



BOILING SPRING LAKES volunteer firefighters use a brush truck hose to knock down a spot-over as a woods fire threatens to jump its control lines last Thursday. The fire, which continues to burn this week in heavy peat, covered just over 100 acres within the town limits.

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Woods Fires Cut Short Holiday For Forest Service, Volunteers

BY THE NEWS STAFF

Woods fires are keeping local forest service personnel and volunteer firefighters busy as dry conditions continue across Brunswick County.

Lightning, unattended debris burning and fireworks were blamed for fires contained last week, while the cause of a fire Tuesday morning at Bird Island near Sunset Beach is not known.

Sunset Beach firefighters borrowed the town's police boat and a pump and used salt water to fight the fire, which destroyed 25 feet of pier before it was put out, said Chief Greg Cain.

The fire had been burning since at least 4:30 a.m., when it was reported as a boat fire by the U.S. Coast Guard Station at Charleston, S.C.

At noon Tuesday Cain said that as far as he knew the fire was out, but that firemen had not been able to cross to the island because the tide was still going out. An N.C. Forest Service plane flew over the island and saw no signs of fire in the myrtle bush thickets.

A Long, Hot Fourth

Boiling Spring Lakes volunteer firefighters and the N.C. Forest Service had a long, hot Fourth of July, but it was no holiday.

Town firefighters turned out at 2:30 a.m. to fight their second lightning-related fire of the night after a thunderstorm with little associated rain moved across the county.

The first, reported earlier in the night, burned an acre or less near the county water tower on N.C. 87, said Chief Dave Farris.

Volunteers from departments at Winnabow, Supply and Sunset Beach joined Boiling Spring Lakes VFD and eight tractor-pull units from the N.C. Forest Service in bringing the early morning wildfire under control.

No homes or other structures were immediately threatened by the blaze, which started in an undeveloped tract within the town limits. It spread across about 107 acres before it was contained by fire lines around 9 a.m.

As firefighters worked to extend containment lines and knock down hot spots, the fire jumped the line at two points as temperatures rose and the humidity fell in midafternoon.

"It's getting hard to hold it down. We're trying to stop it here because if it jumps there's nothing between West Ridge Road and N.C. 87," approximately a mile east, said Assistant Brunswick County Ranger Mitch Pullen, fire boss.

Between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. a Forest Service helicopter with bucket arrived to assist, hauling water from the town's lakes to help contain the fire.

At Boiling Spring Lakes, as well as across much of the county, much of the land—former swampland and Carolina bays—has been ditched and drained for pine plantations or development, Pullen said, leaving thick beds of dry peat beneath the ground surface.

"It's going to continue burning until we get a good rain," Pullen said Monday. "The peat's about a foot deep in there. We're probably going to have people complaining about smoke for days."

Burned Out Area Stops Blaze

Last Tuesday, a fire swept through a bay and pine thicket near Maco charring 90 acres before firefighters and the N.C. Forest Service could bring it under control at an old fire line.

Brunswick County Fire Marshal Cecil Logan said someone in the Pinecliff subdivision on N.C. 87 south of Maco left a debris fire unattended.

Winds rapidly spread the flames north to an area where about 300 acres burned in a wildfire last September.

"That's what finally stopped it," said Logan. The Forest Service set back fires and used four plows to help contain it. A spotter plane routed plows around the fire.

The first call came in to the Winnabow Volunteer Fire Department around 4 p.m. Fire fighters from five stations responded. The plows were pulled from the scene around 10:30 p.m. No homes were damaged.

"That was one of the hottest fires I've ever seen," said Pullen, who is an assistant county ranger. "It just about wore us down."

Also on July 4th, Shallotte firefighters put out a one-acre woods fire in Wildwood Village off Old Shallotte Road that firefighter David Moore said might have been started by fireworks. Tri-Beach volunteers responded to a small brush fire on Holden Beach.

Animal Control Head To Appeal Firing

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County Animal Control Supervisor Zelma Babson, fired from her job June 25, plans to appeal that decision to the Brunswick County Board of Health.

Ms. Babson, an 11-year veteran of the department, said she received a 10-day suspension on June 11 and was fired from her job on June 25 by Health Director Michael Rhodes. "I do feel that I've been done wrong," said Ms. Babson. "I am going through the appeals process."

Rhodes said last week that he could not comment on personnel action taken against an employee. "You will hear more about it," said Rhodes.

Ms. Babson, of Ash, said she has not been notified of when her appeal to the health board has been scheduled. Shallotte Attorney Shelia McLamb will represent her.

"I'd rather leave it to her to make any further statement," said Ms. Babson. "I don't want to hurt my chances."

Ms. Babson met in executive session with the health board and County Attorney David Clegg on May 13 for two hours. Also present was John Crowder, environmental health supervisor II, Ms. Babson's superior.

Upon returning to open session, Clegg said he had made an "advisory opinion" in the matter to Rhodes pursuant to the county personnel policy. The health board has remained silent on the matter.

Health Board Chairman Bill Rabon said Clegg would speak for the board.

According to Clegg, all county animal control employees fall under a competitive service employee policy adopted by the State Personnel

"I do feel that I've been done wrong."

—Zelma Babson

Commission in June 1990.

The health director is responsible for personnel action. If an employee feels the action is unfair, they can appeal the decision to the board of health.

Under the policy, said Clegg, once an appeal has been heard the board of health must render a decision within five days on whether to override the department head's decision

June Was Warm And Dry

The month of June was warmer and much drier than normal in southeastern North Carolina, according to the National Weather Service in Wilmington.

Average temperature for the month was 77.8 degrees, or 1.2 degrees above normal. The region received only 2.57 inches of rain in June, which was 3.08 inches below normal.

The average high temperature in June was 87.7 degrees while the average low was 67.9 degrees, according to the weather service's monthly report.

The highest daily temperature was 96 degrees June 1. The mercury climbed above 90 degrees on 14 days in June.

The coolest reading of the month was 57 degrees, which occurred every day June 6 through June 10.

or to uphold the personnel action.

If the employee disagrees with the board's decision, a grievance can then be filed before the State Personnel Commission.

The animal control department is currently operating shorthanded, said Crowder.

Another animal control worker has left to join the Department of Social Services.

Joel Brewer turned in his resignation June 11, said Ms. Babson. His last day with animal control was June 28. She said Brewer told her he wanted a higher paying job.

Crowder said he has been working mornings at the animal control shelter in Supply and afternoons at the health department in Bolivia to fill in during the personnel shortage.

Cooling degree day units in June totaled 392. That was 44 units above normal and brought the seasonal total to 864, which is 269 above average.

The weather service recorded measurable rainfall nine days during the month and thunderstorms on seven days. The greatest amount of rainfall in a 24-hour period was 1.06 inches on June 19 and 20.

Despite the lack of rain, there were only seven clear days during the month. The weather service reported there were 12 cloudy days and 11 partly cloudy days. This produced 66 percent of the possible sunshine for the month.

Average wind speed for the month of June was 7.8 mph. The weather service recorded a peak gust of 44 mph during a thunderstorm June 1.

Calabash To Enforce New Zoning Rules

BY DOUG RUTTER

Calabash officials have decided to start enforcing some of the town's new zoning regulations that prohibit obsolete and abandoned signs and abandoned structures and vehicles.

Commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday night to begin enforcing the rules after reviewing a long list of violations that have been identified by Code Enforcement Officer Ed Schaack.

While touring the Calabash area, Schaack has discovered four obsolete or abandoned signs, four abandoned buildings and more than 100 abandoned cars, trucks and buses.

Commissioners instructed Schaack to enforce the rules inside the town limits and in the extrajurisdictional area, which covers land as far as one mile outside the town.

However, board member Jon Sanborn asked Schaack to be "fair" and "reasonable" in enforcing the rules. He said he didn't like the tone of some violation notices that have sent out in the past.

"We need to proceed on them in a manner in which we don't start world War III," Sanborn said.

Several Calabash business owners became agitated last year when the town started enforcing an eight-year-old sign ordinance. The new zoning rules took effect in April.

The code enforcement officer will notify people who are not com-

"We need to proceed on them in a manner in which we don't start world War III."

—Board Member Jon Sanborn

plying with the rules and give them a certain length of time to fix the violation. If the problem isn't corrected, the town could take further action.

For the time being, commissioners decided to enforce only three kinds of town code violations.

Schaack identified violations of eight ordinances in his list, but said he can only handle so many at a time. "You can't attack everything at one time," he said. "It's impossible."

Commissioners agreed Tuesday that they should meet with area merchants before they start enforcing rules dealing with other types of illegal signs, off-street parking, handicapped accessibility and several other ordinances.

Among the rules that will not be enforced right away is one that requires businesses to put garbage containers on cement pads and enclose them on three sides so they're not visible from the street.

Schaack noted in his violations list that all commercial establishments are operating in violation of

this code.

Mayor Doug Simmons, who owns a beverage store in town, said there isn't enough room outside most businesses to enclose green boxes and leave enough space for the trash trucks.

Other Business

In other business Tuesday, commissioners:

■ Agreed to negotiate for the possible purchase of the Calabash Animal Hospital property. The land is located adjacent to the town hall property.

■ Voted to increase electrical inspection fees as requested by the town's electrical inspector, Darrel Johnson. Fees for residential inspections were increased from \$20 to \$21.50 per inspection. Commercial fees were increased from \$90 to \$135 for three inspections. Commissioner Stu Thorn said the fees are still lower than what the county charges.

■ Asked Town Attorney Mike Ramos to draft an ordinance setting the speed limit on all town streets at 30 mph. Commissioner Ray Card requested the ordinance, even though the town has no means of enforcing the speed limit.

■ Accepted ownership of the drainage ditches in Hunter's Trace and Acreage Estates.

■ Heard that the mowing of roadside ditches and larger drainage ditches should begin within the next two weeks.

Board Cancels Hearing On Ordinances

Calabash officials decided this week to postpone a July 17 public hearing on eight proposed ordinances that are still being reviewed by the planning board and its committees.

Town Clerk Janet Thomas had advertised the hearing for Wednesday, July 17, at 7 p.m. in the Calabash fire station as directed by town commissioners.

However, town officials weren't sure this week if any of the ordinances would be ready in time for the hearing. None of them would have been ready to give residents enough time to read the rules prior to the hearing.

Rules that were supposed to go to public hearing address landscaping, off-street parking, subdivisions, peddling, sidewalk sales, yard and garage sales, excavation and repair of streets and sidewalks and obstruction of streets and sidewalks.

Planning Board Chairman Tom Brendgord said at Tuesday's town commission meeting that the hearing shouldn't have been advertised until the planning board approved the ordinances.

Brendgord said the board is a "long way" from adopting rules dealing with landscaping, off-street parking and subdivisions. The other ordinances should be approved at the board's July 15 meeting.

Commissioner Stu Thorn, who acts as a liaison between the town commission and planning board, said the three dealing with landscaping, subdivisions and off-street parking probably wouldn't be ready until September.

This is the second wave of zoning ordinances town officials have developed since the 1989 merger of the old Town of Calabash and Carolina Shores.

Commissioners adopted about 20 new regulations earlier this year dealing with everything from signs and refuse containers to noise and junk vehicles.

At public hearings in January and February, merchants said some of the rules, such as the sign ordinance, were bad for business.

But town officials said the regulations are simply designed to create a nicer-looking community.

Due to complaints at the hearings, however, the three ordinances dealing with landscaping, off-street parking and subdivisions were pulled for further review.

All of the zoning rules that took effect in April apply in the town limits and in the extrajurisdictional area, which includes most property within a mile of town. The new rules also would apply to both areas.



Grand Opening



July 20th
3:00 PM - 6:00 PM

FUN and GAMES FOR EVERYONE!

Dunkin' Booth

Live Music by Midnite Express



Register to Win Prizes!

Basketball Shoot-Out

WDZD--Live!

Hwy. 904 & Dale Dr., Seaside, NC