

## Lightning fires rage across state; smoke, ash clog county's air

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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**NORTH COAST** — Lightning was the cause of a series of fires around Northern California and the North Coast that were first reported Friday, and which on Saturday had blanketed Lake County with a thick layer of smoke and, in some areas, falling ash.

Cal Fire reported Saturday that 339 fires were burning across 12 of its units in Northern California and south to Fresno and Monterey counties, aided by this year's extremely dry conditions and, in some cases, by winds.

In Mendocino County alone, Cal Fire received more than 100 fire reports beginning at about 6 p.m. Friday and stretching through Saturday night, said Tracy Boudreaux, a fire prevention specialist with Cal Fire's Mendocino Unit.

"We're still getting reports of fires," Boudreaux told Lake County News Saturday night, all of them resulting from lightning strikes around Mendocino County.

Total acreage estimates weren't available, although Cal Fire reported that the fires ranged in size from one to 125 acres.

Crews and equipment "from all over" — including local government, Office of Emergency Services, out-of-county Cal Fire units, some of them from as far away as Southern California — were battling the fires, said Boudreaux.

Strike teams from Cal Fire's Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit also were on scene, she said.

Many of the lightning-sparked fires were in remote areas of the county, such as the Orr Springs area. Boudreaux said there also was an ongoing fire at Navarro, and an evacuation advisory in the Flynn Creek area, where some individual structures were threatened, not a local subdivision.

Another fire was burning in Anderson Valley near Boonville, she said.

"We're basically tapped for resources right now," said Boudreaux.

The Associated Press reported Saturday that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had ordered the California National Guard to assist with the firefighting effort.

Red skies loomed over the Anderson Valley and Ukiah areas Saturday, said Boudreaux. "It is overwhelming."

Heavy smoke was visible around Lake County all day, with residents reporting that it was so thick in some areas they could no longer see Mt. Konocti.

In parts of Lakeport Saturday afternoon and evening, ash was reported falling.

Boudreaux said the smoke coming through Lake County was coming from two sources: lightning fires in Covelo and Anderson Valley.

Anderson Valley is inundated with smoke, Boudreaux said, and a marine layer of air is pushing the smoke into Lake and Sonoma counties.

In nearby Napa County, Boudreaux said lightning also sparked a fire that had reportedly burned 750 acres by Saturday night.

Boudreaux said the challenge for Cal Fire was prioritizing all of the fires in order to best use its stretched resources.

"Right now I think we're looking at several days of firefighting before we can actually get containment on most of them," she said.

Boudreaux said Cal Fire is urging everyone to be prepared in case of fire during this busy fire season. Readiness includes having documents and personal possessions in an easy accessible location, and having plans for where to take one's family, pets and livestock.

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