

# Fires near Applegate River have residents ready to evacuate

**Damian Mann**  
Mail Tribune

MEDFORD, Ore. (AP) - Daniel Sathre and his family have their bags packed and are ready to flee quickly if the Miller Complex fires near the Applegate River kick up this week. "I'm definitely nervous but not panicked," the 64-year-old said.

Fire officials have told Sathre and other Palmer Creek Road residents near the Applegate River to collect their possessions and prepare for evacuation in case the Burnt Peak fire advances to the east.

The fire is one of 25 separate blazes that make up the Miller Complex, which stretches over a broad area from southern Josephine County to Jackson County near Upper Applegate Road and down into California.

Particularly worrisome for Sathre, his wife and his mother-in-law, is the 2,546-acre Burnt Peak fire burning two miles to the west and 9 miles southwest of Ruch. Firefighters have contained only the western flank of the blaze, and they're concerned that strong winds, high temperatures and expected drier conditions could push it east toward Applegate Road.

Just to the south of Applegate Lake, the 1,595-acre Seattle fire spans the California and Oregon border. Two other connected fires, the Abney and Cook, are burning near the Cook and Green Pass within a 3,446-acre area. The Seattle, Abney and Cook fires have almost joined together and are a half mile from

the rural community of Joe Bar, California, next to the Oregon border.

To the west, some five miles east of the Oregon Caves, the 1,977-acre Creedence and Bigelow fires have also connected. Most of the blazes have only limited containment lines.

"I can tell you the crews are running up and down the road," Sathre said. "The smoke is heavy, heavy, heavy."

He said his 91-year-old mother-in-law is hunkered down in her house across the road from him. A temporary pond has been positioned behind her house, and crews filled it with 1,500 gallons of water, Sathre said.

"My mother-in-law has never seen a fire like this," he said. Both his wife and mother were raised in the Applegate.

Fire crews have kept residents up-to-speed on developments, including explaining what to expect with different evacuation notices and how the fires are progressing, Sathre said.

From his vantage point, Sathre has been unable to see any flames from the fire. For the past few days, heavy smoke has limited visibility, and Sathre has seen fewer aircraft battling the blazes. Fire officials say the smoke, which is primarily from the 107,993-acre Chetco Bar Fire near Brookings, has hampered air operations. Some residents have unnecessarily worried the increasing smoke means the Miller Complex is expanding.

Compared to the Chetco Bar Fire, the 9,628-acre Miller Complex is much smaller, but it has the potential to become devastating because the mountainous terrain is difficult to access for firefighters. After better computer mapping, the exact

acreage of the fires in the Miller Complex was reduced over the weekend. Other smaller fires in the area have been added into the total for the Miller Complex.

Sierra Hellstrom, public information officer for the Miller Complex, said the complex included 25 lightning-sparked fires around the area, and fire crews have essentially stamped out all but six. The fires are being fought by 550 people, though reinforcements have been called in, she said.

With hotter and drier conditions expected over the next week, the fires could gain momentum.

"It is actively burning," Hellstrom said. "There is the potential for fire growth on all the fires."

Because of the terrain and different types of vegetation at each of the fires in the complex, it has been difficult to get crews in to establish lines, Hellstrom said.

"Rolling debris" is one of the biggest safety issues. When crews park on a road with a steep hillside above them, debris that has caught on fire can roll down the hill, creating a hazard.

"We're being very careful about where we're placing the resources because of all the slopes," Hellstrom said.

On Sunday, three firefighters were injured, one of them seriously, when their engine rolled off the road.

"They were in the vehicle and rolled down into an embankment," she said.

Hellstrom said 80 evacuation packets were handed out to residents, mostly along Palmer Creek Road. Other areas have also received evacuation notices, and fire crews have been working with residents who need to move livestock out.

## FIRE ...

Continued from A-1

Communities along the Klamath River are experiencing degraded air quality due to the numerous fires in the area and limiting visibility on forest roads and state highways. Driving in smoky conditions can be dangerous. Please drive slowly, and with your lights on to ensure you are seen by other drivers. Be alert for firefighters and fire equipment along Hwy. 96 from Seiad Valley to Clear Creek Ranch.

Oak: Continued road prep and handline construction for indirect containment firelines and implementing strategic firing operations as the fire moves east. Construct contingency line for the town of Happy Camp. Provide structure protection on the east flank. Resources will continue to mop-up where needed. Continue implementation of suppression indirect containment line on the east side while solidifying contingency alternatives. Strengthen control lines on the east flank.

Cedar and Four Mile: Continue indirect handline and dozer line construction on the west and south sides of the proposed fire perimeter. Continue prepping the 19N01 road for potential strategic firing operations. Continued strategic firing to strengthen containment lines on the east flank and southern flank. Scouting and prep of the northern containment line using MIST.



(Photos by Laura Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Cave Junction (left) was filled with smoke Monday Aug. 28. Harris Beach in Brookings was also saturated with smoke from the Chetco Bar Fire Sunday Aug. 27.

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