

# LITTLE BEAR FIRE NEAR RUIDOSO Fire grows to 10,000 acres, damage reported

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — A lightning-sparked blaze that jumped its containment lines raced through thick conifer forest in southern New Mexico on Saturday, and fire managers estimated that more than a dozen structures were damaged or destroyed.

Spanning only a few acres on Wednesday, the Little Bear fire began to grow Friday as spot fires formed outside established fire lines due to windy conditions. By Saturday morning, about 10,000 acres had been charred northwest of the mountain community of Ruidoso.

"It's nerve-racking right now," Mayor Ray Alborn said in a telephone interview Saturday, as he watched what he described as "real heavy smoke" rise from the Sierra Blanca mountain range.

The mix of timber, dry grass and the steepness of the slopes were making the firefighting efforts more difficult. Windy conditions were also limiting what could be done from the air by helicopters and air tankers, Alborn said.

"Today all we see is smoke," he said. "Last night, we saw the flames too and it was an awesome expression of power. It was red, red and we could see it going across the top."

Fire information officers said summer homes in a few subdivisions and several campgrounds were evacuated late Friday. The Rancho Ruidoso area near Alto was added to the list Saturday, and roads throughout the area were closed, said forest spokeswoman Peg Crim.

There was no immediate word on how many people were evacuated in all. Shelters were set up in Ruidoso and Capitan.

Officials said in a morning briefing that an estimated 15 to 20 structures have been damaged or destroyed by the fire. They could not say whether the structures were homes, sheds or other buildings since crews haven't had a chance to do a formal damage assessment.

The fire was burning in steep, rocky, inaccessible terrain in the White Mountain Wilderness of

the Lincoln National Forest, which is home to Smokey Bear, the little black cub that became the nation's symbol of fire prevention in the 1940s.

U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., was on his way to the area Saturday to meet with fire managers. He said decades of mismanagement, forests packed full of trees and persistent drought conditions have resulted in an explosive situation.

"We just can't keep managing our forests this way. It's not a question of if our forests in the West are going to burn, it's a matter of when. This is just one more demonstration of that," he said.

The Little Bear fire has crossed State Highway 48. Fire information officers said Saturday's goal was to establish an anchor point where crews could work from, fighting the fire with both direct and indirect tactics such as burnout operations.

"We are having winds and the fire is still growing. We're working on it," Crim said.

Crews were reporting extreme fire behavior that included flame lengths of about 150 feet and spotting of up to two miles.

Fire information officers said one of the biggest concerns was the weather. Forecasters were calling for more dry, windy weather.

In southwestern New Mexico, firefighters continued securing the massive perimeter of the Whitewater-Baldy fire, the largest fire in the state's recorded history and the largest currently burning in the nation. The blaze has consumed about 426 square miles and was 32 percent contained Saturday morning.

On Friday, Gov. Susana Martinez visited Reserve for another briefing on the large blaze and declared Catron County a disaster area.

Two smaller fires burning in northern New Mexico's Santa Fe National Forest — the Bear Springs and Colorado Peak fires — were nearly contained. However, crews there were also bracing for the red flag conditions that were forecast for Saturday.



RICHARD TROUT/NEWS-SUN

## New Mac's going up

The new McDonald's restaurant on North Turner is taking shape.

## Economy

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for November 2011 business activity.

Hobbs also ranks fourth in the state of New Mexico business activity for calendar year 2011 at nearly \$4 billion, according to Taylor.

"Within that, our retail business activity was 50 percent more than that of Clovis. And we did 15 percent more in retail sales than Roswell for the year," he said.

Taylor said the community should take great pride in its record sales and tax figures, especially as they compare to other parts of New Mexico.

"Each time I look at a GRT distribution report, I first look at Hobbs' number and then I immediately look for the distribution paid to Las Cruces," Taylor said. "Las Cruces has become a benchmark in my mind, and every

month I hope to find that our distribution has surpassed theirs."

Las Cruces has a population of almost 100,000 and a GRT rate of more than 7.5 percent, yet Hobbs commerce generated nearly the same amount of funds for city government.

Hobbs' total posted tax rate of 6.8125 percent includes the state's tax on gross receipts.

"A little piece of trivia that isn't so trivial: Those businesses (in Hobbs) that are categorized as mining and extraction by New Mexico Tax and Rev generated 23 percent of the total gross receipts in March (2012)," Taylor said.

"We certainly have robust oilfield activity to thank for the record GRT disbursement," Taylor added, "but I think every business and every resident should be applauded for doing their best to find it in Hobbs, as we encourage in our new campaign, before going to other markets like Lubbock and Midland for their goods and services."

## Illness

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University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Children's Medical Center in Dallas, specializes in pediatric autoimmune diseases and said the disease is seen in about one in 500,000 children.

"We don't know what causes it," Graves said Thursday afternoon.

According to Graves, a spinal tap helped diagnose Juanny with autoimmune encephalitis and treatment consists of quieting down the immune system and inflammation by using a steroid therapy and a plasma exchange to filter out the antibodies.

Graves said the earlier patients are diagnosed with the disease and start treatment, the better it is to prevent possible damage.

"About 25 percent of the patients will be left with residual problems," she said. "In Juan he

has already started to walk; we have good prognostic signs with him."

On Monday, Juanny was released from Children's Medical Center in Dallas and transported to a rehabilitation center in Albuquerque with his father where he is currently receiving therapy. According to Graves, each individual case is different and there is no exact time frame as to how long Juanny will have in recovery.

She said autoimmune encephalitis also occurs in adults, but mostly children. Graves advises parents to seek as much medical attention as possible if they think their child is sick and are not able to get concrete answers.

"About half of the cases occur in kids, we see it in adults as well," she said. "I would advise parents to be an advocate for your kid and if you're not getting the answers that you think are appropriate, push to see somebody else," Graves said.

## Housing

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ple, one given industrial worker facility will house only oil-field workers and so on. He noted that not just anyone can rent rooms there.

"People who live there will be employees of the companies that are financially involved in the housing facilities," Mayor Sam Cobb added.

In other business Monday, the commission heard a report on remediated structures that have previously been condemned by the city. Rather than being demolished, property owners agreed to fix up these structures and make them habitable, adding to the beautification of neighborhoods.

"For the last several years, we've been very vested in condemnations, finding an aver-

age of five properties to report on each City Commission meeting," said City Attorney Mike Stone. "Now we want to bring you four or five properties each meeting, if possible, which are being remediated. When I came to Hobbs, Mr. Honeyfield (city manager) said one of his objectives was to clean up the city of Hobbs.

"In the past, we did not have a lot of condemned properties, but now, with the city roll over program, we are beginning to see the fruition. The city has spent a little money, but the program has been great."

Under the program, the city helps pay for costs of removing debris from condemned buildings that are demolished. The city also gives property owners who want to rehabilitate property 45 days to do so, and has been more lenient in granting extensions so work can be completed.

"We are seeing many success stories," said Fire Marshall Eric Enriquez.

At the request of Stone, properties at 1100 E. Llano, 1004 N. Fowler, 1601 E. Dunnam, 205 S. Cochran and 912 S. Houston were removed from the condemned structures list.

"It gives me joy to see people take advantage of this problem and to remodel these properties. This increases our numbers of houses," said City

Commissioner Crystal Mullins. "Some of these condemned structures just need TLC, and so I would ask people, if you have a little money, help take some of these condemned houses off the list and rehabilitate them."

In other business, the city commission voted to condemn the following properties at 2413 N. Houston, 307 E. Alston, 1229 S. Hanna, 1401 E. Dunnam and 3814 N. Hope.

## Feedback on SunZia project sought

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — The Bureau of Land Management has released a draft of the potential environmental impacts related to a 500-mile electricity transmission project that would span parts of Arizona and New Mexico.

The agency has scheduled a series of public meetings in both states to gather comment on the proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Project. The comment period ends Aug. 22.

The BLM says it has identified a preferred alternative based on a preliminary review of several possible routes that stretch between substations in New Mexico's Lincoln County and southern Arizona's Pinal County.

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