

## Governor issues burn ban

Written by Mark Potter, Lawton Constitution  
Tuesday, 06 May 2014 03:49 -

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Gov. Mary Fallin has declared a state emergency across Oklahoma and ordered a burn ban in 36 counties in western Oklahoma, which includes almost every county in the region.

The burn ban prohibits any outdoor burning or the use of fireworks in the listed counties, which include Caddo, Comanche, Cotton, Grady, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Kiowa and Tillman counties; Stephens County is not included.

Jackson County commissioners had already imposed a burn ban after a massive grass fire burned several hundred acres west of Altus.

Sunday's fire was reported at 2:15 p.m. day along the west side of the Salt Fork of the Red River about three-fourths of a mile south of U.S. 62 west of Altus.

Jerry Abbott, Altus fire chief, said the blaze started out as a controlled burn but was spread and intensified by the combination of high winds and low humidity. A total of 800-900 acres burned in the fire, which was responded to by firefighters from Altus and other departments in Jackson and Tillman counties who brought 26 pieces of fire apparatus. Abbott said firefighters were on the scene until around 3:30 a.m. Monday. Jackson County brought in three road graders and a track loader to assist with firefighting efforts.

The fire jumped across U.S. 62 to the north near the river bridge, prompting the closure of the highway from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Abbott said although the fire was extinguished there were still signs of the blaze evident at mid-morning Monday.

"There will still be smoldering under the trees, but the fire itself is 100 percent contained," he said.

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Abbott also advised residents about the dangers of outdoor burning in the face of high wind and extreme drought conditions gripping the area.

“People don’t need to do any outdoor burning whatsoever,” he said.

The Jackson County burn ban was recommended by the county’s municipal and rural fire chiefs. Wayne Cain, Jackson County emergency management director, said conditions, such as summer-like temperatures, high winds, low humidity and extremely dry conditions, justify the burn ban.

“It was over 100 degrees yesterday and temperatures are expected to remain in the 90s the next few days, with humidity at seven percent,” Cain said Monday. “When you have these conditions, you have the right conditions to create a wildfire.”

In Comanche County, firefighters on Monday were still at the scene of a wildfire that broke out near Sterling on Sunday. Jacob Russell, the county’s spokesman, said the fire burned 100-120 acres but endangered no structures. He said firefighters were cleaning up hot spots on Monday afternoon and monitoring the fire to make sure it didn’t rekindle.

A suspicious grass fire Sunday evening in west Lawton not only resulted in minor damage to the landscape, but also left several residents without vital services.

According the Lawton Fire Marshal’s Office, the fire, which was investigated as a count of third-degree arson, was reported just after 7 p.m. in the 7700 block of Northwest Taylor Avenue and spread to two yards and damaged three sections of a fence, as well as a Fidelity Cable node box and a tree, before being extinguished.

The damage to the property was estimated to be about \$3,300, but because a node box is filled

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with sensitive fiber optic cables, anyone living west of the box who uses the local company for phone, Internet or cable services was left without access. As of noon Monday, repairs were still in progress.

Authorities have said one juvenile was apprehended in relation to the fire, but they do not believe the damages were intentional.

Another grass fire reported around 1:45 p.m. Monday just west of Chattanooga was suppressed in a matter of minutes after responding departments arrived on scene. No major damage was initially reported.

Residents in an Oklahoma community where a wildfire killed one person, burned thousands of acres and destroyed at least six homes returned to survey the damage Monday as firefighters continued to battle the stubborn blaze.

The fire in Guthrie, about 35 miles north of Oklahoma City, went awry Sunday and swept through the parched countryside with wind gusts at 31 mph. Fire officials said Monday afternoon that the blaze was about 75 percent contained.