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(Neb.)-UPDATE 9:40 a.m.** East Ash Creek Road Closed Due To Fire**

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 07/23/2012 09:46 AM

(UPDATE 9:40 a.m. Monday)

Sheriff Karl Dailey says East Ash Road is currently closed due to the East Ash Creek Fire except for those who live on the road. Barricades are in place, and he warns people to not even attempt entering the area unless they are residents. Dailey says the Forest Service is now in charge of fire fighting operations, and local volunteer fire crews are providing mutual aid. He says cooler weather and the rain that passed through the area Sunday evening was a big help in the battle with the blaze, but that the major problem now is the rough terrain. He says firefighters "just can't get to it" very well. The pre-evacuation notice is still in effect for those living along Bethel Loop Road south to along East Ash Creek Road to Table Road and then along Table Road to Highland Cemetery, and deputies are in the area and will do a quick evacuation notification as needed if fire danger is eminent.

Dailey says the fire south of the Job Corps has reached containment, as have the Ponderosa and East Belmont Fires southeast of Crawford. Crews are now in the mop-up stages with those fires.

Dailey says he has no clue yet as to the size of the fire. He says "everybody is totally exhausted. Every piece of equipment, every member of personnel is tapped and run dry." Dailey is hopeful that today (Monday) will provide more of a break for fire crews and that things will settle down quickly.

(UPDATE 7:40 p.m.)

KCSR has just received a report of a new fire about a mile south of the Job Corps and west of Highway 385. We will pass along additional information as it becomes available.

(UPDATE 7:25 p.m.)

Dawes County Sheriff Karl Dailey says a pre-evacuation notice has been put into effect for those living along Bethel Loop Road south to along East Ash Creek Road to Table Road and then along Table Road to Highland Cemetery. A pre-evacuation notice simply means to be prepared, keep an eye out, and monitor the situation, but no evacuations have been called for at this time. A lot depends on the wind at this point and how well fire crews are able to keep the fire contained. We will pass along additional information as it becomes available to us.

(CRAWFORD/CHADRON)-Three fires southeast of Crawford have been keeping fire crews busy throughout the day. Dawes County Sheriff Karl Dailey says the Ponderosa Fire, the Belmont Fire, and the East Ash Fire were all started by lightning that passed through the area on Saturday. The Ponderosa Fire, which Dailey says is in the vicinity of the Ponderosa Wood Reserve Southeast of Crawford, and the Belmont Fire, which is situated near East Belmont Road, are pretty much under control at this time. However, Dailey says the East Ash Fire, which is located southwest of Chadron is still "giving (firefighters) fits." He says he is not aware of any houses nearby that may be in danger at this time. The fire appears to be in rough terrain, and Dailey says the firefighters "have their hands full." Officials on the scene say the fire is large enough that it would benefit from having aircraft assistance.

The area has been experiencing some rain, which it is hoped will benefit containment of the fire; however, with the storms come more lightning strikes. And the rain may miss the fire altogether. Dailey says he has no idea yet as to the size of the fire, but that it can be viewed from the edge of Chadron and looks huge. "It's burning big," he says.

Dailey says fire crews "have been stretched to their limit" as of late, and, he adds, "we've still got a lot of summer left." Some fire crews have been on reserve for the fire near Pringle, S.D., and now may not be able to help there if needed due to this fire closer at hand. Dailey said crews from Chadron, Crawford, Hemingford, and Alliance have been helping battle the blazes. He said this region's emergency management coordinator, Nan Gould, is trying to get ahold of officials at the state level, because the area is quickly approaching a time when "there's no one left to call...there are no resources left. Everything has been tapped," says Dailey.

(Questions? Comments? E-mail news@chadrad.com.)

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