

South Dakota

No Injuries As Fires Spread

BY AMBER HUNT
 Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — Just as firefighters had contained about 25 percent of the wildfires cutting through the Rosebud Indian Reservation in south-central South Dakota, a lightning strike started another blaze, effectively doubling the battleground.

Dozens of residents remained evacuated Monday as authorities looked hopefully at weather forecasts predicting thunderstorms Monday and Tuesday nights.

But Rocky Mountain Area Incident Commander Joe Lowe said the weather so far hasn't been cooperating. The area saw rain over the weekend, but the "thunderstorms come in and just miss us by about four or five miles," he told a gathering of residents and officials Monday at a Rosebud Sioux Tribe meeting broadcast on the web.

So far, no homes have been hit and no injuries reported. But some residents aren't sure whether they've lost pets or cattle in the blazes, which began late last week.

Authorities estimated that various fires cover at least 7,500 acres — or more than 11 square miles — on the reservation. That's similar in size to another blaze 10 miles northwest of Edgemont, where firefighters built a fire line Monday around the newest portion of the Mossagate Fire. Meanwhile, the nearly 16-square-mile Myrtle fire continued to burn farther west in the Black Hills. Authorities on Monday said that blaze was about 40 percent contained — thanks, in part, to weekend rainfall.

Shane Del Grosso, a fire behavior analyst, told Rosebud residents that the reservation fires were fueled in part by the recent drought. Flames were 8 to 9 feet high. Where there's brush, some flames soared past 20 feet, he said.

Tribe President Rodney Bordeaux has asked for state and federal help. Residents have been told to document losses to report to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Firefighters planned to pre-emptively burn off brush in hopes of controlling the fires' path, a move Del Grosso acknowledged was risky.

"We're doing it under our terms, and not the fire's terms," he said.

Lowe said a helicopter would go up late Monday or early Tuesday in hopes of spotting at-risk cattle, some of whom could be wandering in the burn area without water. Firefighters also hoped to find and save domestic animals.

State Fire Meteorologist Darren Clabo said that even without rain, cooler temperatures are headed to the area, with highs hitting the low 90s. Humidity should also increase, helping firefighters' efforts.

"Hopefully, that'll help put this fire to bed," he said.

Nebraska

More Help On The Way For Wildfire Fight

BY JOSH FUNK
 Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A wildfire was burning across thousands of acres along the scenic Niobrara River on Monday in north-central Nebraska, and officials hoped the arrival of more crews would help them contain the blaze amid hot, windy weather.

The sprawling fire, sparked Friday by lightning, had charred at least 50,000 acres by Monday morning and it wasn't clear how much of the fire had been contained. The blaze is burning across a rugged area with steep canyons that is mostly covered by trees, creating challenges for firefighters.

Roughly 14 miles of the Niobrara River valley has been evacuated, from the Norden Bridge east to Highway 183. The fire has destroyed at least 10 homes and affected boating on a popular area of the river, but the extent of the damage to the area won't be clear until after the fire is out.

Several firefighters suffered minor injuries, including heat stress, but no other injuries have been reported.

Diane Egelhoff said she and her husband were ordered to leave their Rock Barn Outfitters business on Friday because it's only a couple miles west of the Norden bridge, but they were back at the site several times over the weekend to build a fire line and remove their equipment.

Egelhoff said the fire approached to within a half mile of her family's land but hadn't reached their home or barn. She said she feels lucky, but much of the land in the area has been

charred and blackened.

"Right now we feel safe, but we have felt safe before two or three times, and it's come back," Egelhoff said.

The Egelhoffs live in Valentine, about 30 miles away from the fire, but she said the red glow of the fire was visible over the horizon Sunday from a scenic overlook.

"We're saying a lot of prayers," Egelhoff said.

Federal officials arrived Monday to help coordinate the fight, though local fire departments and four helicopters worked to keep the fire at bay Monday. Fire spokeswoman Susan Ford said some lightning moved through

the area Sunday night and ignited several new fires.

The main blaze, which officials are calling the Fairfield Creek fire, has burned a large area north and south of the Niobrara River in Keya Paha and Brown counties, and part of Cherry County.

Ford said an overnight aerial survey using infrared technology provided officials with an updated estimate of 50,000 acres burned, compared with previous estimates approaching 100,000 acres. She couldn't say how much of the fire was contained.

Firefighters from more than 30 fire departments across Nebraska, many of them volunteer

agencies, worked through the weekend to battle the fire.

The weekend's hot weather was followed by another day of hot, dry weather on Monday with temperatures above 100 and wind gusts up to 25 mph, creating additional challenges for firefighters. Similar conditions are expected Tuesday.

The fire is interfering with canoeing and tubing along the Niobrara River because the flames are approaching some cabins and outfitters. Federal officials closed the river downstream of Smith Falls State Park because helicopters are dipping water out of the river to fight the fire.



Out On The Town

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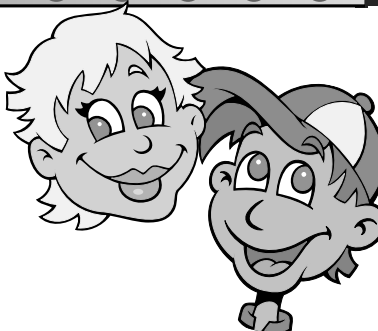
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Hyperion Wants Fast action On Court Hearing

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A company planning a \$10 billion oil refinery in southeastern South Dakota has asked the state Supreme Court to expedite a hearing on an air-quality permit.

Dallas-based Hyperion Resources said delays and litigation have prevented the company from securing money from investors to move forward. The company submitted its initial air-quality application in 2007.

Save Union County, the Sierra Club and Citizens Opposed to Oil Pollution appealed a decision in March by Circuit Court Judge Mark Barnett, upholding the company's air quality permit.

Hyperion officials want the Supreme Court to hear the permit appeal as early as possible in the court's August term or as soon as possible after that.

"Understandably, financial entities and supporters are unwilling to supply money to a project that may be overturned, resulting in large financial losses," Hyperion said in court documents.

Hyperion has until March to start building the refinery that would process 400,000 barrels of Canadian tar sands crude oil each day, *The Argus Leader* reported Monday.

Hyperion contends that the refinery would be a clean, modern plant that would reduce the nation's dependence on oil from overseas.

Opponents say it would emit too much pollution and deplete the quality of life of people living in the area.

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Man Arrested In Slayings Of Father, 2 Sons

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Police say a 33-year-old man has been arrested on accusations that he fatally shot a southeast Omaha man and his two sons.

An Omaha Police Department news release sent Monday says Anthony Davis, of Omaha, has been arrested. Online court records say he's been charged with three counts of murder and three related firearms charges.

He's accused of shooting 44-year-old Miguel Avalos, 18-year-old Miguel Avalos Jr. and his 16-year-old brother, Jose Avalos, on July 9.

Police also say 27-year-old Tiaotta Clairday has been arrested and has been charged with three counts of being an accessory to a felony. She is from Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Douglas County jailers say Davis and Clairday remain in custody. Online court records don't list the names of their attorneys.

Myrtle Fire Burns Historic Ranch To Ashes

PRINGLE (AP) — An historic, 110-year-old ranch has been lost to the Myrtle Fire near Pringle, which has consumed more than 16 square miles of land.

The blaze in the Black Hills engulfed the Williams Ranch, one of the oldest homesteads still standing in the area.

Black Hills National Forest Archeologist Michael Engelhart tells KELO that all 18 structures that made up the ranch burned to the ground.

Engelhart says firefighters had tried to protect the home but couldn't.

KOTA reports that the fire is about 40 percent contained. Rain over the northern two-thirds of the fire helped to slow its spread.

No current homes have been damaged, and Engelhart says firefighters have saved other historic sites.

The Myrtle Fire is one of several sweeping through central and western South Dakota.

Boy, 12, Dies In ATV Crash In Northeast S.D.

ABERDEEN (AP) — A 12-year-old boy was killed when he lost control of an ATV near the northeastern South Dakota town of Claremont, according to the highway patrol.

Troopers said the boy was returning from a baseball game in Claremont on Sunday when he lost control of the ATV on a gravel road. Troopers said the vehicle rolled in a slough and pinned the boy underneath.

Trooper Tom Pioske said the boy's parents searched for their son after he did not return in a timely manner. They discovered him dead in the slough.

The boy's name has not been released.

Pioske said the vehicle was equipped with seat belts, but the boy was not wearing one.

Brown County Sheriff's Deputy Wes Graff told the *Aberdeen American News* that the boy was likely trapped underneath the vehicle for more than an hour.

"They pulled the vehicle off of him and pulled him out of the swamp. They tried CPR, but it was already too late," Graff said.

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