

Fast-burning fire in Oakhurst

Sierra Star, Monday, August 18, 2014

Just before 2 p.m. this afternoon, fire crews responded to a fire located behind the Oakhurst Sears store, off Highway 49.

Firefighters fought the fire - named the Junction Fire — from the top of 425A and from the Highway 49 location. Within less than an hour, the fast-burning fire had burned 90 acres. By early evening, that number had grown to 500 acres, with approximately 300 homes threatened.

All traffic trying to enter 425A from Highway 41 were stopped by the California Highway Patrol. People were allowed to walk in if they wanted to, but the road was kept clear for fire engines, fire crews and other fire related traffic.

By 4:45 p.m., over a loud speaker, California Highway Patrol had advised business owners at or near Sweetwater, to close and leave the area for their own safety. Minutes later, the fire jumped the highway heading towards Hidden Falls Road, threatening Mountain Home School.

Other evacuations were ordered along Road 620, Old Stage Road, and Road 222. Jean Road East and West, Scott Road, Taylor Mountain, and the entire John West Road subdivision. Highway 41 was closed from the Talking Bear at Road 426 to the old Mountain House on Road 222.

Initially, displaced residents were advised to evacuate to the Oakhurst Community Center. By 6 p.m., these evacuees were advised to move down to the Coarsegold Community Center via the following route: east on Road 426 to Road 223 to Road 221 to Road 200 to Highway 41.

Fire bombers and a helicopter were attacking the blaze as spotter planes circled above. According to Cal Fire, propane tanks were an issue, and homes were burning all over.

By 8 p.m., the Junction Fire remained at zero containment.

13,000 asked to evacuate as wildfire near Yosemite grows

Evan Sernoffsky and Kurtis Alexander, staff writers

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, August 19, 2014

YOSEMITE -- A 1,200-acre wildfire burning near the southern entrance to Yosemite National Park continued to spread Tuesday, threatening some 500 homes near the small community of Oakhurst (Madera County), California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection officials said.

The Junction Fire started just before 2 p.m. Monday about a mile away from Highway 41 near the Highway 49 junction and spread uncontrolled, prompting authorities to ask 13,000 people to evacuate as fire consumed eight structures and threatened several hotels, restaurants and businesses, according to the Madera County sheriff's office.

Officials closed Highway 41 in both directions in downtown Oakhurst, which is about 50 miles north of Fresno and acts as the main entrance to the park for visitors travelling from the south.

More than 600 firefighters from Cal Fire and Central Valley fire departments were battling the wildfire. Two firefighters suffered undisclosed injuries, said Cal Fire spokesman Chris Christopherson.

On Monday night, the fire raced through dry brush, jumping roads and sparking spot fires as it moved toward the Bass Lake resort area, Christopherson said.

Small fires burned the office of a propane company in Oakhurst, but firefighters were able to keep the fire from nearby large propane tanks.

Firefighters were taking advantage of lower morning temperatures, higher humidity and less wind Tuesday to cut containment lines around the uncontrolled burn area.

Two evacuation shelters were set up by the Red Cross. The Coarsegold Community Center is about 7 miles south of Oakhurst and was nearly full Monday night. Another shelter at the Yosemite Lakes Community Church about 10 miles farther south had 150 more beds available.

Late Monday, the state Office of Emergency Services announced that Gov. Jerry Brown had been granted federal emergency funding to help battle the fire.

Wildfire near Yosemite threatens 500 structures

The Associated Press

Sacramento Bee, Monday, August 18, 2014

MARIPOSA, Calif. -- Firefighters from throughout California were being dispatched Tuesday to protect homes threatened by an out-of-control wildfire burning in the foothills near Yosemite National Park, the second fire around the park in recent weeks.

The nearly 2-square-mile blaze in Madera County had destroyed eight structures and was threatening 500 others around Oakhurst, which is about 16 miles away from an entrance to Yosemite, fire officials said. Officials were hopeful, though, that cooler temperatures, higher humidity and calmer winds expected on Tuesday would help them begin containing the blaze.

It was not clear how many of the structures under threat were homes, but mandatory evacuation orders went out to some 13,000 phone numbers for homes and businesses on Monday, according to sheriff's officials.

Four hotels in the community of Oakhurst about 16 miles away from an entrance to Yosemite were evacuated and Tuesday classes have been canceled for most of the Yosemite Unified School District.

State Route 41 toward Yosemite was closed down in the area and travelers would need to use different routes into the park, authorities said.

The fire was burning near a propane business with 30,000 gallon tanks on site, but the tanks were spared and the threat to them was brief, according to the Modesto Bee.

The fire comes on the heels of another blaze around Yosemite this summer and last year's Rim Fire, which raged for two months across 400 square miles of land including part of Yosemite National Park. The Rim Fire threatened thousands of structures, destroyed 11 homes and cost more than \$125 million to fight.

Last month's fire, which also burned in the park, threatened about 100 homes and sent smoke into Yosemite's famed valley before it was brought under control.

Meanwhile, another blaze that began Monday some 50 miles northeast of Bakersfield has surged to 3,000 acres, or nearly 5 square miles.

"It's cranking," U.S. Forest Service Spokeswoman Cindy Thill told the Bakersfield Californian.

The fire burning near Lake Isabella in Kern County brought recommended evacuation orders for several neighborhoods, the Forest Service said.

Some structures had burned, but it wasn't immediately clear how many or if any were homes, the Forest Service said.

Northeast of Los Angeles, crews were making quick work of a 275-acre wildfire that forced the evacuation of 200 people from a campground and recreational areas.

The blaze that broke out Sunday afternoon above the foothill community of Glendora was 60 percent contained by Monday night and largely reduced to smoking embers.

Wofford Heights fire grows to 800 acres

By Ruth Brown

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 19, 2014

WOFFORD HEIGHTS — The Way Fire in Wofford Heights quickly mushroomed to more than 800 acres late Monday afternoon, and the Kern County Sheriff's Office issued a list of recommended evacuation areas.

The blaze, originally centered north of Highway 155 and east of Calgary Drive in the Earl Pascoe Road area, began Monday as a brush fire of just 5 acres, but soon spread and is now threatening a number of homes and structures.

"It's cranking," said Cindy Thill, a U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman.

The fire spread into the Kern River Ranger District of the Sequoia National Forest, and as of Monday night was burning toward the southeast toward Kernville.

More than 350 firefighters from Kern County, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management were battling the fire, and Thill said that number would likely double Tuesday.

Thill said the fire was difficult to access because of its location in drainage ditches at the bottom of steep terrain.

A thick haze of brown smoke wafted over Wofford Heights and Kernville during the afternoon, as residents stood outside chatting about the fire and kids pointed skyward at the tankers and helicopters dropping water and fire retardant.

Kern County and BLM vehicles were parked in several neighborhoods, with lights flashing.

The Kern County Fire Department has dispatched both Type 1 and Type 3 firefighting teams to the fire.

A Type 1 team consists of five large engines and is used to protect homes. A Type 3 team uses four-wheel-drive vehicles suited to fighting wildland fires where the forest meets homes.

Paula Baize, the administrator of Burlington Assisted Living on Sycamore Drive, was preparing to evacuate the 13 residents. Sycamore Drive is one of 10 recommended evacuation areas.

"As an administrator, we are a step ahead and we will get them out," she said about 5:30 p.m. "We are lucky that we have no bedridden residents now."

She said if necessary, the residents would be moved to Kern Valley High School in Lake Isabella, which has been designated as an evacuation center.

Paul Anzelmo, 48, has rented a home on Sycamore for the past six years.

"I don't have renters' insurance," he said, "so if this place goes up, I'm done."

Recommended evacuations were made for residents on the following roads:

- the top of Bristlecone Drive;
- Sycamore Drive;
- Sierra Vista Drive;
- Needham Drive;
- Llama Lane;
- Sargent Lane;
- Plater Road;
- Mar Vista Drive;
- Frontier Trail; and
- the southwest corner of Burlando Road.

In addition, Adams Road, Mountain View Lane, Woodland Drive and Rockhaven Road have been closed to traffic.

The evacuation center is located at Kern Valley High School, 3340 Erskine Creek Road, in Lake Isabella.