

Multiple fire departments battle blaze on the bluffs

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ELSAH - Firefighters from multiple departments battled a blaze on the bluffs, which cause portions of westbound Highway 100 to be closed Monday afternoon.

QEM Fire Protection District Chief Gerry New said the department was called to a fire he described as "big and then bigger," which started about a mile west of Lockhaven Hill sometime Monday afternoon. At its height, New said the blaze had engulfed as many as 10 acres owned by Principia College. While no structures were in the way of the flames, New said the fire did destroy portions of the forest as it climbed the nearly-completely vertical bluff approximately 350 feet above the road.

"We were there yesterday for about six hours," New said Tuesday afternoon. "We spent about another hour and a half there last night, but it got pretty dark. We've been out there about twice again today. Embers keep falling down into the dry patches of leaves."

The fire may have originated from something as insignificant and careless as a discarded cigarette butt. While state law prohibits such behavior, many people do it regardless, and when conditions are as favorable to a large fire as they are currently, that disregard can be dangerous.

"We're thinking it could have been a discarded cigarette," he said. "Conditions are favorable for a fire right now. It doesn't take much to fuel it as dry as it's been."

In fact, conditions are so favorable to large, out-of-control fires, multiple fire departments across the area have placed burning bans on their citizens, including both the QEM and Otter Creek Fire Protection Districts. New said Jerseyville has done the same thing, as have many departments in Madison County.

Those three departments were joined through mutual aid by the Fieldon Fire Department, the Alton Fire Department and the Godfrey Fire Protection District.

No one has been harmed as a direct result of this blaze, New said, and he said, while it is currently under control, various hot spots still exist in the fire and are being extinguished as they flare.

Highway 100 was closed for approximately an hour and a half west of Lockhaven due to the amount of firefighting apparatuses on the scene.