

Residents assess damage from Ray May Fire; containment expected Friday

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By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Making good progress against a wildfire raging in Douglas County's Pine Nut Mountains, fire officials said Thursday they expect to have the blaze fully surrounded by fire lines by 6pm Friday.

The Ray May Fire was reported 70 percent contained Thursday after burning more than 3,600 acres or nearly six square miles.

"We're slowly corralling the fire," said Keith Barker, incident commander for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. "We're getting a lot of good work done."

The fire was started Tuesday by two 15-year-old boys who had built an illegal campfire at a makeshift fort near the southern Douglas County community of Pine View Estates, authorities said. The pair is charged with felony arson.

One unoccupied home near the fire's origin burned Tuesday, and as the fire rocketed through tinder-dry pinon-juniper forests Wednesday, it destroyed a guest house and five outbuildings to the northeast in the Ruby Mine area near Pine Nut Creek. Two firefighters suffered injuries.

Musician David John, who fled advancing flames before dawn Wednesday, returned home Thursday to find his guest house, garage and a greenhouse destroyed. His home survived the fire.

"That's what happens with forest fires, I guess," John said.

“They saved the house, I’m happy to say.”

John was more upset over the skeletonized moonscape that used to be the forest he loved.

“It ain’t too pretty up here anymore,” said John, who has lost a home before to a fire. “It’s all burnt. All those trees are gone. They won’t ever again look like they did in my lifetime.”

Some remote structures, less than 20, remained in danger, Barker said.

“We’ve got people that are out there off the grid,” Barker said. “They are very remote homesteads, very isolated.”

While the fire is expected to be fully contained late Friday, “it’s certainly going to be a few days” before it is fully controlled and all interior fire extinguished, Barker said.

The fire burned in particularly dense stands of pinon-juniper that had not burned in a long time, Barker said.

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