

Crews lose ground, no containment in Washington Fire



One of the many aircraft drops retardant on the Washington Fire on June 22. Photo/Susan Wood

Updated 10:43pm

MARKLEEVILLE – Alpine County’s largest town was like an eerie ghost town Monday evening.

A few kids were playing in front of the cafe on Highway 89. One man was in front of his studio. Otherwise it was like everyone else had abandoned the town. A bowling ball could be rolled through town without hitting anything.

With the 14,942-acre Washington Fire threatening Markleeville,

people were not waiting for mandatory evacuation orders before leaving.

More than a dozen structures in the outlying are still threatened. Turtle Creek and Indian Creek campgrounds are closed.

“Today the section of the fire that was initially heading to the northwest toward the town of Markleeville progressed more to the west than north,” firefighters said. “Tactical priority is to keep the fire from spreading farther northwest toward the town of Markleeville.”

The fire is now at zero percent containment, whereas it had been at 10 percent. This is because the high winds made it unsafe for firefighters on June 22. More than 500 firefighters are trying to get a handle on the wildland fire that is burning in a rugged area. It was started by lightning.

Fire crews will be discussing the situation at June 23 at 8am at the Board of Supervisors meeting room, 99 Water St., Markleeville.

— *Reporting by Susan Wood*

Updated 3:50pm

Hundreds of firefighters are trying to gain control of the Washington Fire, which as of Monday afternoon had burned 9,500 acres.

“Resources are focusing their efforts on the northwest flank of the fire in an effort to protect the town of Markleeville,” officials said.

Markleeville residents have been told to prepare to evacuate, though no evacuations have been ordered.

Heavy smoke is covering the area and can be seen for a great distance.

The fire started by lightning remains 10 percent contained as of 3pm June 22.

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The Washington Fire burning near Markleeville has charred between 6,500 and 8,900 acres, officials told *Lake Tahoe News* on Monday morning.

It is about five miles from the town of Markleeville.

“We are forecasting heavy winds again to day. It grounded the use of aircraft for most of all day yesterday and we’re worried it will happen again today,” Larry Lucas with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Winds are forecast to subside on Tuesday.

The fire is burning in a rugged, remote area that makes it difficult to get ground crews to it.

Officials believe the cause of the fire is lightning. It was first spotted on June 19.

Lucas explained that when there are heavy bursts of lightning and a lot of trees are hit that usually it amounts to nothing. But when there are windy days like what occurred over the weekend, it can whip a smoldering tree into a raging forest fire.

Highways 89 and 4 in the area remain closed. About a dozen structures remain threatened. The fire is 10 percent contained.

—*Lake Tahoe News staff report*

