

UPDATE: Winds send Walker Fire away from homes; highway remains open

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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WALKER RIDGE – Firefighters were making headway against the Walker Fire Wednesday, with the fire experiencing no new growth so far and Highway 20 remaining open.

Dan Sendek, a Cal Fire division chief for safety and training, spoke with Lake County News via cell phone while observing activities on Walker Ridge early Wednesday afternoon.

Helicopters were making water drops on some areas of the fire at that point, he said.

The fire, which broke out Sunday in remote wildlands 14 miles east of Clearlake Oaks, is still at an estimated 14,000 acres, said Sendek, with only 5-percent containment.

Sendek said one firefighter suffered a heat-related injury on Tuesday.

Investigators remain on scene in the Benmore Canyon area, where it was first reported, to determine the cause of the fire, originally thought to have been triggered by storms that passed through California over the weekend.

“We know it was not a lightning fire,” Sendek said, adding that they don't yet know the specific cause.

About 240 firefighters are in the county to work on the blaze, with fresh, rested firefighters taking over to give those who have been working the fire all week a break, said Sendek.

Some strike teams in engines best suited for city conditions were put on the fire line as hand crews, said Sendek, in order to make the most of the still-limited resources they're seeing due to the number of active fires across the state.

Although 35 homes are reported to be threatened, only a hunting cabin in Benmore Canyon has been destroyed. Sendek said he had no other reports of lost structures.

A southwest wind is blowing the fire to the northeast, said Sendek.

“It should be blowing it up and away from Wilbur Springs,” said Sendek, who didn't have a distance between that area and the fire.

The wind also is blowing the fire away from the Double Eagle Ranch subdivision, which was evacuated of as many as 30 residents, plus pets and livestock, on Sunday.

Regarding the homes' safety, Sendek said, “We don't have any serious concern or worry at this time.”

Last night, bulldozers put in lines above Highway 20 in order to keep the fire away from the road, said Sendek.

“All indications are, there's no immediate threat to the highway right now,” he said.

The California Highway Patrol's Dispatch Center confirmed that the highway remained open and clear on Wednesday afternoon.

Plans going into the day included setting more backfires on the fire's Bear Valley side in order to get rid of vegetation between the fire and the dozer lines, said Sendek.

There also are plans to begin attacking the fire directly with bulldozers, he added.

The public can call Cal Fire's information line at 707-967-1456 with questions, or visit the Cal Fire Web site at http://fire.ca.gov/index_incidents_walker.php.

Lake County News will continue to follow the story.

E-mail Elizabeth Larson at elarson@lakeconews.com.

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