

Contact

For Immediate Release

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Wild Fires Remain out of Control in Texas

Two huge range fires remain out of control as they burn thousands of acres in far west Texas and northwest Texas. Both fires have consumed more than 150,000 acres.

The Rock House Fire in far west Texas started near the town of Marfa on Saturday, April 9. The Texas Forest Service said the fire spread north through Fort Davis, destroying as many as 40 homes. The McDonald Observatory had been used as an evacuation center and it too had to be evacuated. The observatory has been without power since Saturday. Astronomers were able to close observatory's domes to avoid smoke damage.

The fire had been moving northward toward the town of Balmorhea, but an overnight cold front has shifted the winds to the north. Dr. Anita Cochran with the McDonald Observatory said the shifting winds have posed a renewed threat to the entire area. McDonald Observatory contains three huge multi-million dollar telescopes. McDonald's newest telescope, the Hobby-Eberly telescope, is one of the largest optical telescopes in the world and cost \$30 million to construct.



(Photo Credit: Frank Cianciolo/McDonald Observatory)

At one point fire fighters said the Rock House fire had moved rapidly burning 12 miles of ranch land in two hours. No injuries have been reported in the fire which is reported to be only 10 percent contained.

The Swenson Fire in northeast Texas has spread to three Texas counties. Despite burning 71,000 acres, no homes have reportedly been damaged. The fire which has been burning since Wednesday, April 6, is said to be 50 percent contained.

The Insurance Council of Texas is the largest state insurance trade association in the country consisting of approximately 500 property and casualty insurers writing business in Texas. For more information turn to ICT's Web site at www.insurancecouncil.org.

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