

Firefighters continue to battle smoke, flames

■ DNR costs of battling blaze in Lower Coverdale area surpass \$200,000

By CRAIG BABSTOCK
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

Fighting infernos is not cheap.

It cost New Brunswick's Department of Natural Resources \$200,000 to fight the Lower Coverdale forest fire on Monday and Tuesday and the final tally will be higher.

"It was \$200,000 as of the end of Tuesday, so that will climb," says department spokesman Brent Roy. "It's tough (to calculate) because there's still invoices coming in."

That's because they haven't yet completely extinguished the fire. It burned out of control Monday afternoon but was contained that evening thanks to the efforts of Natural Resources' firefighters and the many local fire departments that also fought the blaze. As of yesterday the fire was still smoldering.

"There's still lots of smoke and flames here and there," says Roy. "It won't be declared out for a few days yet."

Until that happens, the department will keep personnel on the scene. Fifty workers were still there yesterday, putting out hot-spots and guarding the perimeter of the area, to stop any flames should something spark up. Some of the bulldozers that were combating the blaze have left the area now that the 128-acre section of burnt woodland has been ringed by a buffer zone.



With the ground cracking as he walks, Riverview firefighter Peter Trueman provides a bright counterpoint yesterday to the destruction caused by Monday's forest fire in Lower Coverdale. Crews remained on the job yesterday, continuing to mop up after the fire.

Once the fire is completely extinguished, workers will leave the area. Only after that happens will the department know exactly what the cost was.

Roy says the \$200,000 total for Monday and Tuesday includes the cost of having six air tankers drop water and retardant on the fire, as well as the cost of having so many

workers there, many piling up overtime. That total does not include the costs incurred by any local fire departments or other organizations that helped fight the fire.

The cause of the fire, which started near the West Field airstrip, is still being investigated. All the department has said so far is that it was human cause. It appears someone in the area was burning something that got out of control.

Once the investigation is complete, Natural Resources will determine whether or not to pass along the cost of fighting the fire to the parties responsible. Open fires are currently banned throughout the province due to dry conditions, so no one should have been burning anything.

The weather has not co-operated with firefighters since the fire began. Strong wind gusts were largely responsible for stoking the fire on Monday, pushing it in several different directions and starting new fires by blowing embers.

"If we get some rain, that will help us a lot," says Roy. "We need rain for a steady period of time."

Light showers aren't much good. The scorched trees and forest floor need a good soaking to take care of any remaining hot spots.

There is a chance of rain tomorrow and Saturday, so that could help if it's heavy enough.

The fire burned wildly on Monday but didn't reach any local homes, despite coming dangerously close to several neighbourhoods. Trees on two sides of one new home on Justin Drive were burned, but the house was unharmed.

More than 100 homes were evacuated for several hours on Monday and homeowners returned to their residences around 7:30 p.m.



This eerie scene is what was left of a section of forest in Lower Coverdale yesterday in the wake of Monday's forest fire.

GREG ADEN/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Crews watch for flare-ups

■ Preliminary investigation cites 'human cause' for blaze that destroyed 128 acres

By CRAIG BABSTOCK
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

New Brunswick's Department of Natural Resources is close to discovering what sparked the massive forest fire that threatened homes in Lower Coverdale Monday.

"We know it was a human cause (that started the fire)," says department spokesman Brent Roy. "We discovered this through our preliminary investigation."

Roy says they can't reveal anything more than that because the investigation is ongoing.

But he says once they do find out exactly what hap-

pened, it's within the department's power to act. That could mean recovering costs of fighting the fire from those responsible.

"We can go up to as high as the cost of the fire," says Roy. "In this particular case it's hard to say."

Officials would look at the circumstances involved when the fire got out of hand before deciding if any further action was necessary.

At this point, it doesn't appear the fire was deliberately set to cause destruction. It's much more likely someone was burning something or started a fire near the West Field air strip that got out of control.

Either way, no one is supposed to be burning anything in New Brunswick right now.

"There was a burning ban provincewide since the weekend, so no fire should have been set by anyone,"

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GREG ADEN/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

ABOVE: The Wright family store sign echoed the sentiments of many residents yesterday after firefighters prevailed in their battle against Monday's forest fire. LEFT: The map defines the area affected by the forest fire.



RENÉE FRANCE (L'ARCADE)/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Fire facts

- Acres the fire spread over: 125
- Firefighters who battled the blaze: 90
- Planes dumping foam, retardant and water: 8
- Homes evacuated: 100
- Kilometres of Route 114 blocked off: 2
- Years since area has seen fire this big: 20



GREG ADEN/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

A firefighter uses a shovel yesterday to dump dirt on a flare-up near a residence on Justin Street in Lower Coverdale.



VICTOR FIVONARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

An RCMP officer directs traffic yesterday on Route 114 at the Niagara Road turnoff.