Oklahoma Wildfires

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Oklahoma residents evacuated over the weekend as a result of the Freedom Hills Fire in Creek County, Oklahoma were allowed to return home this morning. The work of numerous firefighters and a slight break from the daily triple digit temperatures are credited.

"Don't get me wrong," said Incident Commander Mark Goeller. " We're not saying this fire is over. We're saying that for now, the imminent danger has subsided and the safety of these homeowners is not immediately at stake. We're watching and working, and all Oklahomans need to be watchful as well."

Goeller said the possibility of isolated rainfall in some areas of the state today should not be a signal to resume summer business as usual. In fact, many of the most dangerous and intense wildfires occur after periods of limited precipitation, including the current 58,000+ acre Freedom Hills Fire in Creek County which has burned more than 40 structures, including homes and barns.

Since the current fire outbreak began on July 22nd, firefighters have stood toe-to-toe with more than 50 wildfires, ignited under blazing, record temperatures. As daunting as the task is, fire personnel say that safety is always paramount.

According to Oklahoma State Forester George Geissler, some of the recent wildfires burned with an intensity that longtime Oklahoma firefighters have not seen in years. "We all must remember that it's not only vegetation that burns. Whether a fire starts naturally, or through some human caused action, there are almost always other people who are impacted...and sometimes those "impacts" have tragic consequences."

Firefighters from departments across the state and partners are working together to gain the upper hand on fires across Oklahoma. These include Oklahoma Forestry Services, a division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Oklahoma Emergency Management (OEM), Oklahoma National Guard (ONG), Oklahoma Highway Patrol (OHP), numerous local and volunteer fire departments, and partner state forestry agencies from across the south.

Fire managers say fires in the Sooner State are different, in some ways, than mega-fires typically seen in other parts of the country. "We have fires popping up across the state every day," said Geissler. "We're not always dealing with one large fire where you can pre-position resources and plan your attack every day. Fires can, and usually are, scattered literally hundreds of miles apart. Local and volunteer fire departments are indispensable in this effort."

Geissler said the state expects the extreme fire danger to continue throughout the summer.

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