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Jefferson COURIER

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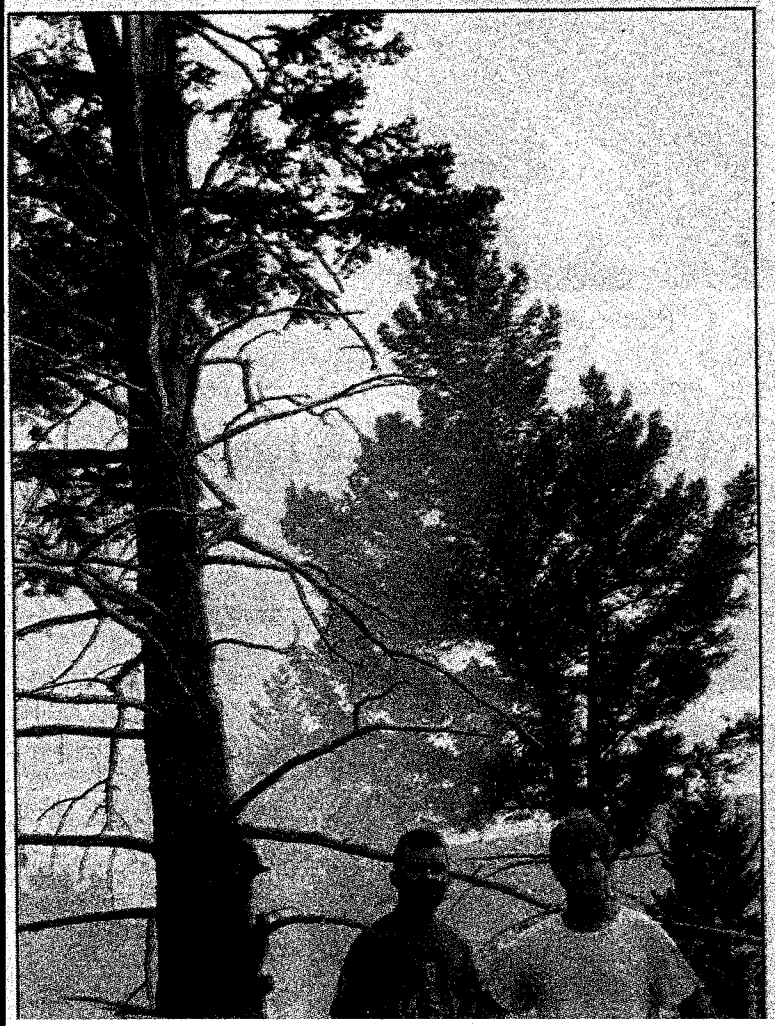
JEFFERSON COUNTY'S AWARD WINNING WEEKLY

Vol. 12, No. 19 Wednesday, August 13, 2008 50 Cents

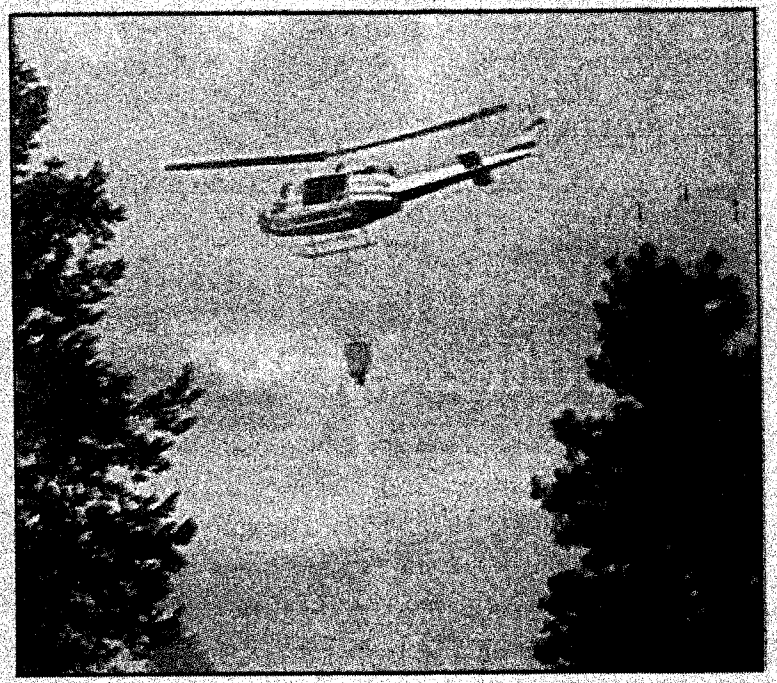
# *Multiple fire starts in county quashed by rapid responses*

by **Jan Anderson**, editor

Hot, dry, windy weather with occasional thunderstorms tested the readiness of fire departments all across Jefferson County last week as fires cropped up in several areas. The departments passed the test, responding quickly to control the wildfires and successfully preventing their spread.

Lightning sparked a fire eight miles west of Basin, dubbed the Torpy Fire, on Wednesday morning, August 6. The fire was initially reported around 10:40 a.m. Ten firefighters and two engines from Whitehall were on the scene shortly and by 2:30 p.m. had built a fireline around 20 percent of the fire. They were joined by 20 firefighters from the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in con-

See **FIRES, p. 6**



**A DNRC helicopter dumps water on the Clancy Creek Fire.** (Photo courtesy of **Bud Siderits**)

tinuing to control the fire.

Burning in trees and grass in the national forest, the blaze was contained to about three acres. No structures were threatened by the fire.

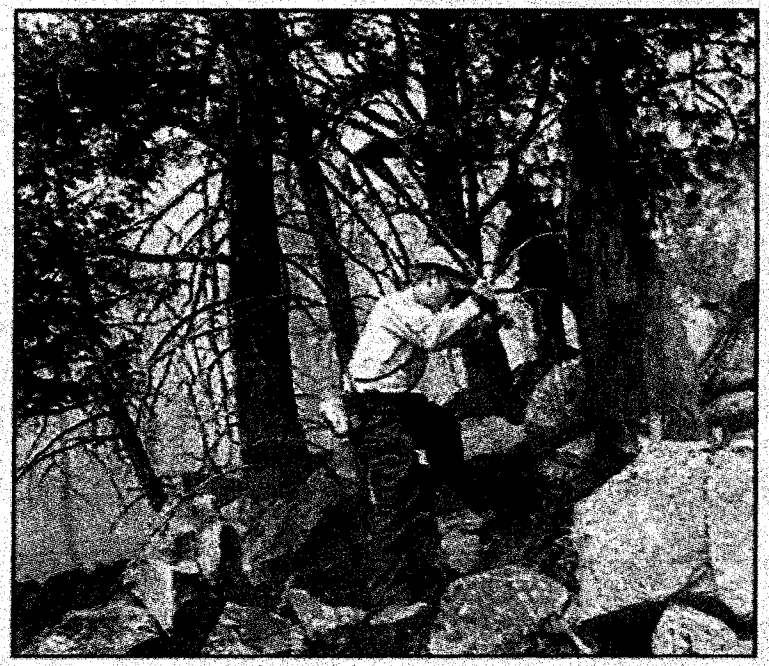
The same day, firefighters in Clancy were aided by helicopters and a tanker in making quick work of a fire in the Lump Gulch area roughly three miles west of Clancy. Reported in the early afternoon, the fire spread quickly due to temperatures in the 90s and crowning from tree top to tree top.

Residents of the area nearby were alerted to the fire's presence by Jefferson County Sheriff Craig Doolittle and Deputy Bob Gleich. Although residents were advised to be prepared to leave if necessary, no evacuation was ordered.

Aiding firefighters from Clancy's Volunteer Fire Department were firefighters from the Jefferson City VFD, Montana City VFD, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Helena National Forest. Nine engines, five water tenders, three DNRC helicopters, and 60 personnel on the ground were assisted in their efforts to contain and subdue the blaze by a fire retardant drop from an air tanker. Two privately owned water tenders also volunteered assistance.

In all, approximately 19,000 gallons of water were available to keep firefighting efforts on the ground supplied.

The fire burned about six acres. After gaining the upper hand on the blaze within hours of its start, most of the firefighters were released from the fire in the late afternoon. Some DNRC personnel remained at the scene overnight to mop up.



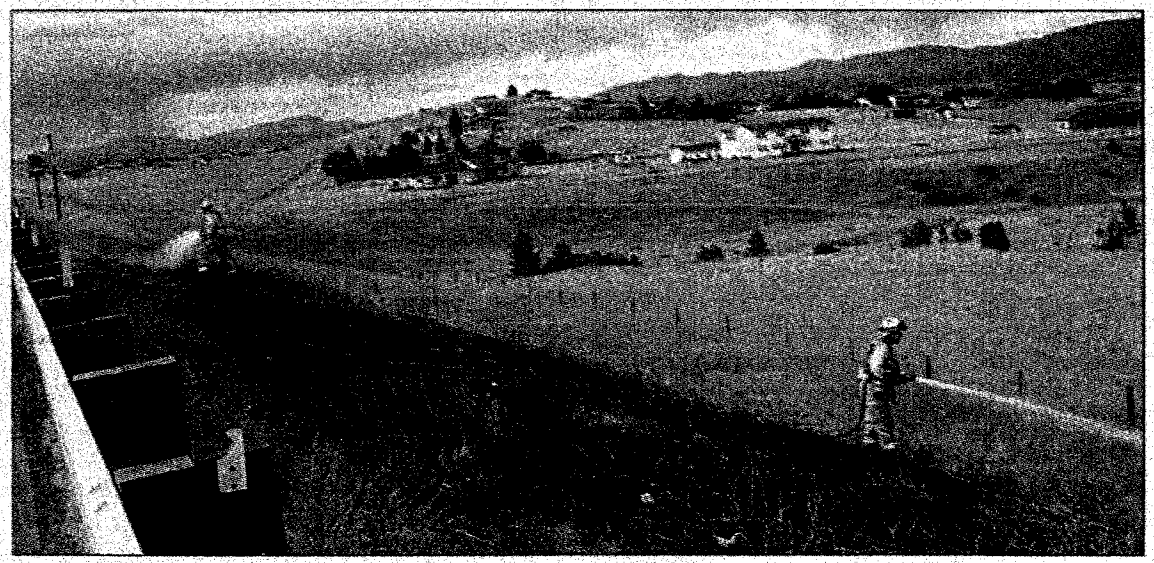
**Left and right, Clancy Volunteer Fire Department members work to control the Clancy Creek Fire August 6.** (Photos by **Bud Siderits**, Clancy VFD)

As Thursday arrived, fire officials said firefighters all around southwestern Montana were bracing for predicted lightning. The National Weather Service issued a "red flag warning," an indication that weather conditions created a serious hazard for wildfires, with gusty winds, high temperatures, dry conditions in grasses, shrubs and trees, and lightning.

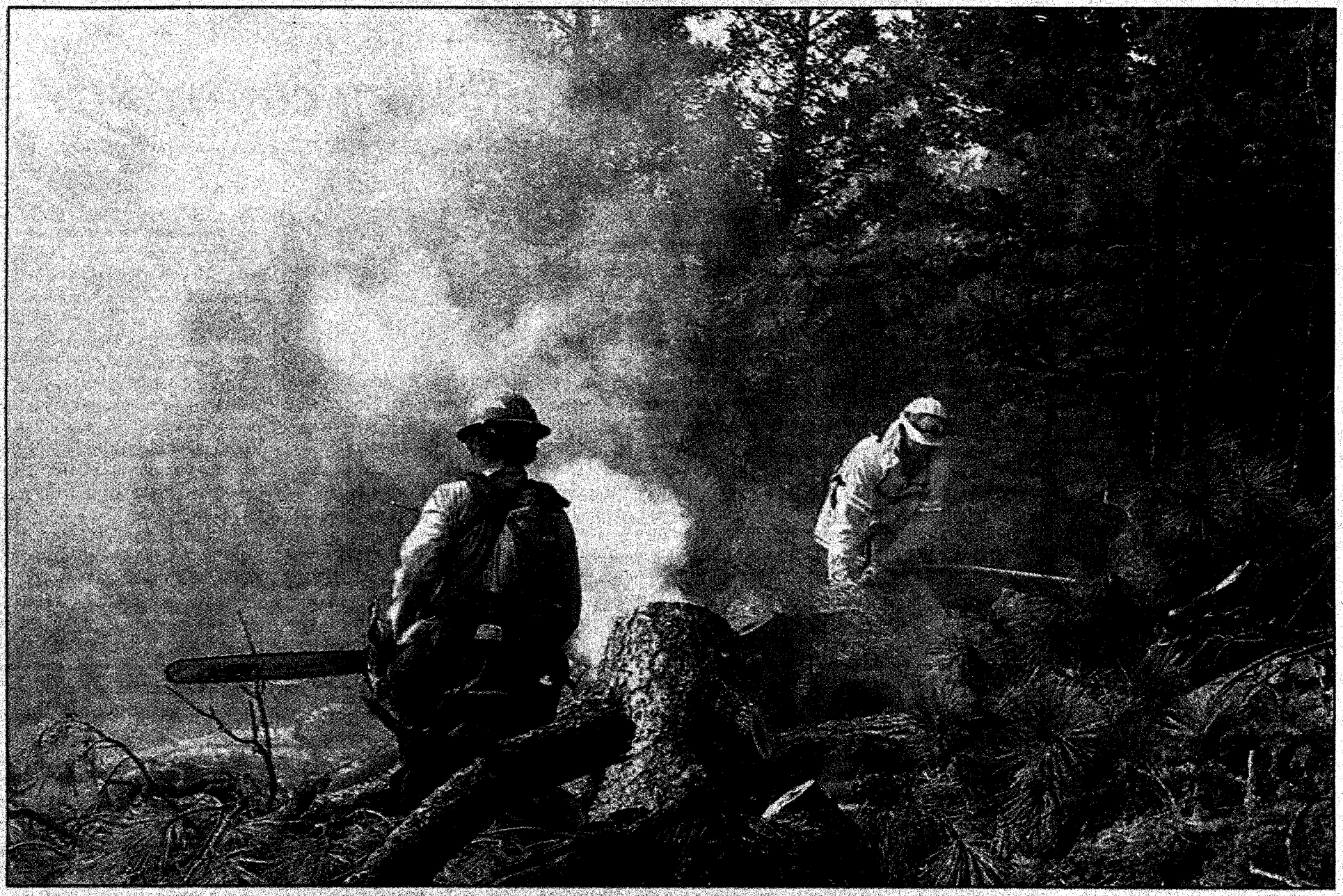
With the stage set, a thunderstorm that rolled through the Boulder area early Thursday afternoon triggered a fire on Depot Hill just west of town. Lightning struck a tree, sparking the blaze that was quickly brought under control by the Boulder Volunteer Fire Department. The fire was not far from a developed residential area, but was extinguished before spreading nearer homes. *(See companion article, p. 1.)*

Another fire Saturday was also near homes, this time near Montana City. Fourteen Montana City Volunteer Fire Department members responded early Saturday evening to a grass fire along the east side of Interstate 15, just south of mile marker 189. With mutual aid from the Clancy VFD, DNRC, Helena Fire Department and Helena National Forest, firefighters were able to keep the fire

See **BLAZES, p. 7**



**Montana City volunteers Larry and Dee Alheim spray water on the fire along I-15 Saturday. The fire was near homes between Montana City and Helena.** (Photo by **Karen Semple**)



**DNRC firefighter Ryan Patzer, left, and Montana City Volunteer firefighter Ray Sedey work to extinguish a diseased tree burning from the inside on the Clancy Creek fire.** (Photo by **Karen Semple,** MCVFD)