

[back to story page](#)

Printed from ABQjournal.com, a service of the Albuquerque Journal

URL: <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/state/apfire08-20-08.htm>

Wednesday, August 20, 2008

## Feds Watch as Nevada Wilderness Burns Unchecked for 12 Days

**By Scott Sonner***Associated Press*

RENO, Nev. — While armies of firefighters battle wildland blazes across much of the West, federal crews are watching from the sidelines as a 12-day-old wildfire burns unchecked in a remote wilderness area in the northeast corner of Nevada.

With no immediate threat to people or property, the Forest Service has been content to let nature have its way as the lightning-sparked fire crackles its way through more about five square miles of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Jarbidge Wilderness Area along the Nevada-Idaho line.

Agency officials continue to monitor the fire that's 15 miles from the nearest town of Jarbidge, and will step in to fight it if any danger arises, said Linda Slater, a public information officer for the National Park Service who is assisting in the interagency effort.

"The safety of firefighters and the public remains the top priority," she said Wednesday.

But if all goes well, they're counting on rain or snow to put it out the old fashioned way sometime early this fall.

The management practice called "Wildland Fire Use" is used to manage lightning-caused fires in remote areas where fire is a natural component of the ecosystem, Slater said.

"Right now, they are not putting it out in any place. We have teams in there monitoring the perimeter of the fire and they also fly over it once a day or more to keep track of it," Slater told The Associated Press.

It's a very different scene than in Oregon, where 500 firefighters are battling a stubborn fire on Mount Hood; eastern Washington, where 390 personnel are trying to stop a fire that has burned 24 square miles near Davenport; or the Sierra Nevada, where 150 firefighters now have a 650-acre fire in California's Mono County about 45 percent contained.

So far, the fire in Nevada's wilderness has burned 3,245 acres primarily through an area dominated by brush, bug-killed and other dead trees. It's perimeter is expected to grow, but many pockets of green trees within the perimeter remain unburned, she said.

"It is burning very spotty. It is not black from end of the wilderness to the other," Slater said.

The vast wilderness area, home to the threatened bull trout, covers a total of about 195 square miles. The fire is burning within about a 9-square-mile area that has been closed to public entry near the 10,184-foot God's Pocket Peak.

"It is a pretty rocky, open area. It is not a densely covered forest. It is a lot of meadow, open area," Slater said.

For the first time since it ignited on Aug. 8, residents of Jarbidge could see smoke from the fire on Tuesday. But Slater said they aren't in any immediate danger.

"They are not going to let it burn out of the wilderness areas at all," she said.

Dot Creechly, owner of the Outdoor Inn in Jarbidge, said the smoke was "pretty heavy" Tuesday evening but the skies were mostly clear Wednesday morning.

She said she's not necessarily sold on the idea of letting the fire burn but was glad Forest Service officials were keeping them updated on its status. She said an agency official was due in town again later Wednesday.

"It's quite a ways to the east of us. Last year we got evacuated. That wasn't any fun. So they are keeping us informed," said Creechly, who has owned the inn in the old mining town for 39 years.

"They told us it started by lightning so they considered it a managed burn and they told us if it went out of the wilderness area they would fight it," she said. "We don't control what they do, but I hate to see stuff burn."

Environmentalists generally remain supportive of the policy even in cases where protected species are involved, such as the bull trout.

"When you have a natural event like this, it is beneficial," said John McCarthy, Idaho forest campaign director for The Wilderness Society in Boise, Idaho.

"These fish have evolved in these systems. Bull trout actually benefit from fires, even high intensity fires, as long as there is connectivity so the fish can move out of an area if it gets too hot before or after a fire," he said.

"The key is there can't be blockages of their passage up and down, like culverts. You can have a total burn and within a couple of years, bull trout will be back and thriving."

Copyright ©2008 Associated Press.

[Back to story page](#)