

Wind key factor in wildfire control

FIRES + FIRE PROTECTION

7-8-85

Highway 17 traffic snarled by 415-acre blaze

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

LOS GATOS — Firefighters today continued to battle an out-of-control wildfire that started Sunday afternoon, quickly swept over 415 acres and threatened homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The fire caused holiday and commuter traffic jams along Highway 17 on both sides of the Summit. The Highway Patrol said this morning that motorists should plan on a two-hour drive from Santa Cruz to San Jose.

Firefighters hoped to control the fire by this evening if the wind did not come up, said Bill Gordon, spokesman at the California Department of Forestry command post, located above the Lexington Reservoir.

The fire was 50 percent contained by this morning with 10 percent controlled and an unknown amount in total control, said Gordon.

Beach and holiday traffic was backed up nearly 10 miles Sunday afternoon as roads were closed, said Dave Larton of CDF.

Ashes drifted over the mountain ridge and landed on cars in Soquel and other areas, miles away from the fire site.

This morning firefighters feared the flames would jump bulldozed fire lines. About six miles of lines had been cut by this morning, but another five miles needed to be cut, said Gordon.

"There's still a lot of volatile material out there," he said.

Gordon said the outcome of

today's battle would be decided by weather conditions. "We're hoping for containment this evening. But, our fear is with the wind."

The fire this morning threatened homes in the Chemeketa Park area. If it moved much closer, residents there would have to evacuate, said Gordon.

About 175 homes were evacuated near the reservoir Sunday in an area where 300 structures were threatened, said Gordon.

There were two reported injuries Sunday. One CDF firefighter was treated at Valley Medical Center after suffering second-degree burns on his feet. A Santa Clara County Central Fire volunteer was sent home after suffering a twisted knee, said Gordon.

Three air tankers, two helicopters and nine bulldozers were put into service.

Crews, numbering 372 in all, were dispatched from CDF, state Office of

Please see back of section

Area fire—

Continued from Page A1

Emergency Services, U.S. Forest Service, and joint fire agencies from San Jose, Santa Clara, Milpitas, Sunnyvale, Palo Alto and Los Altos, plus volunteers from those agencies.

Gordon said Highway 17 remained opened Sunday and this morning.

"You can see smoke now, but it's nothing like it was before," he commented this morning. The fire was running southeast this morning toward Hendrys Creek Road.

Evacuated residents either stayed with friends or relatives or at a Red Cross shelter at Lexington School.

"Darn right, I'm worried. We're in danger. We're ready to evacuate," one resident, Rita Kephart, told said Sunday, adding she was "packed and ready to go."

Gordon said the fire spread quickly from a brush fire. The cause of the brush fire was undetermined.