



Marines from the 1st Battalion in Fort Pendleton, Calif., set up a tent Tuesday in the Madison Campground in Yellowstone Park. STEVE DOWELL/CHRONICLE

Marines arrive to shore up park fire lines

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YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, Wyo. — Cold, wet weather, which since the weekend has limited the growth of fires involving 939,270 acres in Yellowstone National Park, began to break up this morning.

Fire officials looked forward to seeing how much good the fire lines built since Sunday would do.

Clouds that have covered the park since Saturday began to lift today. Although temperatures remained cool, reaching only 40 degrees, officials expected a warming trend that would take temperatures to the 70s, said park spokesman Steve Iobst.

"Things are just smoldering and there were no winds (Tuesday) to speak of to kick things up," Iobst said. "It is hard to tell how much good the work we did starting Sunday did. I'm sure it will help us. But with a warming trend

and the potential for things to dry out, I think it's going to be a matter of waiting and seeing how well our lines held."

The 7,200 firefighters and U.S. Army soldiers in the park have worked since the rain and snow arrived to strengthen existing fire lines and attack hot spots in an effort to gain the upper hand on the fires, which have not grown significantly since the weekend.

But Iobst said the precipitation was not sufficient to thoroughly wet fuel, meaning conditions could become quite dry again in several days.

"It is not going to get real warm; the main thing is it will dry things out," he said. "We didn't get enough to soak things down for a long time. A couple of days will dry things out again."

Although forecasts called for warmer, drier weather, winds similar to those that allowed fires to grow by thousands of acres each day last week were not expected.

About 550 Marines flew to West Yellowstone from Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Tuesday the first of 1,200 Marines sent in to help battle the flames.

The additional personnel should give firefighters an edge in trying to control the fires, Iobst said.

"As long as things don't get crazy here again, a lot of progress can be made by people on the ground," he said. "We haven't had any breathing room like we've had the last few days for a long time."

Most of the Marines were expected to be placed on lines of the 229,400-acre North Fork fire after a day of training, Iobst said.

"That's the one that's been the most difficult to knock down," he said.

Elsewhere, containment of the 3-month-old Storm Creek fire north of Yellowstone Park was predicted by Saturday and crews attacked

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Tourism chiefs gear up to sell Yellowstone