

## County declares Jarbidge emergency: In one day, fire doubles in size to 60 square miles

By [JOHN SENTS](#) - Staff Writer

ELKO - High winds coupled with low humidity and high temperatures in steep, rugged terrain provided ripe conditions for a wildfire in the Jarbidge Wilderness to more than double in size Monday to 38,500 acres - roughly 60 square miles - while nearly 500 people work to contain the blaze.

The lightning-sparked fire - which the U.S. Forest Service originally monitored while allowing it to burn, a technique used to naturally reduce fuel loads of dead or diseased trees - grounded aircraft and forced firefighters to move to safety zones by mid-afternoon Monday as the growing conflagration outflanked them.

“We just couldn't risk having our firefighters becoming entrapped,” said Incident Commander Paul Summerfelt.

Monday, the Elko County Commission issued an emergency declaration and is seeking a declaration from the state, which may in turn trigger federal aid and help allocate additional resources to the fire.

Winds pushed the fire to the north along Robinson's Creek up to Cougar Point. By late afternoon it was about five miles south of Murphy Hot Springs.

The fire reached the Sawmill Ridge area over the weekend, which is approximately 3.5 miles east of the town of Jarbidge. It continued to move north along Sawmill Ridge Monday but did not move westward over the ridge toward the small hamlet.

Jarbidge Volunteer Fire Department Chief Ken Heil said residents in the area are meeting and making contingency plans in case an evacuation is needed. He said there wasn't much smoke in the town Monday, although they received a bit over the last few days.

“There are a lot of flames up there,” Heil said. “It is a long fire front. It is way out of control.”

Active portions of the fire now well north and east of Jarbidge. However, the Owyhee County Sheriff's Department has issued a pre-evacuation advisory to residents of Murphy Hot Springs.

Firefighters completed some fire breaks, or holding lines, south of the community and engines are on-site to provide structure protection.

Structure protection efforts were curtailed at the Pole Creek Guard Station when it appeared the fire might compromise the road and their ability to leave. They were able to apply protective “foam” on the structure before pulling out. Firefighters working on the northeast side observed fire backing downslope against the wind.

While the county is not under a Red Flag Warning today, portions of the fire are burning through sagebrush and grass where even light winds can cause fire to move quickly.

A Type I National Incident Management Team is managing the fire and there are currently 476 people fighting it, including six Type I Hotshot crews, six Type II crews, five helicopters, 10 engines, three dozers and eight water tenders.

U.S. Forest Service public information officer Linda Slater said the firefighting strategy has changed to suppression and crews are focused on that plan.

“There will be some time to evaluate this (strategy) decision in the future,” Slater said.

The Forest Service's earlier wildland fire use strategy has drawn some criticism as the blaze, which began Aug. 8, has grown beyond original projections and damaged some grazing allotments.

“I warned them that Thursday if they don't stay on top of this with how those canyons are and how steep it is, they will lose this fire,” Ellison said. “Knowing the terrain and type of brush up there, it is kind of ridiculous to let it get to this point.”