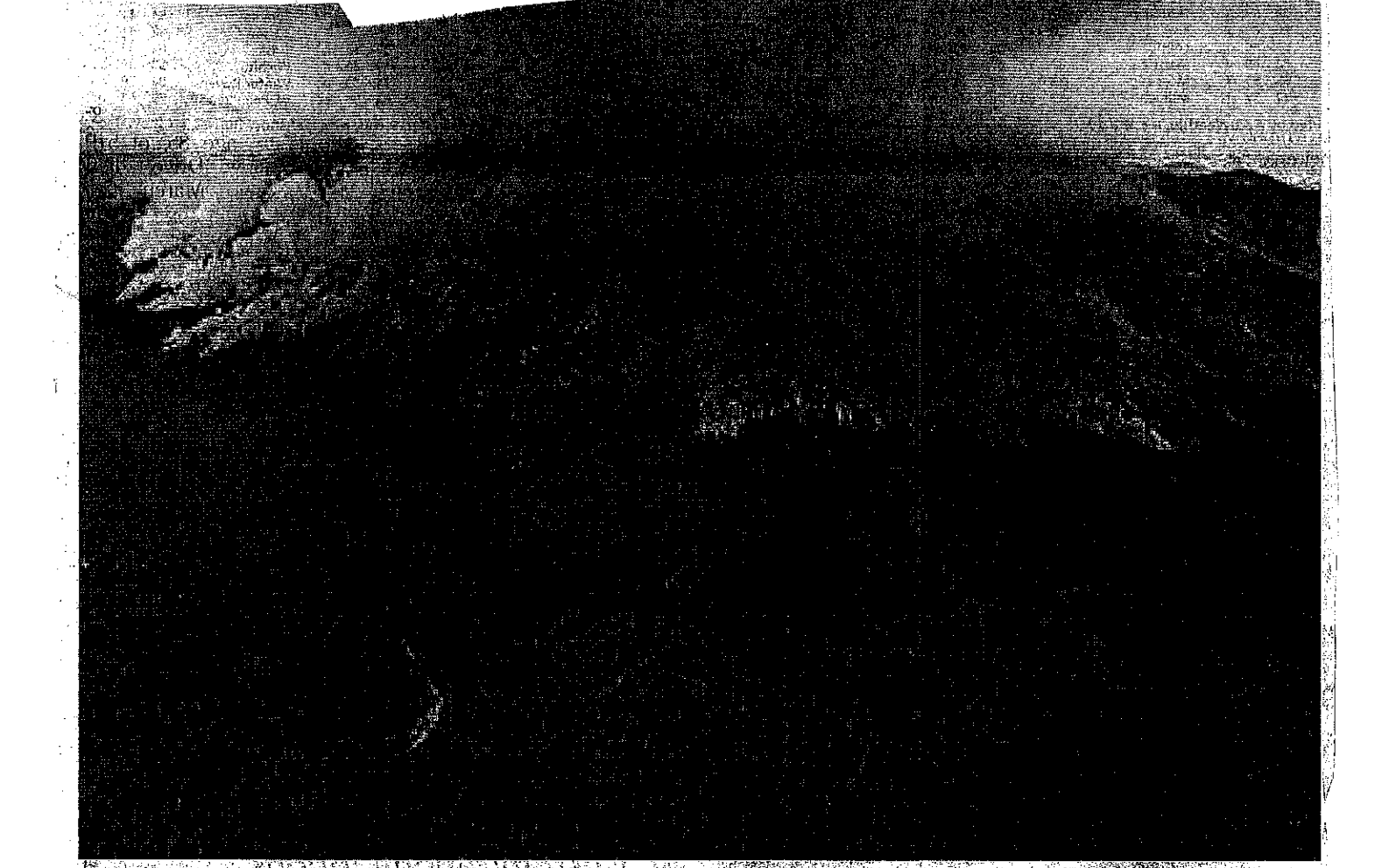




The White Creek Fire, which first started March 16 near Shortoff Mountain at the south end of Linville Gorge, is now 5,538 acres.

COURTESY U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Linville Gorge White Creek Fire 90% contained, covers 5,538 acres

KAREN CHÁVEZ

KCHAVEZ@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

NEBO - Firefighters completed burnout operations Friday on the west side of White Creek Fire, increasing containment to 90 percent. The fire is now estimated at 5,538 acres.

"The fire continued to grow within containment lines due to both active fire movement and burnouts," said spokeswoman Lisa Jennings with the U.S. Forest Service in Asheville. "The fire will remain active within the containment area but will not grow in size."

The fire, first reported March 16 at 10 acres, is burning near Shortoff Mountain at the south end of Linville Gorge on the Grandfather Ranger District of Pisgah National Forest.

Law enforcement officials determined lightning to be the likely cause of the fire.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, fire activity on the west side of Shortoff Mountain increased Friday, prompting fire managers to conduct burnout operations to reduce the intensity of the fire and minimize damage to the soil. Low intensity backburns limited high inten-

sity of fire running uphill. On the eastern and southern control lines, firefighters are also focusing on extinguishing remaining hot spots.

Firefighters will monitor and patrol the fire over the weekend, as well as work on fireline repair. Fire managers are transitioning control of the fire back to the local type 4 incident management organization Saturday morning. The fire is expected to remain active within containment lines until a significant rainfall. Such a weather system is predicted for Sunday that could provide much needed precipitation over the area.

Smoke was expected to impact areas around Lake James and Oak Hill Friday evening and Saturday morning, with smoke settling in low-lying areas overnight. Travelers along N.C. 181 between Oak Hill and Linville Falls should expect to see smoke in the area. Smoke may continue to impact the area throughout the weekend.

There are now 67 firefighters on the scene. The U.S. Forest Service is leading fire response efforts, with support from the N.C. Forest Service, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Burke

and McDowell County Emergency Management, N.C. Emergency Management, and local volunteer fire departments.

Closure on U.S. Forest Service lands

East of State Road 1238 (Old N.C. 105/Kistler Memorial Highway), South of Conley Cove Trail (Trail No. 229), south of Table Rock Picnic Area, west of Back Irish Creek Forest Service Road No. 118 (Blue Gravel Road) and Roses Creek Forest Service Road No. 99, north of N.C. 126.

Trails closed:

- » Shortoff Trail (No. 235)
- » Rock Jock Trail (No. 247)
- » Pinch-In Trail (No. 228)
- » Linville Gorge Trail (No. 231) south of Conley Cove Trail (No. 229)
- » Mountains-to-Sea Trail (No. 440) from State Road 1238 at Pinnacles to the Table Rock Picnic Area
- » Any social trails existing within the closure area. Public entry is prohibited within this area.