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## Ely fire chars 12,047 acres, 90 percent contained

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ELY — The North Schell fire, a prescribed U.S. Forest Service burn that ballooned to 12,047 acres, continued to be at 90 percent containment Friday.

The fire, 20 miles northeast of Ely, is expected to be fully contained by Wednesday, according to U.S. Bureau of Land Management Public Affairs Specialist Chris Hanefeld.

The Schell fire is smoldering and creeping.

Firefighting resources began to demobilize Thursday afternoon, according to Hanefeld.

“Isolated areas of smoke are expected throughout the interior of the burn area for up to a month and may be visible to Ely and McGill residents,” Hanefeld said.

The Forest Service started the fire on June 9 before it crossed over into BLM land and was declared a wildfire on June 17.

Two factors led to the fire’s growth, Forest Service Ely District Ranger Jose Noriega said.

The first was spotting — when embers fly ahead of the fire.

The fire, with about 300-foot flame lengths, stopped at green sagebrush and mahogany but spotted half a mile farther into a stand of old white fir.

The embers landed in a heavy fuel zone not accessible by vehicles on June 12 in the late afternoon, Noriega said.

The Forest Service had ceased to set fires by then.

The embers hit an area of old and dead trees, he said.

“It was too dangerous to put people in to control it,” he said.

At 3 p.m. June 16 a log rolled out of the area lit by the spotting and into the bottom of a canyon.

Helicopters were directed to stop the spread of the fire but on June 17 high winds in the mid- to late morning picked up and whipped the fire down the canyon and prevented helicopters from dropping water on it, he said.

“It went right down the canyon,” Noriega said.

All of the resources, crews and machines were moved to the bottom of the canyon to try to prevent it from burning structures and mule deer and sage grouse habitat.

The sides of the canyons were “real rocky,” which hindered crews but also hindered the fire.

The log and the spotting changed the whole fire.

“Those two factors led to something new,” he said.

A double-wide mobile home, on the east side of the fire, burned. It was in a sporadic pinyon-juniper area.

The resident was able to safely evacuate and take a few belongings, Hanefeld said.

The rancher whose home burned told Noriega he is still supportive of the controlled burns.

“He wants us to do (the burns) in the future,” Noriega said. “A lot of people who were affected want to see this continue.”

The prescribed burn was supposed to be 600-700 acres to burn out white fir to allow the area to be restored to aspen.

“Aspen loves fire,” he said.

After a fire burns white fir out of an area, aspen will take hold. In 100-200 years, with no burns, white fir will take the area back over.

After a fire, aspen can sprout 1,000 to 2,000 trees per acre, Noriega said.

Aspen sprouts from roots protected in the ground, usually unaffected by the burns.

“It’s possible to cook it,” he said.

If a burn happens in extremely hot weather with dry ground, it can cook the aspen roots to death, Noriega said.

The burn was part of a larger relandscaping effort the Forest Service approved after a National Environmental Policy Act process.

The plan calls for 12,000 acres of prescribed burns and 12,000 acres of mechanical treatments, such as chopping down trees and harvesting them, in a 78,000-acre area.

There are no more plans for burns or mechanical treatments this summer, Noriega said.

Indian Creek and Kalamazoo roads, and the Kalamazoo Recreation Site, are now open.

### **Pinto fire completely contained**

Firefighters fully contained the 2,800 acre Pinto fire Friday, which burned 20 miles east of Eureka.

The fire caused six residents of a ranch to be evacuated but they were moved back into their

residences Wednesday.

High winds caused power lines to arc, sparking the fire, which was 30 miles north of the Bald Mountain mine, early Tuesday morning at 12:30, according to Hanefeld.

Residents in Newark Valley lost power temporarily and Mt. Wheeler Power restored it with a substation while they repaired the main power lines.

“Firefighters will continue mop-up activities in the interior burn area,” Hanefeld said Friday.



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