

North Coast fires claim first human casualty

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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NORTH COAST – As fires caused by lightning storms nearly two weeks ago continue to burn around the North Coast, on Thursday they claimed their first human casualty.

Cal Fire and Mendocino County officials reported that Bob Roland, a 63-year-old volunteer firefighter recruit from the Anderson Valley Volunteer Fire Department, died early Thursday morning at Ukiah Valley Medical Center.

He'd been taken there after suffering respiratory distress on Wednesday afternoon while working on the Oso Fire, nine miles northwest of Boonville, officials reported.

The Oso is one of 40 active fires out of a total of 123 sparked by lightning in Mendocino County two weekends ago. So far, 38,500 acres have burned, with the complex 40-percent contained, according to officials.

Lakeport Fire Chief Ken Wells reported this week that a Lake County strike team of five engines was sent to work on the Orr Fire in the Mendocino Lightning Complex, which Cal Fire reported has approximately 1,687 personnel, 140 engines 17, helicopters, 60 water tenders and 50 bulldozers assigned to it.

In addition to Roland's death, 15 other firefighters have been injured working on the fires, according to Cal Fire.

The estimated cost of Cal Fire's firefighting effort in Mendocino County to date is \$14,550,000.

Work also continues on fires caused by lightning on June 21 in the Mendocino National Forest, where as of Thursday 5,090 acres had burned in the Soda Complex in Lake and Mendocino counties, and 6,042 acres in the Yolla Bolly Complex in Mendocino, Trinity and Tehama counties, according to forest spokesperson Phebe Brown.

The four-fire Soda Complex is reported 74-percent contained, while Brown said the 23 fires within the Yolla Bolly Complex are only 5-percent contained in total.

Smokejumpers are constructing lines around some of the larger fires in the Yolla Bolly Complex, which has a total of 96 personnel assigned to it, with another 438 personnel on the Soda Complex, according to Brown.

Southwest winds continue to carry the smoke from the fires away from Lake County's air basin, according to county Air Pollution Control Officer Bob Reynolds. Improve air quality is expected through Friday.

For more information visit the Forest Service Web site at www.fs.fed.us/r5/mendocino/currentconditions.

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

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