

Willow Fire grows to more than 1,100 acres Roads in area still closed - No structures lost at this time

By Mark Evan Smith

Sierra Star, Saturday, July 25, 2015

A vegetation and timber fire sparked about 2 p.m., Saturday, July 25, east of Malum Ridge Road (274), has continued to grow to 1,121 acres by late afternoon Sunday, with containment at 5%. The fire, close to Bass Lake and North Fork, had burned about 200 acres by 6 p.m. Saturday.

Dubbed the Willow Fire, crews from both the U.S. Forest Service and Cal Fire, along with Madera County Sheriff's Department deputies instituted mandatory evacuations on the east side of Road 274, from Willow Canyon Drive to Central Camp, as well as Douglas Ranger Station Road. Some residents of the area refused to evacuate. Gags and Whiskers campgrounds have been evacuated.

Road 274 was closed to traffic between Willow Drive and Central Camp Road at the east end of Bass Lake. The road is still closed and may remain closed for a couple more days.

An 'advisory' evacuation was given to residents of the Marina View subdivision at the east end of Bass Lake, and for the Cascadel Woods subdivision outside North Fork. Although there are about 450 homes in the surrounding area of the fire, no homes are currently in immediate danger according to Daniel Tune of the Sierra National Forest.

Tune said a good-sized blanket of fire retardant has been dropped by aircraft in front of the northern and southern edges of the fire which should help slow it down.

The fire is in an area that has a heavy concentration of fallen dead trees from previous fires, drought, and bark beetle kills.

Hand crews and engines have made positive progress on the ground, supported by heavy air support.

Firefighting teams include close to 800 personnel, three air tankers, five helicopters, three bulldozers, and more than 20 engines are fighting the fire. A "Type 2" team, similar to the team that fought the recent Sky Fire, has been called that will bring additional equipment and personal to assist with the Willow Fire. Fire crews are staging at the old North Fork mill site on Road 225.

On Saturday when the fire started, Tune said officials were planning on an "extended attack," which could last two or three days as crews work to halt the inferno's progress through very dry vegetation and timber.

The Red Cross established an evacuation shelter at the Oakhurst Community Center, where the Central California Animal Disaster Team can take care small animals. Anyone with larger animals, such as horses, were asked to call Naomi Flam at (559) 433-9663, to arrange taking animals to the Coarsegold Rodeo grounds.

Saturday afternoon, the fire was heading northeast on Peckinpah Mountain, away from North Fork, but anticipated winds Saturday night could push its flames south towards the Old Mill site. Investigators are at work to determine the cause of the fire.

This is the third large fire in the Mountain Area this summer. The Sky Fire, that started June 18 on Sky Ranch Road, burned 500 acres. The Corrine fire, that started between North Fork and Auberry, six and a half hours after the Sky Fire, burned 920 acres. No homes were lost and there was just one minor injury to a firefighter from the two fires.

At the peak of the Sky and Corrine fires, more than 2,650 fire personnel, 157 engines, nine air tankers, 10 helicopters, 27 water tenders, 20 bulldozers, 64 hand crews, and additional support were involved in fighting the two

Health warning

The Willow Fire has prompted air officials to issue a health cautionary statement for smoke impacts in the eastern areas of Merced, Madera, and Fresno counties. The caution is in place until the fire is extinguished.

Smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter, which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure.

Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions.

Residents can check the district's wildfire page www.valleyair.org/wildfires for information about any current wildfires. Residents can also check the nearest air monitor to their location to determine localized air-quality conditions. Visit the Real-time Air Advisory Network page on the district's website to subscribe for free: www.valleyair.org/RAAN. Updated fire information can also be found at <http://inciweb.nwccg.gov/state/5/>.

Air district seeks inspectors for wood-burning devices

The Business Journal, Thursday, July 23, 2015

The San Joaquin Valley Air District is hosting a free training workshop July 28 for people interested in becoming a Registered Wood Burning Heater Professional (RWBHP). That's the wordy title for people holding credentials to help Valley residents who use clean-burning wood and pellet-fueled devices in the winter register those devices with the district.

Residents who own such stoves and inserts will contact a RWBHP from a list posted on the district website. The RWBHP will inspect the device and certify it is in good working condition. Once approved, registration of these devices allows the resident to burn during the period from Nov. 1 through the end of February, when the daily wood burning status for their county is "No Burning Unless Registered."

During the training workshop, district staff will explain the process for becoming a RWBHP.

"The Air District is helping boost the local economy by creating a pool of professionals that will provide a necessary service for Valley residents who are helping improve our air by investing in clean-burning devices," said Seyed Sadredin, air pollution control officer. "We want to make sure that an adequate number of registered heater professionals are available to the community so that residents will be able to use their devices when they need to."

This training workshop is open to all interested individuals with one of the following professional certifications:

- Fireplace Investigation Research and Education (F.I.R.E.) Certified Inspector, or
- Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) certification, or
- National Fireplace Institute (NFI) certification.

Alternatively, the training is appropriate for individuals who have three years of experience in the hearth industry installing, repairing or servicing these types of devices, including but not limited to:

- Hearth retailers
- Chimney sweeps
- Wood and pellet stove installers
- Licensed construction contractors with documented experience in the hearth industry

The training workshop will be video teleconferenced between all three regional offices of the Valley Air District in Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield, July 28 at 5:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org/rule4901 or call a District office in Fresno at (559) 230-6000.