

High winds fan forest inferno in Montana

Raging fires spread throughout state, damage 100,000 acres, force hundreds to flee

By TOM LACEKY
Associated Press Writer

HELENA, Mont. — Scores of wind-whipped fires raged out of control yesterday across Montana, charring 100,000 acres of forests and rangeland and forcing hundreds of people to flee their homes, while fresh firefighters began arriving from other states.

"Our state literally is on fire from Glacier Park in the extreme northwest corner to the Custer (National) Forest and the Bull Mountains in the southeast," said Gov. Ted Schwinden.

President Reagan declared two fires that were threatening populated areas to be federal disaster areas yesterday, Schwinden announced. The designation makes an unspecified amount of Federal Emergency Management Agency funds available to help firefighting efforts. FEMA officials met with state officials yesterday in Helena to discuss qualifying other fires for the federal assistance.

"A number of the fires are out of control," Schwinden said in an interview. "We've had a number of homes burned, some animals lost. In some areas our major effort is on evacuation rather than containment of the fire."

"Some of these fires are totally out of control at the present point, and the major priority has to be trying to save buildings, communities and evacuating people," the governor said.

Schwinden called the outbreak the worst in Montana in a decade, but the breadth was even greater than he said. The fires extended westward

even beyond Glacier, to Libby in the extreme northwest corner of the state.

Scores of fires were burning, but no one was sure how many because several state and federal agencies were involved.

"We're monitoring 13 to 16 fires around the state from 1,500 to 45,000 acres," said Department of State Lands spokesman Steve Jorgenson in Missoula.

He said federal forest firefighters from other states were flowing into the state yesterday.

The state's two biggest fires were coming together to form a 45,000-acre blaze near between Roundup and Billings, and two major new forest fires erupted in northwestern Montana, driving about 600 people from their homes.

High wind driving the flames continued to buffet the state and was forecast to continue today.

"We are getting somewhat cooler temperatures, and what we need is for the wind to go down because in some areas we haven't even been able to use the aerial slurry applications simply because of high winds," the governor said. "With extremely high winds in timber, and some of the fires are in very rough, mountainous country, you simply can't get the heavy equipment in."

One volunteer firefighter was critically burned over the weekend and taken to the University of Utah Burn Center, but other injuries have been minor.



Above, clouds of smoke billow into the skies north of Billings, Mont., as several fires burn out of control. The fires have damaged forests and rangelands across a large section of the state. At right, ranchers survey damage 20 miles east of Roundup, Mont.

● The North Hill fire, 14 miles north of Helena, 8,000 acres.
● The Houghton Creek fire burning an eight-mile swath on both sides of U.S. 2 about 30 miles south of Libby, 10,000 to 12,000 acres.
● The Red Owl Creek fire southeast of Kalispell, more than 2,000 acres.
● The Hawk Creek Fire northeast of Billings, more than 30,000 acres.
The North Hill and Houghton Creek fires were covered by the federal disaster declaration.

Army ingenuity being used to tame the mighty Mississippi

By BILL CRIDER
Associated Press Writer

CITY, La., instead of the 312 meandering miles it now takes past New Orleans.

Such a shocking rearrangement of the river's course would, among other things, cause billions of dollars in damage.

Some 140,000 people who live in the Atchafalaya Basin would be displaced. A Louisiana State University study said that Morgan City, Houma, Thibodaux and Raceland, among other towns, would be isolated and flooded.

The river is struggling to cut through an old river bed across a narrow neck of land and take over the Atchafalaya River for a 140-mile run to the Gulf of Mexico at Morgan

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Harare gives Arafat warm welcome

By MICHELLE FAUL
Associated Press Writer

HARARE, Zimbabwe — PLO leader Yasser Arafat, packing a pistol on his hip, arrived in Harare yesterday to a 19-gun salute usually accorded visiting heads of government.

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe welcomed him on a red carpet as a police brass band played the anthems of Zimbabwe and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

In a mixture of military pomp and tribal pagantry, African dancers and drummers performed on the tarmac of Harare International Airport.

Diplomats from East bloc and African nations were among hundreds of people gathered at the airport to welcome Arafat, who earlier visited Zambia and Tanzania on an African tour to renew ties with black leaders.

The PLO chief left his pistol in his room when he was the guest at a state banquet in the Monomotapa Hotel and heard Mugabe attack both Israel and South Africa's white-minority government.

"Today, Zionism and apartheid have become birds of a feather," Mugabe said. "They flock together as they invade and destabilize neighboring states and as they collaborate in all spheres — economic, technical, technological and military."

Arafat was officially invited to Africa's youngest nation by Mugabe.

Before he arrived, the Zimbabwe Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Arafat would hold "wide-ranging talks... on the current situation in the Middle East."

Arafat, wearing his distinctive black and white headgear and a tan military-style safari suit, flew from the Zambian capital of Lusaka in a private jet with Saudi Arabian markings.

Two Zimbabwe air force jets screamed overhead in salute as the plane touched down.

Arafat reviewed a green-uniformed presidential guard and then was driven into central Harare in a motorcade for talks with Mugabe.

In Lusaka, Arafat met privately with Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda. Kaunda later denounced the United States for supporting Israel and white-ruled South Africa and condemned Arab countries opposed to Arafat's leadership of the PLO, according to the Pan-African News Agency.

Arafat said the PLO's aim "is to find a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem," he was quoted as saying, and added that the government of Israel — which he called a "military junta" — was the PLO's enemy — not all Jews.

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Sinking freighter stabilized

LONG BEACH, Calif. (AP) — Rescue vessels rushed toward a hurricane-lashed freighter that lay dead in the water yesterday, a gaping hole in its bow, after its "frantic" captain and 22 crew members stabilized the foundering ship.

Aircraft dropped pumps early yesterday to the 350-foot Blue Falcon, which emitted a Morse Code mayday at 9:30 p.m. Monday saying it was sinking in the Pacific Ocean about 900 miles southwest of San Diego.

"The vessel is no longer sinking," U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Debra Harbaugh said about 9:45 a.m. Tuesday. Officials were unsure how the crew stabilized the ship, but, said Harbaugh, "it's holding its own."

"The captain of the ship was pretty frantic and he wanted to abandon ship" early yesterday, said Harbaugh. "The Coast Guard has instructed them not to abandon ship unless absolutely mandatory."

The merchant vessel Joseph Roth was speeding toward the scene was expected to arrive last night, and it was to stand by and offer emergency help until a Coast Guard cutter arrived about 1 p.m. today, said Petty Officer Charles Crosby. Another merchant ship, the Nalo Express, was expected to reach the scene early today, he said.

"The 15-foot swells washed one life raft away from the freighter, and officials said the crew would be safer on board than on the remaining life rafts or rafts that could have been lowered by aircraft," Petty Officer Rick Woods said.

"Life rafts can get blown around, they can get blown over," he said. "It

looks to me like the hurricane passed right over the top of it," Woods said.

Winds of 65 knots had dropped to 40 knots, about 55 mph, and water had ceased washing over the main deck, Harbaugh said.

"The weather on the scene is choppy but good weather for aircraft," she said. "The winds are flyable and they (the aircraft crew) won't lose sight of the vessel."

The ship was 190 miles southwest of the tiny Mexican island of Isla Clara and about 570 miles southwest of Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of Baja California, Woods said.

Woods said the hole in the bow was about 40 feet across and 10 feet deep. "That area down there is one where the tropical hurricanes form," Woods said. "It's possible that they just got caught in the area and couldn't get away fast enough."

The Coast Guard sent three aircraft carrying communication gear, radios, life rafts and food supplies, but there was no immediate decision on using the equipment, said Harbaugh.

The ship was out of range for most land-based helicopters, said Woods. "I understand that it's theoretically possible to get there and back with a helicopter, but it would take special preparations and it would take days to get ready," Woods said.

The Venturous, a Coast Guard vessel from Long Beach, was expected to arrive at the scene at 1 p.m. (PDT) today, but the merchant vessel Nalo Express, contacted late Monday, was to arrive at midnight last night, Brown said.

When the Nalo Express was contacted about 360 miles from the crippled freighter, Harbaugh said.

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Illegal beer case to go to court

FOND DU LAC, Wis. (AP) — A judge yesterday ordered a Nov. 8 trial for three parents who allegedly tried to attract cash donations to an athletic program by illegally offering free beer at a girls' softball game.

Fond du Lac County Circuit Judge Henry Buslee set the trial date during a brief court appearance of two of the parents, Elizabeth Bednarek, 34 and Alexandria Braun, 37. Both pleaded innocent to charges of selling beer without a license. The third parent, Gary Friess, 42, entered an innocent plea by letter and did not appear in court.

The parents had intended to raise funds for a girls' softball program in North Fond du Lac by selling beer during the weekend of Aug. 3-5, at the start of a three-day softball tournament. But sponsors had missed the deadline for getting a license.

The parents said they then got the idea of serving the beer free and asking customers to make cash donations to the program.

About two dozen supporters of the parents attended a village board meeting Aug. 6 to protest the arrests and vowed to be in court when the case came up. Originally set for Aug. 14, the case was postponed until yesterday. Few people were in the courtroom yesterday when Buslee set the trial date.

At the time of her arrest, Bednarek said it was embarrassing to be charged in front of the young people. The defendants were accused of illegally selling beer to a policeman's wife, who sat sipping the beverage through the incident.

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