

'A PRETTY GOOD DAY'

Favorable weather helps firefighters gain traction in battle against blaze

Fire + Fire Protection - Deco

8-16-09

Crews have fire
40 percent contained;
6,843 acres burned

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Zayante firefighter Rick Andrews douses a smoldering Swanton hillside with a mixture of water and foam Saturday.

BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Governor visits county fire camp

Schwarzenegger is
briefed on Lockheed Fire,
10 others in the state

By CATHY KELLY

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WATSONVILLE — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger swept into a sprawling fire camp at the county fairgrounds Saturday for a briefing on 11 raging California wildfires, shook some firefighters' hands and told reporters the inevitable annual blazes illuminate his motivation for wresting more money for emergency firefighting and for a \$500 million budget reserve.

Schwarzenegger called Santa Cruz County one of the most beautiful areas in the state and called state firefighters some of the best in the world.

"I always think the world of them," he said. "... And we'll do everything in our power to save people's lives, property and memories."

H.D. Palmer of the governor's office said the state's firefight-



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger thanks Santa Cruz County Sheriff Phil Wowak on Saturday for the department's efforts in evacuating North Coast residents in the face of the Lockheed Fire.

ing budget this year is about \$700 million, a "sliver" of the state's projected expenditures of \$84.6 billion. The emergency firefighting fund was tripled this year, from roughly \$60 to \$180 million, based on an average of the past

five years' total, he added.

It is money well-spent, Schwarzenegger said, as it's crucial to provide resources for the fire season, which has been longer and more

SEE GOVERNOR ON A12

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

EVACUATION CENTER: 350 Mission St. Vintage Church, Mission and King streets, Santa Cruz, run by Red Cross.

TO VOLUNTEER: Call Volunteer Centers of Santa Cruz County at 427-5070.

ANIMAL SERVICES: Santa Cruz Animal Services is helping with large animal evacuations. For information, call 454-7303.

MAIL DELIVERY CURTAILED: Mail delivery to 353 addresses in the 95060 zip code has been curtailed. Affected residents with proper identification can pick up their mail at the Santa Cruz post office on 850 Front St. Customers can call 426-0144 for delivery updates.

MORE INSIDE

■ Fire affecting many athletes, but not today's race in Felton, **C1**

■ Photos from the front lines of the fire, **A10**

■ WAMM garden out of danger, **A12**

DAVENPORT — The battle against the nearly 7,000-acre Lockheed Fire hit a pivotal moment Saturday when fire crews capitalized on favorable weather conditions to increase containment of the blaze, which has burned out of control in the remote forest between the communities of Swanton and Davenport since Wednesday night.

Cal Fire spokesman Mike Mohler said Saturday could be a turning point for the more than 2,000 firefighters assigned to the wildfire as containment increased 10 percent to 40 percent. Firefighters are on track to reach full containment by Aug. 23.

"We had a pretty good day," Mohler said. "We're not out of the woods yet. This fire is very volatile. We still have a lot of open line that's not contained and we need to catch this thing while the weather is cooperating."

However, two firefighters were injured. One cut his hand early in the day, was treated and returned to duty. About 8:30 p.m. a firefighter with breathing difficulties was airlifted to a San Francisco Bay Area hospital. Mohler said his injuries also were believed to be minor. An airlift is standard procedure for a firefighter injured during an incident.

During the night, Cal Fire planned to deploy dozers to cut additional fire lines, including contingency lines that will give firefighters a fallback stand in case the blaze begins to move toward Bonny Doon.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger received a briefing on the Lockheed Fire, as well as other blazes around the state, Saturday morning in Watsonville. He promised the state would do all it could to protect property. About 250 homes are threatened, but only two out-buildings have been damaged in the fire, according to Cal Fire.

Mapping with Global Positioning Systems helped crews get a better understanding of the extent of the fire, which was burning about 8 miles northwest of Santa Cruz, in Big Basin Redwoods State Park and on private property. They also provided the most accurate information about the size of the fire — and accounting for most of the increase since Friday, fire officials said.

The attack force also grew Saturday as roughly 300 more firefighters arrived along with more

SEE FIRE ON A12



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Rubberneckers clog Highway 1 at Scott Creek Saturday to watch the progress of the fight against the Lockheed Fire.

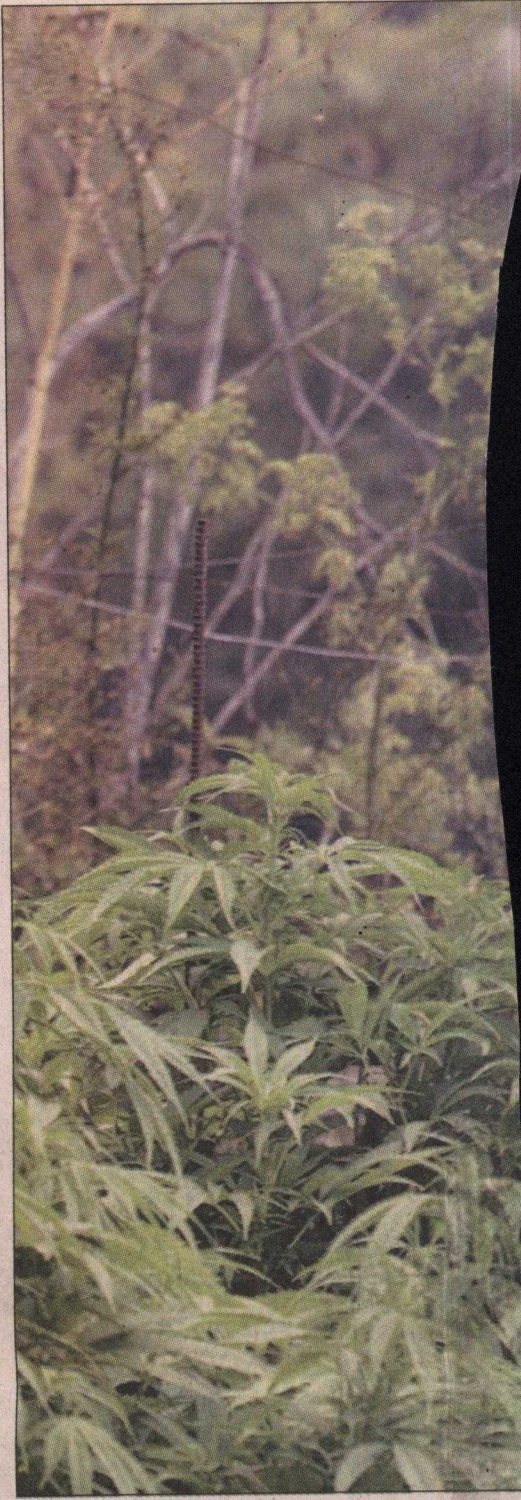


BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

A firefighter trudges across a burned hillside in Swanton Saturday.

SCORCHED EARTH

Sentinel photographers spent Saturday capturing these images of the Lockheed Fire and the surrounding areas. To see more of their photos, visit the Sentinel slideshow of the Lockheed Fire at www.santacruzsentinel.com.



ABOVE
RIGHT: **Buddy Bloxman** of Monterey County Cal Fire leads a meeting during the attack on a flank of the Lockheed Fire in Swanton Saturday.

BILL LOVEJOY/
SENTINEL

Kevin Berkery, a firefighter from Vacaville, stands in a wasteland of ash and charred trees along Warnella Road putting out hot spots Saturday.

DAN COYRO/
SENTINEL





A worker in the WAMM garden salutes the work of a helicopter pilot after a water drop foiled advancing flames Saturday.

BILL LOVEJOY/
SENTINEL



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Deer peers out of the smoky brush off Warnella Road on Saturday afternoon while hot spots flared up on both sides of road.



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Onlookers watch a helicopter take on a load of water from the Scott Creek lagoon to fight the Lockheed fire Saturday afternoon.

FIRE

Continued from A1

engines, helicopters and bulldozers.

There were a few flare-ups along Warnella Truck Trail — a dirt road that snakes up the mountains from Davenport to Empire Grade and is the main fire break between the blaze and Bonny Doon — late Friday and into Saturday. Some of those spot fires jumped to the west side of the road toward Bonny Doon, but hand crews snuffed out the flames.

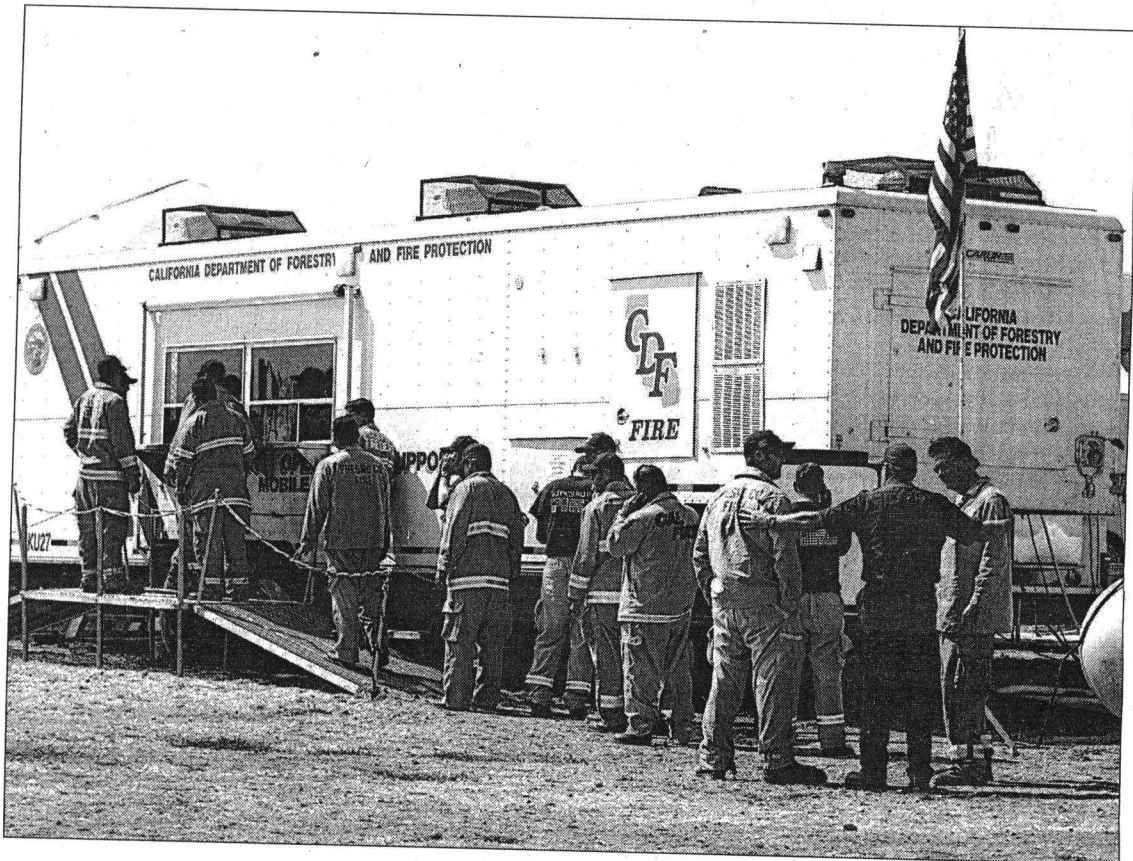
Fire officials said the blaze remained a mile or more away from the rural community, from which an estimated 2,000 people were ordered to evacuate Thursday. About 30 percent didn't heed the order and remain in the area, according to the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office.

Fire crews tried Saturday to hem the fire north and west of Bonny Doon Road, west of Empire Grade, south of Lockheed between Little Basin and Scott Creek, and east of Highway 1 and Swanton and Last Chance roads, according to Cal Fire.

Helping them, the normally unpredictable North Coast winds were lighter than anticipated Saturday, though the day was warm with temperatures hitting the mid-80s, Mohler said.

He said temperatures are expected to inch up a few degrees Sunday, a problem because vegetation will be drier and burn more quickly. Wind also is a constant concern, he said.

To combat the fire, what would be ideal would be for a thick layer of moisture-laden marine air to descend on the area. But in the next few days the marine layer is expected to thin, said Brian Tentinger, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. Still, it's not as bad as it could be. Winds will be 5 to 10 miles per hour, humidity will dip only slightly, to about 45 percent — and then temperatures are expected to



Firefighters line up for a hot breakfast Saturday at their base camp and command center at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

cool later in the week. Patches of white smoke rose over the Santa Cruz Mountains on Saturday as Cal Fire and contract helicopters hovered over Scott Creek to scoop up hundreds of gallons of water in one swoop.

Airplanes that dumped fire retardant on flames earlier in the week couldn't be used due to poor visibility caused by the smoke.

Spectators lined the shoulder of Highway 1 to watch the helicopters and take pictures until sheriff's deputies told them to move along.

On Warnella, a strike team from the East Bay worked its way down from the flare-ups toward Molino Creek Farm Road, trying to cool down the burned debris within 50 feet of the road cut.

Smoke wafted through the trees and ashes covered the forest floor like snow. The firefighting crew used hoses attached to their fire engine to douse small flames and hacked at smolder-

LOCKHEED FIRE BY THE NUMBERS

- ACRES BURNED:** 6,843
- STARTED:** 7:15 p.m. Wednesday
- CONTAINMENT:** 40 percent, estimated full containment Aug. 23
- LOCATION:** Bonny Doon area — Smith Creek drainage
- EVACUATIONS:** Mandatory evacuations for Bonny Doon and Swanton affecting 2,200 to 2,400 people. Other roads affected include Swanton Road, Swanton View Road, Mill Creek Road, Last Chance Road, Warnella Truck Trail, Rancho Del Oso and Penstock.
- CAUSE:** Unknown
- ROAD CLOSURES:** There were hard road closures Saturday at Bonny Doon and Smith Grade roads; Empire Grade and Alba roads; and Felton Empire and Empire Grade roads. Roads at least partially closed Saturday included Empire Grade, Swanton Road, Bonny Doon Road, Pine Flat Road, Ice Cream Grade and Smith Grade.
- STRUCTURES THREATENED:** 250 homes. No reports of buildings destroyed but two outbuildings were damaged.
- FIRE CREWS:** 2,028 firefighters; 24 hand crews; 279 fire engines, 30 dozers, 17 water tenders, 14 helicopters.
- COST:** \$5.2 million.
- SOURCE:** Cal Fire

ing logs with pickaxes.

"We're mopping up all this, catching all the hot spots and stump holes," Vacaville city firefighter Kevin Berkery said.

The scene was similar on Swanton Road, where a strike team of 20 firefighters from different Santa Cruz County fire agencies set up. Four water tenders from UC Santa Cruz, Zayante, Aptos/La Selva and Scotts Valley established a fire line. Foam from the fire hoses extinguished and stuck to smoldering trees and brush on a ridgeline.

Smoke from extinguished fires and blazing fires became indistinguishable as winds picked up a bit midday. Downtown Santa Cruz became completely blanketed by the smoke, forcing some people out and about to cover their mouths and noses with their shirts.

Haze also cloaked the San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley.

The Monterey Unified Air Pollution District warned of poor air quality along a broad swath of the Central Coast on Friday and advised people with heart and lung disease, the elderly, children and pregnant

women against prolonged exertion and to stay inside when possible.

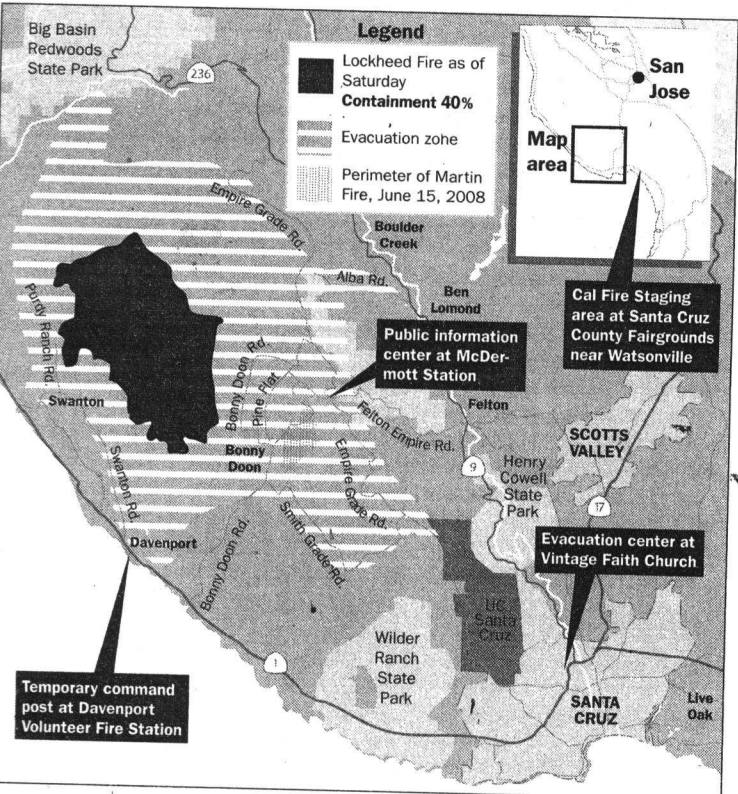
There was no word Saturday on when evacuees would be allowed to return to their homes.

Some evacuation orders could be lifted before full containment, though Cal Fire spokeswoman Julie Hutchinson said, "not until it's safe, and that's being continually revised."

The Sheriff's Office and the American Red Cross are teaming up to notify evacuees about when they can safely return. To register for the notification service, evacuees can call 332-5144 or stop by the Red Cross shelter at Vintage Faith Church, 350 Mission St., Santa Cruz.

"We think it's a better way of serving the public more quickly," Lt. Jim Hart of the Sheriff's Office.

Officials from Cal Fire, the Sheriff's Office and Red Cross also will host a meeting for evacuees seeking updated information about the Lockheed Fire at 9 a.m. today at Vintage Faith. The morning briefing will likely occur every day at 9 a.m. until the evacuation orders are lifted and the shelter closed.



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