

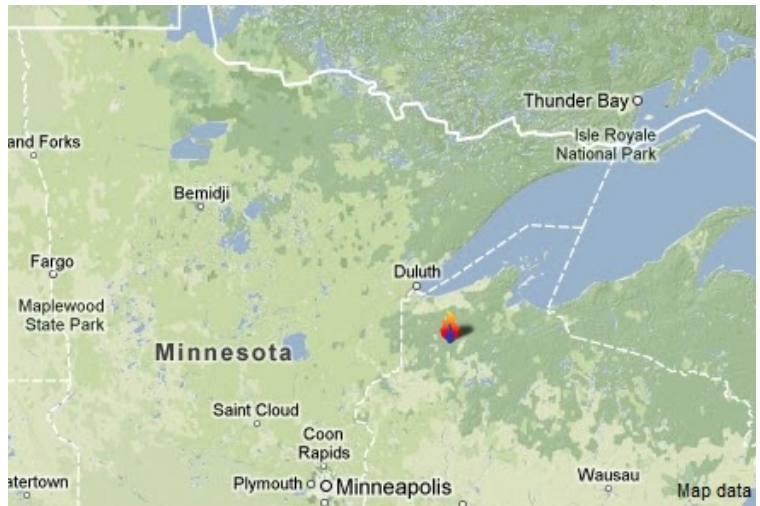
# Germann Road Wildfire

## Northwest Wisconsin 2013 May 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup>

Amanda Graning

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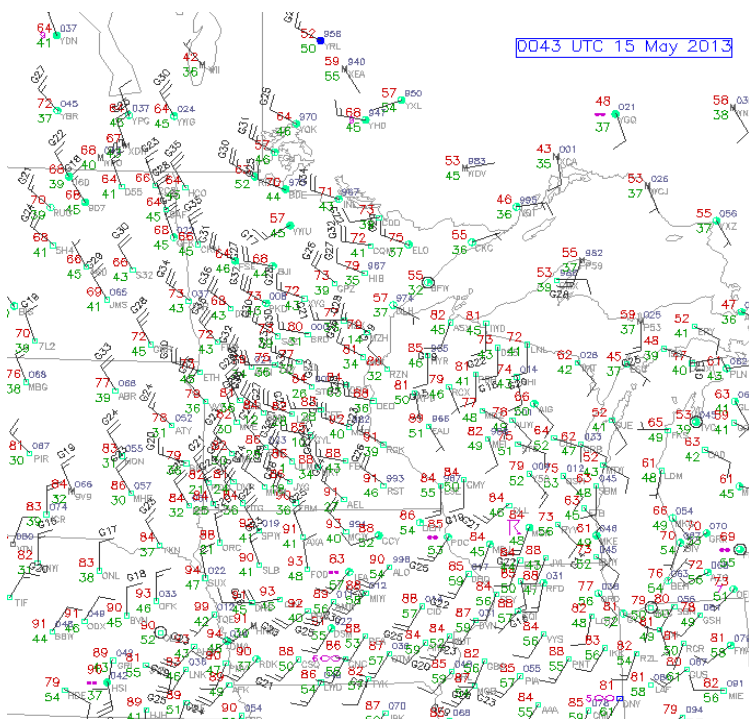
A significant wildfire began in the Town of Gordon in Douglas County the afternoon of May 14, 2013. According to the Duluth News Tribune, the fire was first reported just after 2 p.m. Tuesday near Germann Road (southeast of Solon Springs, WI) at an active logging site.



The fire made a run into the town of Highland and destroyed several dozen structures. At last report by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the fire had claimed a total of 47 structures; including 17 homes and cabins, 15 garages, 9 outbuildings, and 6 unknown. No injuries were reported as firefighters battled the largest forest fire in northern Wisconsin has seen in 33 years. The cause of the fire is listed as equipment associated with logging operation.

The fire was declared 100 percent contained at 900 p.m. on May 15th with all public roads open. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources currently reports the size of the burned area to have been 8,495 acres. Wednesday evening, May 15<sup>th</sup>, Governor Scott Walker, signed executive order #103 declaring a State of Emergency in Response to the Forest Fire.

### WEATHER



The fire season was slow to get going this spring due to a snowy and cool April and start of May. A National Weather Service (NWS) Cooperative Weather Observing Site at the DNR office in Gordon, WI recorded 26.1 inches of snow for the month of April with an additional 3.9 inches of snowfall through the first week of May.

This site reported at least 1 inch of snow on the ground through May 5<sup>th</sup>. This May also began much cooler than normal with highs only in the 30s and 40s through the first week. The climatological normal high temperature at Gordon, WI during this time of year is in the low 60s. The cool spring led to the late green-up and record setting ice-out dates on many of the area lakes.

However, the weather pattern made an abrupt shift through the second week in May and high temperatures soared well above normal. A nearby automated weather station in Barnes, WI (BRNW3) recorded a high temperature of 87 degrees the afternoon of the Germann Road Wildfire. This is 20 degrees above the climatological normal and only 4 degrees shy of the record daily high for Gordon, WI for this date.

The very warm temperatures were the result of a surge of warm air from the south, ahead of a strong cold front. The nearest automated weather station to the fire at Barnes, WI showed winds were out of the south sustained 10-12 mph with gusts of 20-25 mph through the afternoon.

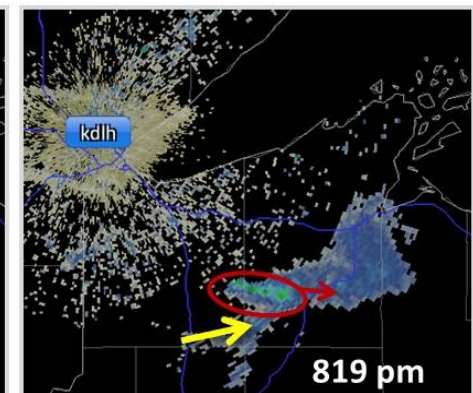
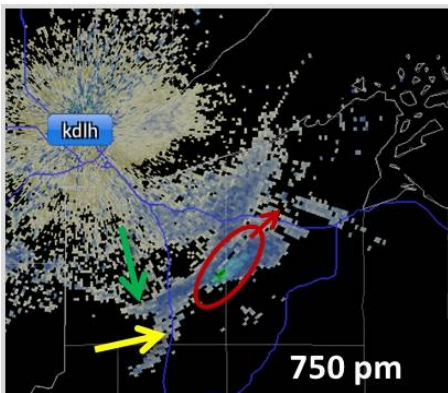
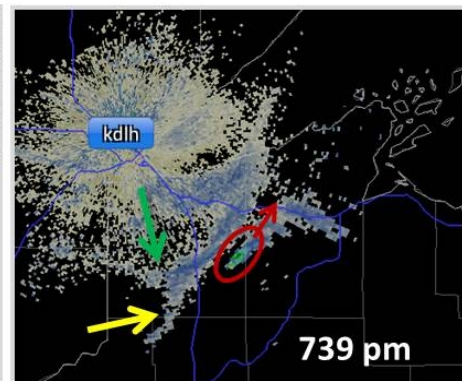
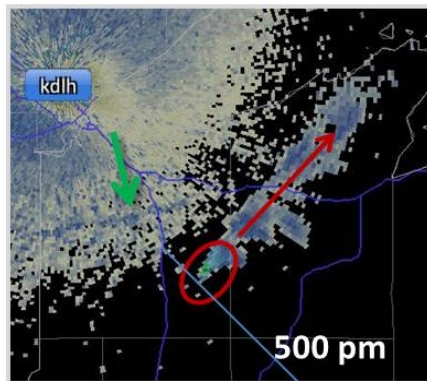
The cold front arrived at the fire around 730 p.m. and brought a wind shift to the northwest, along with higher gusts around 30 mph. The greatest sustained wind at the site for the day was 12 mph.

The near-record warm temperatures allowed relative humidity values to fall to the 20-25% range at the time the fire was detected. However, relative humidity increased to 30% with the frontal passage and arrival of stronger winds, and continued to rise into the 40-50% range through the evening. Poor relative humidity recovery and continued gusty west to northwest winds through the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> contributed to the growth of the fire.

The graphic below is a series of radar captures from the KDLH radar in Duluth, MN the evening of May 14<sup>th</sup>. These radar captures show the location of the wildfire, along with the interaction of the lake breeze and cold front.

# Germann Road Wildfire

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013



Lead forecaster on duty at the NWS Weather Forecast office (WFO) in Duluth, MN noticed the wildfire on the KDLH radar and visible satellite imagery around 1600 L. He made a call to the USFS dispatch to confirm they were aware of the fire and to offer any assistance with forecasts.

The first SPOT request for the Germann Road Wildfire was submitted to WFO Duluth at 1717 L and was completed and issued in less than 20 minutes. Due to the fast approaching cold front, an updated SPOT forecast was sent at 1913 L to emphasize the wind shift that would occur at the fire. The Duluth WFO issued a total of 8 SPOT fire weather forecasts for this wildfire between the dates of May 14<sup>th</sup> and May 17<sup>th</sup>.

After hearing of evacuations on social media and through local news sources, the lead forecaster on duty called the Douglas county sheriff to offer assistance with their evacuation by broadcasting a message on the All Hazards NOAA Weather Radio (EVI). The county dispatch said none was needed at that time. A call was then made to Bayfield County to again offer the use of the All Hazards NOAA Weather Radio to broadcast emergency evacuation information. The dispatcher stated they were too busy to send a fax with the evacuation details so the message was verbally relayed by phone. The Duluth WFO issued the first Civil Emergency for an Evacuation due to the rapidly growing wildfire at 2047 L. Updates to this message (EVI) were sent at 2102 L on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 0049 L on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Further follow-ups on road closure and evacuation information were sent via a Public Information Statement.

The lead forecaster made calls to the Public Information Officer and Safety Officer at the Incident Command the morning of May 15<sup>th</sup> in order to convey the main weather threat of the day. The forecast was calling for afternoon relative humidity of around 20% and gusty winds around 20 mph. This was the first verbal contact with anyone associated with the wildfire operations.

A link to information about the wildfire was posted in the News of the Day section of the Duluth NWS Homepage as well as on the Duluth Facebook Page.

The Duluth NWS office conducted three media interviews on May 15<sup>th</sup> regarding the Germann Road Wildfire; including Wisconsin Public Radio, Fox21 TV and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel Newspaper.

### **ADDITIONAL NEWS REPORTS**

“The fire department crews worked all night, and they saved 77 structures, including 42 homes,” said Larry Glodoski, incident commander of the firefighting effort for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. “They did their triage ... and then tried to save the homes and cabins they thought had a chance.”

In all, about 100 residents were evacuated from the areas around Rock Lake, Loon Lake, Murray Lake, Beauregard Lake, Sand Lake, Catherine Lake, Ellison Lake and from Potawatomi Estates and the Village of Barnes. The Red Cross helped shelter and feed about 22 people Tuesday night in the Drummond School, where Glodoski gave his update to homeowners eager for any news. The center was expected to stay open Wednesday night for anyone unable to return home, or with no home to return to.

All that remains of this home on Sand Lake near Barnes, Wis. is the fireplace after a wildfire swept through the area late Tuesday night, May 14, 2013. (Bob King / rking@duluthnews.com)

Read the article: [Wisconsin wildfire 95 percent contained, fire line is holding \(with video\)](#)

Read the article: [Wisconsin wildfire's wrath was swift, severe](#)

