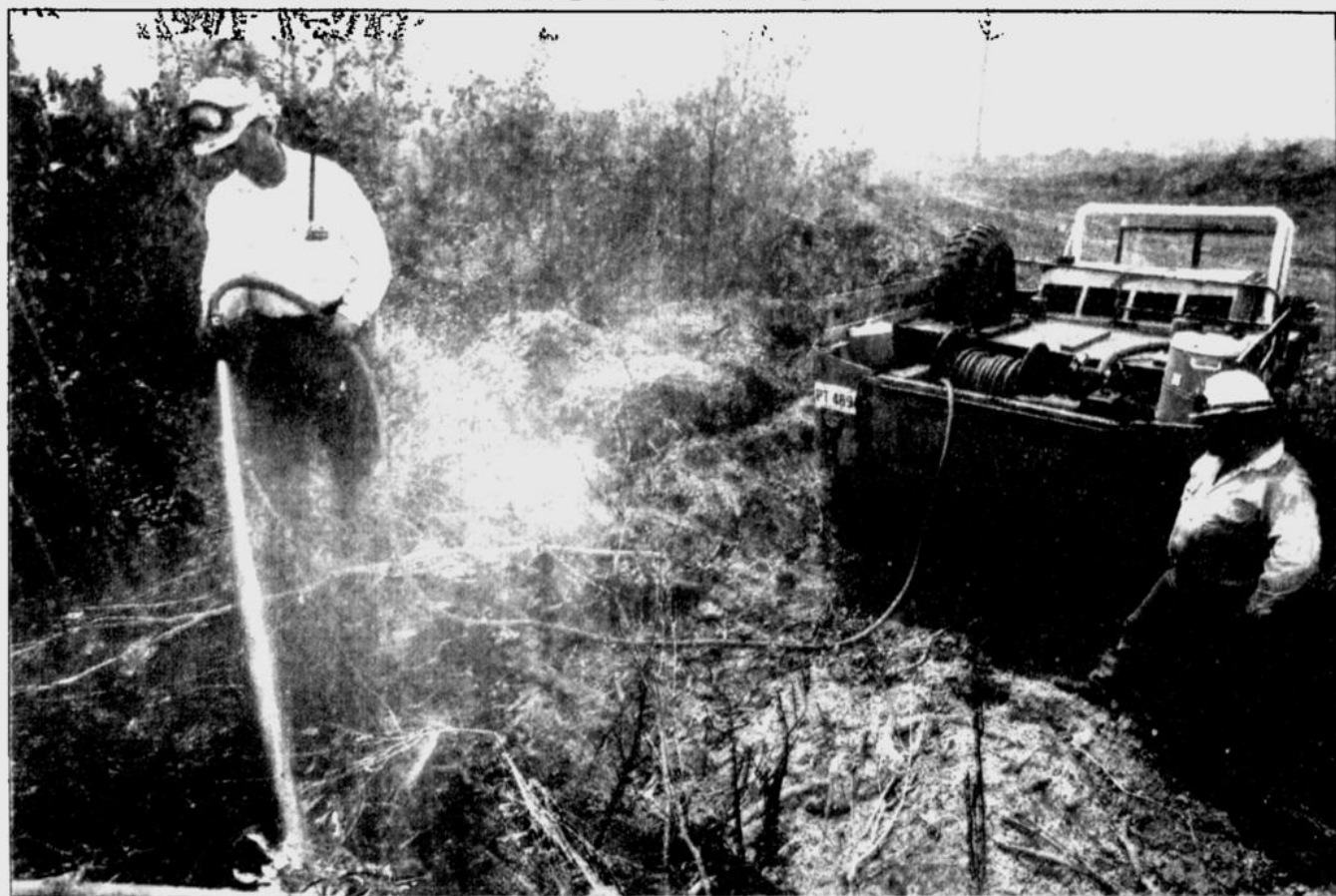


## HOT SPOTS



Staff photo - JAMIE MUNCRIF

Larry Lawrence and Jeffery Stanley hose down hot spots Monday at the site of a forest fire in Pender County.

# Firefighters hope for good rain

## 2 men treated for heat exhaustion as Pender forest fires contained

By **JERRY McELREATH**

*Star-News Intern*

**HOLLY SHELTER** — Firefighters in Pender County Monday had to beat the heat coming from Mother Nature as well as the fires.

About 80 firefighters were battling five fires Monday afternoon, four in the Holly Shelter Game Land area and one near Atkinson. N.C. Forest Service spokesman Alison Davis said between 2,000 and 2,300 acres had been burned so far.

Most of Monday's fires were ground fires, which occur when organic soil — made up of decomposed leaves, roots and tree bark — catches fire under the surface.

Ground fires are difficult to put out, firefighters said. The main goal is to halt their spread.

Although all the fires were contained, Ms. Davis said, it will be some time before all are extinguished. The fires' end will require cooperation from Mother Nature in the form of a good, soaking rain.

To beat the heat of a second straight 99-degree day, the state forestry firefighters stressed pace Monday.

"If you try to move too fast, that's when the heat gets to you," said firefighter Larry Lawrence. All the firefighters have been warned to drink lots of fluids and to take frequent breaks when working on the fires.

"They need to stay with the work,

but this is not the time to show you're the toughest guy on the line," Ms. Davis said.

Mr. Lawrence, who is stationed in Elizabeth City, has been working on the fires in Pender County since Saturday morning. He said the heat almost got the best of him Saturday. "I came close Saturday, but I sat down and drank some Gatorade."

Two firefighters were taken to New Hanover Regional Medical Center Sunday because they showed symptoms of heat exhaustion. Jeff Hathaway, one of the men treated, was back working Monday.

Mr. Hathaway, who came to Pender County from Beaufort County, was helping install a portable bridge Sunday when he began to feel dizzy. "I just got

overheated," he said. He was treated and released at the hospital.

Mr. Hathaway said he had been on the job about eight hours by the time the heat overcame him.

Long hours are not uncommon for the firefighters. Mr. Lawrence said he worked 16½ hours Saturday and 15 hours Sunday and had put in 10 hours by about 4 p.m. Monday.

This spate of forest fires was sparked by lightning striking dead trees in the hot weather, forestry officials said. A 1986 forest fire that burned 78,000 acres left many tall, dead trees that Ms. Davis said act like lightning rods.

She said Monday's conditions were similar to those seen over the weekend, so more fires are a possibility. So far, all the fires have been in isolated areas.

## Burning permits in region canceled

The state canceled burning permits Monday in six southeastern counties because of the danger of more forest fires.

As of today, the state won't allow open burning in Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover or Pender counties, according to a news release from the N.C. Division of Forest Resources.

The ban will be in effect until further notice.

Forest Resources officials cited the hot, dry conditions, along with the potential for lightning and the number of fires already burning, as reasons for the ban.

It does not apply to fires within 100 feet of an occupied home, said division spokesman Alison Davis.

This is the first cancellation of burning permits in North Carolina since October 1991, according to the news release.