



# Evacuate Now!



MARCIA HORA - THE STAPLETON ENTERPRISE

This picture taken from the Augusta Wind Golf Course south of Stapleton, shows the immense cloud of smoke that engulfed the village as the fast moving wildfire prompted the evacuation of Stapleton, Gandy and the surrounding area. The fire stayed north of the South Loup River and missed both villages, but outbuildings, livestock, hay and shelter belts were lost.

MARCIA HORA

It was just another day, Monday, February 26, as area residents went about their business. They went to their jobs, students were in school, ranchers were calving and farmers thinking about upcoming spring work. Most people in Logan County were watching the wildfire, now known as the Betty's Way fire, that was racing east across Lincoln County and into Custer. Stapleton Fire Chief Frank Kramer said Stapleton sent two trucks and one tanker in answer to the mutual aid call that arrived at the Lincoln County 911 center at 10:32 a.m. The fire was being driven by a strong, steady west wind that gusted to about 40 miles per hour as temperatures reached the low 70's and humidity dropped into the teens. Someone mowing their lot in a small subdivision along Twin Lakes Road about eight miles north of North Platte started a spark that erupted into a massive wildfire.

Margaret Ann Neal who lives just a few miles north of Stapleton, let out her chickens and left her country residence in the morning.

The Kennard and Donna Lovitt family went to aid their daughter, Kennetha and her husband Jim Amos, at their place on North Maxwell Road. The Betty's Way fire was forcing evacuations. The Lovitts were prepared and ready to move cattle out of harm's way.

At the Diamond Bar Ranch north of town the Jones family was preparing to load out their cattle and were busy with ranch work.

In a few hours everything would change and it would take help from area fire departments, volunteers and neighbors to stop what was to come. It is unknown who made the first call of a fire northwest of Stapleton Monday afternoon. Travis Hansen called Kennard Lovitt at approximately 2:55 p.m. to alert him there was a fire barreling north of his place toward the Lovitt ranch. Robert Jones said it was about this time he also called in the fire. Jones immediately hooked on his disc.

Fire Chief Kramer said the local department was paged out and personnel rolled out of the fire station. Those working at the Betty's Way fire dropped mutual aid and

headed back home to battle what would be named the Lariat Fire.

Logan County Emergency Manager Sean Carson said agencies were monitoring the fire that changed directions due to shifting winds and made the call to evacuate the towns of Stapleton and Gandy at 3:30 p.m. An emergency code red went out on cell phones and Stapleton Public Schools Principal Jeremiah Johnson began the process of getting students on buses and out of town. Emergency personnel were on the streets advising residents to evacuate.

Emergency Manager Carson said traffic was redirected on both north and south Highway 85 near Stapleton and those assisting were the Nebraska Brand Committee, Nebraska Game & Parks, Nebraska State Patrol, McPherson County Sheriff Tom Burch, three Lincoln County Sheriff deputies, Nebraska Department of Roads, and Ryan Sylvester with the Nebraska Fire Marshal's office.

"There was not much time as this was a very fast moving fire that we believed posed danger of going through the village," Emergency Manager Carson said. "A

strong west wind that changed directions and extremely dry conditions made it difficult for firefighters and volunteers."

The Lovitt family raced home to their ranch three and a half miles northwest of Stapleton. When they arrived, their daughter Kami Florea was doing what she could by placing sprinklers on the house. Firefighters and neighbors arrived and through heroic efforts they were able to save the house and most of the vehicles and UTV's.

The fire hit their 100-year-old tree strip and was unstoppable. In the aftermath it showed the devastation. At least 13 outbuildings were gone. Ten bulls, two horses, and two cows had to be put down. Two baby calves and a cow were lost in the buildings. Most of their winter hay was destroyed and approximately 1,000 acres charred. The Lovitts said they watched over 50 years of their work taken in a matter of minutes.

The fire moved across Chip Kramer's pasture located north of Jon and Fran Hill's home.

Kramer said he lost ninety percent of the pasture and half of the meadow. He added there was a lot of firefighters

and volunteers there and he was grateful no equipment or livestock was lost.

The Doyle Ranch was notified that their headquarters were in the path of the oncoming fire. The wind switched and pushed the fire in a more southerly direction. Jayce Doyle said approximately 800 acres of grassland burned and a small portion of a tree strip was lost south of the headquarters.

"There were people with discs and fire departments here to help us," Doyle said.

The wildfire stayed on the north side of the South Loup River sweeping the edge of Stapleton and passing just north of the Diamond Bar headquarters.

Robert Jones said they lost approximately 900 prairie hay bales, all of their tree strips, 200 railroad tires for corner posts and tires on some equipment.

At least a section of leased grass and three sections were charred.

"The wet swamp kept it from coming into town and we are certainly grateful for the snow that arrived Tuesday to settle it down," Jones said. "All of the cattle we were getting ready to ship were in

a dry lot in the middle of sand between two tree strips that were burning and somehow they were not harmed."

Jones went on to say the ranch was fortunate in so many ways. No horses were lost and one group was able to get to a high hill even though they were surrounded on four sides.

"We had moved our mares off of the mare pasture because we were shipping cattle and had them in a dry lot," he added. "We had wood piles and they burned to the ground. I guess we don't have places to pile trees anymore and won't have to worry about burning them now."

Jones disked east with the belief they could stop the fire at Highway 85.

The fire blew through the Margaret Ann Neal residence and took everything, but the house, little house and bunk house.

The barn built in the late 1800's by J.P. and Mary Brosius burned to the ground. It was being looked at to place on the National Historical list.

Harry Frey worked to hose down the house and Eric Frey was able to turn on the pivot west of the

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## SPS to aid fire victims

National Honor Society and Student Council students at Stapleton Public Schools are teaming up with the elementary to raise money for Easter baskets for those who lost property in the recent Lariat Fire and firefighter families. Elementary students will be collecting change with a goal of reaching \$1,000. Donations may be made at Community First Bank in Stapleton prior to March 8.

High school students will be going to the Stapleton Fire Hall Wednesday, March 6, to detail fire and rescue equipment.

A pep rally will be held at the school prior to Easter and there will be games and activities for firefighter families.

K-12 students will also be writing personal notes to those who came to help with the fire.

Please be generous with your change and help the elementary reach their goal.

## Weather

| DATE  | HI | LO | MT  |
|-------|----|----|-----|
| 24    | 56 | 28 | 0   |
| 25    | 61 | 29 | 0   |
| 26    | 66 | 34 | 0   |
| 27    | 70 | 29 | 0   |
| 28    | 29 | -1 | .02 |
| 29    | 48 | 1  | 0   |
| Mar 1 | 63 | 23 | 0   |

Observations:  
Winds were recorded at 47 mph Feb. 26 at 11:29 a.m.; 37 mph Feb. 27 @ 11:52 a.m.; 28 mph on Feb. 28 @ 1:41 p.m.; .3" of snow was recorded on February 28. Wind chill was -11 at 3:36 a.m. on Feb. 27 and -4 at 12:35 a.m. on Feb. 28. Smoke haze was observed on Feb. 29 and Mar. 1  
Total Feb. Moisture was 1.20". Total February snow was 1.3". Total moisture to date is 1.48". A grass fire on February 26 forced evacuation of Stapleton & Gandy. Livestock, equipment, structures, pastures, hay destroyed.

## McPherson Co. News



- Over The Hills
- Graphic Files
- Hannah Burch Letter
- Poem - Saving Time

## Public Notices

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- Village Of Stapleton Public Notice
- McPherson County District #90 Notice
- McPherson County Commissioners Public Notice
- Upper Loup NRD Public Notice
- Stapleton Rural Fire Public Notice
- USDA Work Group Notice

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