



By Russ Pankonin and Jan Schultz
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The Izaak Walton League cabin at Enders Lake, known by most as “Ike’s Cabin,” escaped a wildfire that roared around the building Monday afternoon.

Although the fire wasn’t as close, it also threatened the nearby home of Curtis and Amanda Johnson.

Imperial Fire Chief Nick Schultz said the cabin stood in the path of the fast-moving grass fire that started just north of the Dan Marshall home along the paved cabin road.

He said the department’s first priority, however, was the Johnson residence when they arrived on the scene, and made sure the Johnsons were aware. Schultz said they recommended the family evacuate and they did.

Before leaving, Johnson turned on the lawn sprinklers to keep the area wet around their home.

Although their home is in between the Marshalls’ home and Ike’s Cabin, the cabin was more directly in the fire’s path.

Schultz said he didn’t know whether they were going to be able to save the cabin when he saw the fire racing north through canyons towards the structure.

He dispatched some trucks to the building to begin foaming it. Crews also foamed the surrounding trees and grass.

As the fire approached, he pulled the crews back. They applied foam to the grass alongside the road as they drove to safety.

Schultz said flames and thick black smoke crept high up into the sky as the fire appeared to engulf the cabin.

“Well, we tried,” Schultz said to his crew as the cabin disappeared in the flames and smoke.

“When the smoke cleared, it was still there,” Schultz said Tuesday morning. An inspection of the building showed no apparent damage from the fire.

Schultz moved crews back up to Ike’s to extinguish any smoldering trees and embers. The fire continued to burn in the trees east of the cabin towards the lake but the terrain was too rough to bring in trucks.

Wauneta’s fire department brought in a truck beside the cabin and used its deck gun to shoot water towards the fire.



After controlling the fire around the cabin, Schultz said they used a large front-end loader to knock down trees. This opened the way for graders to cut a path down to the lake northeast of the cabin.

Even with the path, Schultz said their mobility was limited. As a result, they moved a

quick-attack unit as close to the fire as they could and with the aid of about 400 feet of hose line they attacked the fire with hand lines on the ground and used Imperial's pumper to feed the quick attack.

Firefighters from Grant also assisted in the ground attack with hand lines.

Other tankers came in from behind to keep Imperial's pumper full.

Schultz called for aerial spray plane assistance which came from Broken Bow as night neared.

He said they were able to get two loads of water dumped on the active fire before it became too dark to fly safely. That did make a difference, he said, as the tops of the trees did not burn out in the areas of the drops.

Schultz said the fire's cause appears to be spontaneous combustion from a compost pile north of the Marshall home.

Cabin escapes damage

Looking back Tuesday morning, Schultz said the fire, which burned about 150 acres, could have been much worse.

If the fire had crossed the trail road leading to Ike's Cabin, or jumped the paved road that leads to the cabin area, Schultz said there would have been cabins lost to fire.

Prior to attacking the fire with hand lines, Schultz said they considered lighting a controlled back fire east of Ike's Cabin to prevent the fire from spreading to other cabins to the north and west if they couldn't contain the fire.

However, he said it was starting to get dark and it would mean even more hours at the scene, because of all the trees.

As it was, Imperial's crew did not leave the scene until about 12 midnight.

Schultz said they began sending mutual aid departments back home as the evening progressed.

Besides Grant and Wauneta, other departments aiding in the fire included Lamar and Benkelman.

Schultz said they couldn't have done it without the help of those departments, Frenchman Valley Coop, Lamar Fertilizer and other volunteers who delivered water for the firefighting efforts. Imperial EMS was also on the scene as a precaution.

He said they also appreciated the use of the Johnsons' shop building across the road from their home which was used as a staging area for rehab. Food and water were also served there.

The Imperial department returned to the scene Tuesday.

Schultz said they fully expected to be called back Tuesday to control flare-ups in the trees. IVFD sent one rig out mid-morning to the compost pile, but after extinguishing it, they noticed another flare-up nearby.

That unit didn't have enough water, so they called in the rest of the Imperial department about 11:45 a.m.

Mid-afternoon Tuesday, the wind came up and ignited the cedar trees north of Ike's Cabin, so the IVFD went out a third time for another two and a half hours. The department returned again Wednesday morning when flare-ups occurred north of the Johnson home.