

Rainy weather may slow Rough Fire

By Mark Evan Smith

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Meteorologists said a storm system that moved into the Valley and Mountain Area from the southwest Monday morning could help slow down the rampaging Rough Fire by providing cooler temperatures and more humid conditions.

Brian Ochs, meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Hanford, said rain in Oakhurst reached around five-hundredths of an inch by 1:00 p.m. Monday, with expected totals to move into about a tenth, or possibly quarter of an inch by Tuesday evening.

He said surrounding areas, such as Coarsegold and North Fork, are expected to receive similar totals.

“Basically there’s a 40% chance through tomorrow morning of some more rain,” Ochs said. “It’s hard to pinpoint when you’ll get the brief lull periods, but I would say any time between now and tomorrow afternoon you can expect to see more rain, which will taper off in the evening.”

Near Hume Lake east of Fresno, the Rough Fire grew to 138,053 acres and 40% contained by Monday afternoon, continuing its reign as the largest wildfire in California and the 8th largest in the country.

Ochs said about a tenth-inch of rainfall could fall over the fire, and though most of it would likely evaporate due to the flames, the cooler weather and humid conditions will certainly play a role in improved firefighting efforts.

“Rainfall usually makes it a lot easier to deal with fires and also so the rate of its spread isn’t as great,” Ochs said. “It will help suppress the Rough Fire quite a bit today, I think. Things are finally getting a little better there.”

Karen Guillemin-Kanawyer, Fire Prevention Specialist with Cal Fire, said storms, while helpful, could also prove dangerous through lightning strikes or high winds.

Lightning started the Rough Fire on July 31.

Ochs said fortunately, the systems predicted through Tuesday in route from the coast have shown few instances of lightning or thunder.

Temperature highs are expected in the middle-70s range for Oakhurst and North Fork into Thursday, Ochs said.

Ochs said the minor amount of rain is by no means an end to fire season, nor will it have an effect on California’s several-year drought, but it’s a helpful change in the weather.

Air quality may also improve due to the rainfall, but Anthony Presto, outreach and communications representative with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said it was too early to determine improved conditions.

“If you’re in a sensitive group, you need to practice caution and the main thing is, if you see or smell smoke, stay inside and play it safe,” Presto said.