

## **Area fire departments come together to battle wildfire on north divide**

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Friday, 06 April 2012 18:49 - Last Updated Friday, 06 April 2012 18:57

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**Here the Wauneta Volunteer Fire Department battles a blaze on 347 Avenue on Tuesday, March 27. Approximately the same location was victim to the larger fire on Friday.**



**After the majority of the fire on Friday, March 30 was contained area fire fighters concentrated on putting out flare-ups. Here a fire fighter from Hayes County assures that a blaze in some old trees on the west side of Avenue 348 is extinguished.**

**By Sheri Hink**

**The Wauneta Breeze**

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*Dry conditions, wind come*

*together to create wildfires*

*on Wauneta's north divide*

The north divide has seen three grass fires in the past two weeks. The largest of the three last Friday covered approximately 700 acres of CRP land.

Friday's fire was located just west of Clint and Betty McCallum's feed yard on Larry and Minnie Petsch's land.

Wauneta Volunteer Fire Department Chief Donny Allen reported that the fire started in a ditch, about one and a half miles north of the Avenue 348 and Road 740 intersection. The fire spread quickly and eventually jumped Avenue 348 into the trees on the east part of McCallum's land.

Allen explained that the fire was most likely started by a spark of some kind, the exact cause of the fire is unknown.

The fight against Friday's fire was a joint effort between the Wauneta Volunteer Fire Department, the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department, the Palisade Volunteer Fire Department and the Hayes Center Volunteer Fire Department. The Lamar Volunteer Fire Department also loaned a truck to the Imperial Fire Department to help battle the blaze.

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The Frenchman Valley Co-op in Imperial sent three tankers of water to the fire to help fire trucks refill water tanks and the Kramers helped in the fight by trying to create a barrier using a tractor and disk.

Allen said that the fire fighters could not get to the fire line because it kept jumping a head of itself, creating multiple fire lines.

“I’m very happy we have the mutual aide district that we can lean on when fighting a fire. If we hadn’t had help up there on Friday we would not have been able to get the fire under control as fast as we did,” said Allen.

High winds Friday afternoon, as well as winds created by the fire itself, helped the fire to continually jump blocks put in place by those fighting it, Allen said.

The Wauneta Fire Department was called out at 1:07 p.m. Friday and made it back to the shop at about 10:30 p.m., only to be called back out to the scene again at 1:03 a.m. Saturday. Wauneta’s fire crew made it back to the shop Saturday morning at 3:45 a.m. Then, at 7:53 a.m. and again at 12:17 p.m. on Saturday, additional flare ups were reported.

On Sunday, Allen and another firefighter from Wauneta went back out to the scene and put out 12 spot fires. The deep grasses on the CRP land allowed for long-term smouldering of the fire. Allen explained that the grasses can be burning or smouldering and you can’t tell until you get right up to them and smell or see the small smoke cloud.

Larry Petsch and Clint McCallum continued to monitor the location of the fire for flare-ups all day Monday. Tree stumps also started to burn again.

### Previous fires

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The same patch of land that saw the large fire Friday was also victim to a smaller fire on Tuesday, March 27. Tuesday's fire was on Avenue 347 south of the base of McCallum hill. Allen thought that fire was most likely caused by a cigarette thrown from a vehicle.

March 21 saw another grass fire on the north divide, this time a little farther north of last week's fire on Avenue 349 approximately three miles north of St. John's Cemetery in rural Hayes County. That fire covered 60 to 70 acres of CRP, wheat stubble and trees. Fire departments from Wallace and Hayes Center also responded to a call for help on that fire, the cause of which is also unknown.

### Call for caution

So far the community has been lucky that the three fires so far this spring have not caused any major personal or property damage, however the close occurrences and dry conditions require that all practice extra caution and care to prevent fires.

Allen urges the public to practice extreme caution in light of the dry conditions. "People just need to use common sense when it comes to preventing fires," says Allen.

Using good judgement you can prevent most fires, he noted. For example, use caution when burning trash in burn barrels because that can sometimes ignite into a damaging fire. Allen noted that a spark can fly as much as 50 feet from the burn barrel. So, trash should only be burned in barrels when the wind is down and never near dry grasses or trees.

Any open burning must receive a burn permit from the fire department that services that area.

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The National Weather Service has issued several red flag warnings in or near the Wauneta area lately.

“A red flag warning means that critical fire weather conditions are either occurring now or will be shortly. A combination of strong winds, low relative humidity and warm temperatures will create explosive fire growth potential,” explains the National Weather Service website.

University of Nebraska at Lincoln and the Nebraska Forest Service’s websites have many resources for how to prevent fires. The Nebraska Forest Service names several simple things that can be done to prevent a fire on a farm.

- Never allow smoking in or around barns or outbuildings.
- Do not refuel an internal combustion engine while it is hot or running.
- Make sure electrical wiring is inspected and approved.
- Install lightning rods on all major buildings.
- Never burn on windy days and when you do burn, keep water and firefighting tools handy.
- If you burn trash in a burn barrel, always cover the flame with a burn screen.

Find additional fire prevention materials at [www.nfs.unl.edu/publications.asp](http://www.nfs.unl.edu/publications.asp). The State Fire Marshall’s Web page also has many fire prevention resources, including many for kids. You can find the Fire Marshall’s fire prevention materials online at [www.sfm.ne.gov/programs-services/fireprev/safety.html](http://www.sfm.ne.gov/programs-services/fireprev/safety.html).

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