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 79/96 S.F. Examiner A2
 1996 WL 3713674

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 USNEWS

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San Francisco Examiner
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Tuesday, July 9, 1996

NEWS

Wildfires dance across Sierra Lightning, rains, gusty winds keep firefighters
 guessing as blazes scatter south of Reno

Larry D. Hatfield
 EXAMINER STAFF

Two major wildfires and a swarm of smaller ones continued to burn on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Tuesday, with a quirky Mother Nature assisting firefighters with some of them while at the same time starting others.

"Mother Nature's just going a little crazy with her lightning tonight," said interagency fire spokeswoman Linda Massey on Monday night as lightning sparked more blazes in the high country south of Reno.

At the same time, erratic and gusty winds fanned flames in tinder-dry chaparral and grasslands while sometimes heavy rain and even occasional hail helped douse them.

The most serious fires were the three-day-old blaze that continued to threaten the small town of Coleville in Antelope Valley and another that imperiled the hamlet of Nixon on the south end of Pyramid Lake.

In Southern California, fire crews were demobilizing after quelling several fires, including a week-old 2,975-acre brush fire near New Cuyama, on the northern slopes of the Sierra Madre range in Los Padres National Forest northeast of Santa Barbara.

Firefighters, though hampered by afternoon thunderstorms that brought unwanted lightning and wind, said they had lines around about 60 percent of the biggest Sierra fire - a 2,000-acre burn that was a combination of three smaller ones that joined forces Monday morning in Mono County.

The lightning-sparked fire between Sonora Pass and U.S. Highway 395 no longer threatened the village of Walker or the U.S. Marine Corps' Mountain Warfare Training Center

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Pickel Meadows. But flare-ups continued on the skirts of Coleville.

Firefighters expected to have the fire encircled by Wednesday night and out by Thursday night.

More than a dozen smaller fires were ignited by lightning around the big fire but they either were out or posed no serious danger. About 240 firefighters using helicopters, planes and ground equipment were fighting the blaze.

More thunderstorms were forecast in the mountains for Tuesday afternoon.

To the north, a 1,000-acre lightning-caused fire doubled in size overnight and burned close to Nixon and some farm buildings on Nevada's Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation north of Reno.

"With the resources we have on order, we're hoping to attack it before it gets any bigger," Massey said. As it did in the Coleville fire, rain aided firefighters in keeping the fire from growing.

So far, none of the fires, involving hundreds of firefighters in both Northern and Southern California, produced any serious injuries. Fire officials said bee stings and poison oak were the most serious problems.

Fires continued to burn elsewhere in the West in states plagued by one of the worst droughts of the century. The Utah town of Terra, east of Dugway Proving Grounds and 60 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, was evacuated as two lightning fires threatened it and houses on the Skull Valley Indian Reservation.

The two fires scorched some 31,000 acres of desert. Another fire had burned about the same acreage near Cove Fort on Interstate 15, about 175 miles south of Salt Lake, and a 300-acre fire was out of control in the rugged Pole Canyon area along the Utah-Nevada border south of Wendover.

In Terra, erratic winds that had the fire "going every direction" died down at night, and the blaze was moving slowly, said Kathy Jo Pollock of the Interagency Fire Center.

About 15 miles away, a 1,000-acre fire threatened homes on
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Skull Valley Reservation and some buildings on private land, Pollock said.

The fires began Monday afternoon and were likely caused by lightning. They were being battled by 80 firefighters that were assisted by state fire engines and retardant drops from air tankers.

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PHOTO; Credit: AP / DOUGLAS C. PIZAC; Caption: Fire lights the sky near Cove Fort, Utah, Monday as a firefighter radioes his command post.; MAP; Credit: EXAMINER GRAPHICS; Caption: (LOCATING WILDFORES IN CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA)

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

KEY WORDS: BRUSH FIRES; FOREST FIRES

EDITION: FIRST

Word Count: 601
7/9/96 SFEX A2
END OF DOCUMENT

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96 LVRJ 5B
11/96 Las Vegas Rev.-J. 5B
1996 WL 2344898

Rank(R)
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The Las Vegas Review-Journal
Copyright 1996

Thursday, July 11, 1996

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Firefighters gain upper hand on lightning-sparked blazes in Utah
Associated Press

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY - Firefighters have gained the upper hand on two fires that threatened the small western Utah town of Terra and the nearby Skull Valley Indian Reservation, burning 36,000 acres.

Although firefighters had to deal with whirlwinds and lower humidity on Wednesday, the fires did not advance, said Jane Pennell, a fire information officer at the Army's Dugway Proving Ground. The fires were burning west of the Army base and about 60 miles southwest of Salt Lake City.

Crews were building a line around the east side of the 31,500-acre Davis-Knolls fire and were dousing hot spots, Pennell said.

The blaze was started by lightning on Monday and threatened the 28 homes in and around Terra and some structures on the nearby Indian reservation.

Several dozen Terra residents who had been evacuated Monday returned to their homes the next day.

The Davis-Knolls blaze scorched at least seven power poles, cutting off electricity to the Dugway Army base and the surrounding area late Monday night. Electricity was restored Tuesday, Utah Power spokesman Dave Eskelsen said.

By Wednesday morning, fire crews had it 60 percent contained and predicted it would be under full control by Friday evening.

Meanwhile, fire crews were working toward full control of the 4,500-acre blaze near the Skull Valley Goshute Indian Reservation Wednesday evening. The fire there, 10 miles to the north of the Davis-Knolls fire, destroyed a corral but did not threaten other structures.

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To the south, the last of the five fires that made up the 300-acre Sorenson Complex of fires in west-central Utah was declared contained Tuesday evening, with control expected today, said Bert Hart, public information officer for the Bureau of Land Management's Richfield District.

Overnight Tuesday, fire crews with the help from BLM in Nevada discovered and contained a 300-acre lightning fire just east of Topaz Mountain, about 45 miles northwest of Delta. Wildfires burn in Nevada

Review-Journal

A rash of small wildfires in White Pine County has destroyed more than 250 acres, Bureau of Land Management officials said Wednesday.

Curtis Tucker, a BLM special projects coordinator at the agency's Ely district office, said more than 30 fires have been reported in White Pine and Lincoln counties in the past two days. The cause for each blaze is believed to be lightning.

"In the 24-hour period around July 8, we had more than 6,000 lightning strikes reported," Tucker said. "I've been in eastern Nevada for more than 10 years, and this is the worst I've seen."

The majority of the fires have been attacked and contained before they could cause major damage, Tucker said. In one fire in Lincoln County, a BLM truck was destroyed when winds shifted, causing firefighters to abandon the vehicle.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

EDITION: FINAL

Word Count: 454
7/11/96 LVRJ 5B
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