

## West-central Idaho fire forcing evacuations

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A west-central Idaho wildfire fire jumped the Salmon River, prompting evacuation notices and forcing more than 100 rafters to cut their trip short and be shuttled out of the backcountry.

The fire burning in timber was up to 122 square miles Monday, threatening rural areas and small towns including Riggins, authorities said. Some evacuation notices told people to leave immediately. Others urged people to be prepared to flee.

Fire spokesman Jose Acosta said fire crews tried to use the river as a natural fire break but winds over the weekend with gusts up to 40 mph caused the firefighters to have to abandon the area for safety reasons.

"Mother Nature won on Saturday," he said. "We had to get out of the way. Those were serious wind gusts that blew the fire at an amazing speed."

After crossing the river and moving north, the fire consumed another 46 square miles of vegetation. Acosta said no structures have been lost. He said crews Monday planned to strengthen fire lines to the west and southwest where most of the homes and towns are located.

He said that 109 rafters on the Salmon River, a popular floating destination, had been halted and were being evacuated. He said 72 were taken out over the weekend and 37 remained Monday. Falling boulders loosened by the fire have intermittently shut down the road being used to take out the rafters, he said.

Food and supplies were taken into the area for the rafters in case they have to remain there for multiple days. Acosta said they appeared to be in good spirits, being on a trip that already included camping.

Federal authorities closed nearly all of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests because of the fire.

In northern Idaho, residents near the town of Lowell were told to be prepared to evacuate due to a 16-square-mile fire that was threatening a historic ranger station.

Fire spokeswoman Michelle Kelly said structure protection is in place for the Fenn Ranger Station, built in 1936 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

She said nearly half an inch of rain on Sunday helped slow fires in the area.

"What we're seeing is that all the fires in our complex are having more minimal type of activity — more creeping and backing fire," Kelly said. "We're able to do more direct fire line, and in some areas do mop up."

She said low clouds have been preventing aircraft from flying but five helicopters are available if skies clear.

Also in northern Idaho, evacuation notices are in place in Bonner County as fires in Washington state edge toward the border.

Idaho on Monday had 18 large fires burning, the most in the nation, the National Interagency Fire Center said.

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