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TOP STORY

Top stories of 2020: No. 2: Evans Canyon Fire lights up the night

By DAILY RECORD STAFF
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Evans Canyon Fire's flames could be seen headed toward the Yakima Canyon as seen from Manastash Ridge Trail Sept. 2 in Ellensburg.

Jacob Ford / Daily Record file

To Kittitas Valley residents looking toward the Yakima River Canyon on the evening of Aug. 31, the flames appeared ominously close.

As it turned out, the Evans Canyon Fire in did cross into Kittitas County, and as part of a fall of fires in the Northwest, contributed to air quality issues into the fall.

At its peak the fire instigated the closure of state Route 821 through the canyon and to evacuation notices for all residences on Overlook Road, Coyote Run Road and Long Tom Canyon Road, Strande Road and Møllergaard Road at the foothills and up the draws, Shushuskin Road and the mouth of Umptanum Road up to Durr Road; all residences south of Thrall Road along SR821/Yakima Canyon Road, Canyon Ranch Road, Canyon River Terrace, Canyon Vista Way, Canyon Rivers Edge Road, Burbank Creek Road, and Roza View Drive. No structures were lost in Kittitas County.

The Evans Canyon Fire began the afternoon of Aug. 31 near Selah and rapidly rapidly grew to 12,900 acres by Sept. 2.

From the start, wind played a role in the spread of the fire and the efforts at containment.

Northwest Team 12 Public Information Officer Roland Emetaz said strong winds experienced overnight on Sept. 1 were primarily coming from the northwest, which he said pushed the fire towards the southeast.

The fire was fought by a regional team comprised of crews from the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife and local fire resources.

Locally, Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue crews answered the call.

The fire continued into September and by Sept. 8 had reached over 75,000 acres. At that time, there were 571 people are assigned to the fire, including nine crews, 63 engines, six dozers, nine water tenders and two skidgines.

But at that point, crews felt there were turning the corner on containing the fire.

"We're in a good place Sunday night (Sept. 9). The crews have done a remarkably awesome job on that, and they are to be commended. The effort they have put in has really paid off," said Northwest Incident Management Team 12 Public Information Officer Dana Leavitt.

But even as progress was made to contain the Evans Canyon Fire, smoke from other fires in the region significantly degraded air quality into September.

As the year came to close, volunteers were in the canyon starting the work to help reseed portions of the burned area.

Volunteers with the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club and the Kittitas Environmental Education Network spent time in early November reseeding an area of land in the Umtanum Canyon area, treating approximately three acres of bottomlands with 55 pounds of seed donated from the Conservation Northwest.

Daily Record Staff