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Thunderstorm causes increased fire activity in southeast Oregon

Vale, Oregon – Late afternoon thunderstorms dramatically increased fire activity within the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District in southeastern Oregon yesterday. The District received more than 100 lightning strikes between 4 p.m. and early evening, with accompanying gusts of wind that made fire behavior unpredictable and air coverage impossible until this morning.

Air and ground crews were on scene at the **Irish Springs** fire before the storm hit. They were dealing with an approximately ten-acre fire in steep and rugged terrain which began in a juniper stand north of Castlerock. By 4 p.m., high winds had whipped the fire to 500 acres, and air crews had to suspend their activity. At last report the fire was estimated at 660 acres.

One Snake River Valley firefighter assigned to the **South Fork** fire northeast of Castlerock was transported to Holy Rosary Medical Center in Ontario for a heat related medical condition. He was treated at the hospital and released last night. The South Fork fire is estimated at nearly 20 acres.

The **Mud Springs** fire began in the Tub Mountain/Moores Hollow area northwest of Ontario and southwest of Farewell Bend. The fire, estimated last night at 20,000 acres, had threatened to close I-84 between Farewell Bend and Ontario for a time, but Oregon State Police carefully monitored visibility and did not find the closure necessary. This fire is a mutual aid effort involving the BLM, as well as rural fire departments from Nyssa, Weiser, Payette, Vale, Ontario, and Huntington.

Air resources will fly the area this morning. They will be searching for additional starts and assessing the existing fires. The BLM anticipates acreage figures may change significantly following this morning's assessment. A type II team has been ordered for the Irish Springs fire and will report this morning.

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