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Fire ravages 1,500 acres near Agate

Home, pets and livestock narrowly escape fast-moving blaze; containment in two hours



STEVEN VETTER/Eastern Colorado News

A major fire came within 50 to 60 feet of a home near Agate Sept. 15.

by **Steven Vetter**
Managing Editor

AGATE — The hard work of firefighters and assistance from neighbors saved a residence during a fast-moving wildfire that charred more than two sections of rangeland near Agate Sept. 15.

The Agate Fire Department was first dispatched at 2:09 p.m. on report of a fire that sparked along westbound I-70 about three miles east of the Agate exit. The fire quickly spread to the north and east with the assistance of strong, swirling winds and the dry top layer of rangeland grasses in its path.

“We’re talking about it ending three miles away

from the interstate where it first ignited,” said Agate firefighter Jerrel Rector, whose family owns much of the land that was burned. “With the wind, we are talking about 10-foot flame heights. That’s pretty high, especially with it being short grassland out here.”

The fire scorched approximately 1,500 acres and came within 50 to 60 feet of a home and barn whose only protection was one gravel country road between them and the blaze.

“We also had trucks spraying water along both sides of the roadway to try and give a bigger buffer and that seemed to help a lit-

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PHOTOS BY STEVEN VETTER/Eastern Colorado News

The Agate fire scorched more than two square miles.

AGATE FIRE

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tle bit until we got it under control,” Rector said. “The wind also died down just in the nick of time to help out a bit. If it would have kept up like it was around noon, things could have been much worse.”

Neighbors of the threatened property were assisted by an Elbert County Sheriff’s deputy to rescue a couple of pups from the home and release several horses from the barn into sizable catch pens to get them away from danger.

A number of saddles and other equipment was rushed from the barn.

“It was a close call, that’s for sure,” said neighbor Doug Purdy. “[The fire] was coming across some of our property as well, so we were out there when we saw that the house was in danger. We needed to make sure nobody was in danger and help where we could.”

Containment occurred about two hours later at 4:13 p.m. In addition

to Agate, firefighting support came from Byers, Deer Trail, Kiowa, Limon, Simla, Rattlesnake and Elizabeth fire departments and Elbert County Road & Bridge, which responded with two road graders to cut in fire lines.

Cattle grazing the area were not harmed but were within harm’s way.

“We kind of lucked out. We have a couple hundred head we are shipping out tomorrow, and that is still going to happen,” Rector said following containment of the blaze. “We ended up cutting a couple of fire breaks on the far east edge of the fire to give the cattle a couple hundred feet of area to get them around.”

The cause of the blaze is not determined and firefighters as well as Elbert County Sheriff Shayne Heap both indicated it will likely stay that way.

“Unless somebody saw somebody else doing something along the in-

terstate at the time, figuring out the cause will be about next to impossible,” Heap said. “Between the trains and vehicles that travel the area, it’s really anybody’s guess.”

Rector added that while an errant cigarette butt could be the cause, mechanical failure of a vehicle can also be a culprit.

“The last four or five we’ve really heard of, you’re talking about a fan belt, tire or bearing sparking,” he said. “There’s really no way to, with certainty, determine the cause.”

Heap said that he implemented Stage II fire restrictions at the beginning of September because of the increase in hot, dry field conditions throughout the county.

Stage II restrictions include: all open burning, except for charcoal grills or approved portable heating units; smoking, except within a vehicle or building or within a developed recreation site; fireworks; and educational rockets.

[The Agate Fire Protection District thanks the Eastern Colorado News and Steven Vetter, for their permission to post this article on our website.](#)