

Full assault on wildland fire keeps it from reaching structures

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Swirling winds gave firefighters chills Wednesday afternoon as they quickly battled a nearly 15-acre blaze on the top of Kingsbury Grade.

The June 12 blaze started at a spot where fire officials said a property owner is planning to build a home on a private road. A satellite dish erected on a pole and an iron bench mark the potential point of origin. Fire officials told *Lake Tahoe News* they believe the fire may be human caused. However, as reported earlier, it is possible a smoldering fire ignited from a lightning strike earlier this week could be the cause.

Tahoe Douglas Fire found out about the fire about 3pm when a motorist came into the station at the top of Kingsbury Grade saying smoke was visible while driving from the Carson Valley.



Firefighters on the evening of June 12 work the King Fire. Photos/Susan Wood

It took about 200 firefighters, 12 engines and two hand crews nearly five hours to contain the blaze. One firefighter

suffered smoke inhalation. No air tankers could be used because of the high winds. A red flag warning is in effect until 11 tonight.

“It started here about 1 acre and moved pretty fast,” said Tahoe Douglas Capt. Bob Child as he showed *Lake Tahoe News* where the fire started.

Flames at times shot up 30 feet and high winds sparked spot fires farther down the slope toward the valley.

Child said, “If there was no wind, we would have eliminated this to 1 acre. But we got on this really fast.”

He told his crew this morning, “I hope we don’t have a fire today (because of the wind).”

Assisting Tahoe Douglas were the U.S. Forest Service, Genoa, East Fork, and Lake Valley firefighters.

Most of what burned was Forest Service land. Much of the flora was manzanita, which is highly combustible and burns extremely hot. The terrain is a mixture of brush, rocks and pine trees.

Had the fire gotten out of control, it could have reached the town of Genoa. Had the winds changed, Ridge Tahoe would have been in the path if the fire crossed Kingsbury Grade.

“If the wind changes, we have procedures to follow,” Sharon Graham with the resort told *Lake Tahoe News*. The management team met to make sure everyone was prepared.



Tape outlines the potential point of origin of the 15-acre King Fire.

The fire was about three miles north of the ridgetop tourist area. The Ridge knows all about evacuating. Guests had to flee during the 2002 Gondola Fire. And the Ridge was home to firefighters fighting the blaze while it burned toward the resort that Fourth of July weekend.

No evacuation of tourists or residents was necessary with the King Fire.

“We were lucky the wind was headed in the direction it was, blowing northeast,” Child said.

Dave Pereira, assistant fire management officer with the Forest Service, agreed, and was impressed with the “great job the crews did.”

Pereira is concerned about the dry winter the Sierra and all of California and Nevada experienced because fire season has arrived earlier than normal.

No structure beyond the shed on the property where the fire may have started was ever threatened.

Kingsbury Grade was closed for several hours between Tramway on the Tahoe side and Foothill Road on the Carson Valley side.

Firefighters are expected to spend the night to fully extinguish the fire.

– Kathryn Reed contributed to this story.