

WILDFIRE

Winds, heat contribute to fires around Napa County



MAY 01, 2013 7:44 AM • [KERANA TODOROV](#)

CalFire fought several wildfires in Napa County on Wednesday, including a blaze that burned 75 acres and gutted a barn near Yountville and a smaller 2-acre blaze in rugged country near Calistoga.

At about 6:40 p.m. Wednesday, firefighters from as far as Marin County responded to a wildfire near the Soda Springs ruins above Soda Canyon Road in east Napa County.

The fire, which broke as winds gusts

reached about 20 miles per hour, burned an abandoned trailer in a eucalyptus grove.

Early in the evening, onlookers snapped pictures of two helicopters — one from CalFire and another contracted through “Call When Needed” — dumping buckets of water on the burning, smoking blaze in steep terrain.

As of about 8 p.m., the Soda fire had burned about 20 acres, according to CalFire/Napa County officials. While the blaze may be contained by Thursday morning, fire crews are expected to remain at the site for days, they said.

“With the heavy fuels, we’ll be out here for a couple of days,” CalFire/Napa County Fire Chief Scott Upton said. “We’ve stopped the forward spread of the fire. But they’ll be heavy mop-up.”

The cause of the fire is unknown, but there were two downed power lines near the ruins, CalFire/Napa County fire representatives said. Pacific Gas and Electric Co. responded to the incident. Napa County Sheriff’s deputies closed Soda Springs Road, a one-lane rural road that veers off Soda Canyon Road and leads to the ruins.

Earlier in the day, the Yountville fire, located near the California Department of Fish and Wildlife facility on Silverado Trail, north of Yountville, was 100 percent contained early Wednesday afternoon, CalFire/Napa County Fire Capt. Amy Head said at 1 p.m..

The fire gutted a barn on the Gamble family ranch, but no injuries were reported.

The Yountville fire broke out shortly before midnight, said CalFire Battalion Chief Curtis Brown. Firefighters were challenged by a lack of access and winds gusting to 25 mph, he said.

“It made it very difficult,” Brown said. “It’s very dangerous.”

The fire burned an unused former slaughterhouse built in the 1920s, ranch owner Tom Gamble said Wednesday morning as firefighters continued to hose the barn with water.

Arnold Rojas, a resident on nearby State Lane, said he had a hard time falling asleep because of the high winds. Then the smell of the fire woke him up. "The smoke was really thick," he said.

Fire crews included volunteer firefighters from Capell Valley who supplied fire crews with water. One of the firefighters, Capell Valley Volunteer Fire Capt. Bob Lee, estimated having supplied 7,500 gallons to fire engines throughout the night.

About 80 firefighters were at the scene Wednesday. Some of the firefighters were expected to remain at the fire Thursday, officials said.

Near Angwin, strong winds caused another fire when a tree branch struck a power line that arced, causing a fire in the 1000 block of Las Posadas Road,, said Angwin Volunteer Fire Chief Avery Browne. A property manager heard noise, saw the fire and called for help at 12:07 a.m. Wednesday.

The fire extended into a tree, then reached the roof of a 5,000-square-foot barn where Treasure Wine Estates maintains vineyard equipment worth more than \$50,000, he said.

The fire got into the attic, but firefighters were able to save the structure, estimated value of \$180,000, as well as the contents, including tractors, discs, and fuel. The fire was put out in about 20 minutes, Browne said. The firefighters left the scene at 5:30 a.m.

The fire came near a 250-gallon propane tank, but the tank did not explode because of a vent.

Altogether, the fire caused about \$50,000 worth of damage to the structure, and burned a half acre, Browne said. Firefighters had to cut a hole in the roof to keep the fire from progressing.

"I'm very proud of those guys," Browne said.

A larger wildfire, called the Yellow Fire, burned Wednesday in Knights Valley in Sonoma County, with 114 firefighters on the scene, CalFire said. The fire was reported at 2 a.m., Head said. That fire had burned at least 125 acres of oak woodland and rolling hills east of Healdsburg and damaged a house, CalFire said Wednesday.

Another blaze, dubbed the Summit Fire, had burned about 2 acres near the Schramsberg Vineyards south of Calistoga.

CalFire spokeswoman Suzie Blankenship said 46 firefighters were battling that blaze at midday Wednesday. The fire started at about 5:30 a.m. Wednesday near the 1400 block of Schramsberg Road, she said.

No structures have burned and there are no injuries in the Calistoga blaze, CalFire said. Firefighters were unable to get engines close to the fire because of the steep terrain and were hiking in with hoses, Blankenship said.

The cause of the fire is under investigation and there is no estimate when it will be contained, CalFire said Wednesday afternoon.

The Yellow Fire was expected to be fully contained by Thursday morning, Head said. Fire crews were also dispatched to the 18000 block of Highway 128 near the Yellow Fire at 1:20 a.m. Tuesday where a 65-foot tall oak tree fell on power lines. A fire then burned about 1/2 acre, Head said.

“The high winds have definitely been a challenge,” Head said.

Bay City News contributed to this story