs Road west from the Warm Springs Bridge.
- Hulen Meadows bridge.
- Adams Gulch Road.
- Serenade Lane is closed to all but firefighter traffic.
- Greenhorn Gulch Road.
- Emergency officials are asking people to limit their travel on Highway 75 to allow for the unencumbered movement of fire-fighting vehicles. People are encouraged to ride the bus.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION
Current information is available:

- On the Web at www.blainecounty.org.
- On the Web at www.mtxpress.com.
- On the Web at www.inciweb.org.
- Through the city of Ketchum-(208) 726-7811, or at Ketchum City Hall.

WEATHER FORECAST
The National Weather Service forecast is:

Thursday: A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms after noon. Partly cloudy, with a high near 84. North wind 5 to 9 mph becoming south..

Thursday night: A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 50. Southwest wind between 6 and 9 mph becoming calm.

Friday: A 30 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly after noon. Partly cloudy, with a high near 80. Light wind becoming south southwest between 13 and 16 mph. Winds could gust as high as 24 mph.

Friday night: A 30 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly before midnight. Partly cloudy, with a low around 48. Southwest wind between 11 and 14 mph becoming light. Winds could gust as high as 22 mph.

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AND OTHER LOCATIONS AS WELL.

Forest health set as West's goal

Mother Nature's fire plan cautiously embraced

Editor's Note: The following article ran in the Wednesday, Nov. 24, 2004, edition of the Idaho Mountain Express. Not all people interviewed still hold the positions they did in 2004, but the issue of wildfire in the West is as pertinent today as it was then.

By GREG STAHL
Express Staff Writer

When the smoke clears and the rhetoric subsides, the simple fact is that fire is as much a part of forest ecology as rain and snow. It feeds the circle of life.

After decades of intense fire suppression, Westerners are beginning to come to grips with the fact that many of the forests in their backyards are overgrown, tangled and in need of a good burn to clean the mess and renew the circle of life.

But today's fires are taking on new characteristics. Because of a century of fire fighting, there is more fuel, and fires are burning hotter and bigger. Along with increasing populations in the rural West, there are some places where people can't afford to let Mother Nature manage her own affairs.

And that presents a problem. "We can't cut our way out of the problem. We can't burn our way out. We can't suppress, and we can't walk away," said Stephen Pyne, an Arizona State University professor who has written two books on America's fire management practices.

Pyne, the featured speaker at a two-day conference on forest health and wildfires last Thursday and Friday in Boise, said global warming is probably another of the key causes of increasing fire activity across the West. As the world warms, precipitation patterns are changing, and drier forests are more burn-prone and disease-prone.

Fire managers would do well to concentrate efforts on the reduction of global warming, he said.

The conference, sponsored by the Andrus Center for Public Policy, The Idaho Statesman and the U.S. Forest Service, covered an incredibly disparate range of opinions and topics, from refocusing the mission of the U.S.

Forest Service to relearning the basic tenets of democracy. The central theme, however, was to ask the question: How can we improve forest health?

Despite Pyne's grand scheme admonition about global warming, managers on the Sawtooth National Forest believe they are on the road to implementing a plan that will help deal with the tangle of fuels in their domain.

The Sawtooth example is a case study of many of the management practices conference participants suggested implementing, such as forest thinning near populated areas and institution of let-burn policies in remote areas.

Though all forest types, regions and even watersheds are unique, the Sawtooth National

Forest Service to relearning the basic tenets of democracy. The central theme, however, was to ask the question: How can we improve forest health? Last fall, the SNRA began to implement a fuels reduction plan in areas where mountain pine beetle-stricken trees encroached on homes and private properties. The so-called Red Tree Fuels Reduction Project was met with approval from Central Idahoans.

"There seems to be a lot of common ground and agreement on Red Tree I," Monahan said. Red Tree II, which is still on the drafting table, could be a different matter, she said. Consensus may be more difficult to find when managers release the

world of hurt," agreed Matt Filbert, a fuels planner for the forest. "The future for us, both on the Ketchum Ranger District and the SNRA, is fire use and prescribed fire intermingled with plenty of timber sales."

than 100 years. "We're in a situation where all that time, with 100 to 200 years of fuel buildup—now we're trying to open up the stand, at least where it's up against the homes," Murphy said.

But making those kinds of decisions is a small part of the big picture, and that picture is framed by the Forest Service's history of fire suppression, logging and a perceived lack of trustworthiness, conference participants said.

U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, was among the conference participants who said decisions about forest health need to be made collaboratively. The polarization has got to stop, he said.

"We will have to work extremely hard on consistency and sustainability to make sure we're doing all the right things in all the right places," he said.

Monahan said one of the key lessons she took away from the conference was the need for the Forest Service to have a meaningful dialogue with the country's citizens. That is something managers are striving for with Red Tree II and associated projects, she said.

"We are probably closer together than we are far apart," she said.

Filbert agreed, and he said he was pleased to hear conference panelists note some of the nuances involved with managing for forest health.

"My gosh, I think people are starting to understand the complexities of what we're dealing with," he said. "Not every stand is the same, and not every forest is the same."

In summarizing the conference, former Idaho Gov. Cecil Andrus and chairman of the Andrus Center for Public Policy, called for more dialogue among people and groups with opposing points of view.

"We have not been communicating with one another," he said. "There must be collaboration. Otherwise we will go on as we have been, and the resource will deteriorate."

Fuels reduction projects on the Sawtooth National Forest are ongoing.

"My gosh, I think people are starting to understand the complexities of what we're dealing with. Not every stand is the same, and not every forest is the same."

Matt Filbert

Sawtooth National Forest fuels planner

Forest is in some ways representative of many Western regions. Most of the forest has not burned in decades, and it is increasingly susceptible to disease and a large conflagration.

In the Sawtooth Valley, mountain pine beetles have swept across the landscape killing millions of aged lodgepole pine trees and leaving entire forests of tinder-dry trees behind.

In the Big Wood River Valley, Douglas fir beetles and a parasite called dwarf mistletoe have killed many trees, though on a much smaller scale than in the Sawtooth Valley.

The beetles and parasites are naturally occurring and endemic to the ecosystems, but decades of fire suppression combined with recent warm temperatures have left the forests aged and vulnerable, said Sawtooth National Forest North Zone Fire Management Officer Bill Murphy.

"I know our forests are in a

forest-wide analysis, which will include a study on historic fire behavior in the region, the state of forest health across the region and proposed treatments for areas where forests are in disrepair.

Part of the Sawtooth's plan will include letting remote parts of the forest burn naturally. It's a practice that's already used in the Sawtooth Wilderness Area, and it could be instituted elsewhere as early as next summer.

"Some of the country in the northern White Clouds needs to get some fire back in there," said Sawtooth National Forest Supervisor Ruth Monahan. "I think we have some places on the Sawtooth the public will support us on."

On the Ketchum Ranger District, forest rangers are planning a large-scale fuel reduction project in Warm Springs canyon, where most of the forest has not seen a significant fire in more

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National wildland fire information online: www.inciweb.org

Ketchum City Hall, 480, East Ave. No.

American Red Cross Evacuation Center Info: 208-243-0517

American Red Cross Evacuation Center at Community Campus (Fox Acres Road, Hailey), 788-2117

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Let the community know what you are experiencing and what you see

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