

# Weekly Register-Call

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NEWSPAPER OF RECORD FOR GILPIN COUNTY, BLACK HAWK, AND CENTRAL CITY • THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2011 • 75 CENTS

- Black Hawk requests City Manager resignation. **CITY p2**
- Commissioners discuss potential wilderness area. **COUNTY p3, 7**
- Letters to the Editor. **SOCIAL p6**
- The art of preparing tax returns for self-employed creative types. **FINANCIAL p6**
- How to deal with train wrecks in our lives. **SOCIAL p11**
- The battle for our thoughts. **SPIRITUAL p11**
- Do you ever answer your phone? **TECHNOLOGY p12**
- Furry introductions - how best to say "Hi." **PETS p22**



**The mountains are on fire.** text. **p12-13, 24**

DAVE GIBSON

# Wildfire! Six days of hell

## Indian Gulch Fire believed to have been human-caused

by Dave Gibson

Friday evening, March 25th, the Indian Gulch Fire west of Golden, CO, was declared 100% contained.

Started Sunday, March 20th, between Clear Creek Canyon and Golden Gate Canyon around 10:15 a.m., it would consume 1,570 acres of bone-dry grasses, scrub brush, and conifers. No downed power lines or lightning were in the remote area that is without roads or established trails, and the event is believed to be human-caused. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Dept. has a tip-line at

303-271-5612 for anyone who saw suspicious activity in the vicinity of Mt. Galbraith Park east to Hwy 93 and Tunnel 1 of Hwy 6 north to Hwy 58.

At 2:45 p.m., with flames 1 ½ miles away, 100 homeowners and businesses were told to evacuate. One helicopter from Douglas County and hand digging crews valiantly fought the blaze in unpredictable swirling winds. By evening the winds subsided but the fire had grown to 550 uncontained, rugged, acres. Monday 705 homes, including 350 in the Mountain Ridge Subdivision, were given pre-evacuation notices via reverse 911 calls. The fire died down during the preceding night but the 7% humidity and 38 mph wind gusts Monday made for a tough day. Ground crews slogged against

steep 50 degree slopes. Single-engine air tankers were able to drop two 7,000 gallon loads of fire retardant on the fire in the morning but were grounded in the afternoon due to high winds. Meanwhile the inferno had grown to 1,200 smoky acres. No relief came the next day as 75 mph winds tore through the region scrubbing firefighting efforts. Conditions were explosive!

Wednesday came in like a spring-time lamb with a cool breeze shifting the fire back on itself. Helicopter water-drops and air tanker slurry runs bombarded the conflagration throughout the day with great effectiveness! By evening when I viewed it from Lookout Mountain in Golden, acrid brown and gray plumes of smoke rose from a nearly burnt-

out smoldering hillside. Flames alternately licked a ridge and stands of trees, stair-stepping up a gully. Embers in between made the mountain glow reddish-orange. The fire seemed to be breathing – it was after all consuming oxygen – alive as it changed form during the night. It was awesome in its beauty yet threatening like an approaching apocalypse.

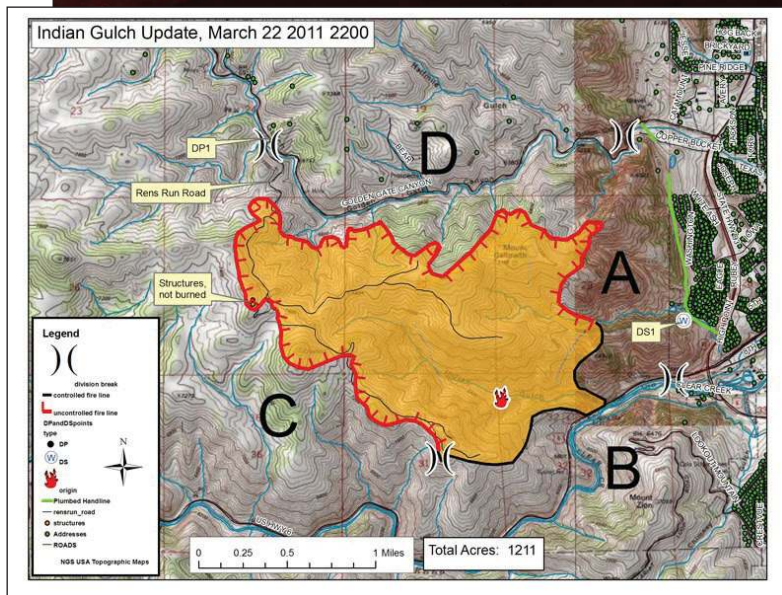
Incident manager Rowdy Muir of the National East Zone Type 1 Fire Management Team notes that, "This is the earliest my team has ever been mobilized in nine years. Colorado's fire season is burning months ahead of schedule, and this could be a sign of things to come." As of last Thursday evening the Indian Gulch Fire was 77% contained. By Friday night, thanks to Rowdy and 401 brave firefighters

and more than 40 federal, state, and local agencies, 100% containment was accomplished. The Colorado Dept. of Transportation evaluated loosened soils from the fire on Friday and determined that rock-fall mitigation was not needed at that time and Highways 58 and 6 could reopen. However, heavy rains might change the scenario in coming days and weeks resulting in closures. Drivers should use caution when traveling either Clear Creek or Golden Gate Canyons. No injuries or deaths were reported in connection with the fire, and no structures or homes were lost.





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