

# Police pull body from Lake Irving



Jim Carlson lost his home, which overlooked the No. 8 fairway at Blueberry Pines Golf Course near Menahga. Sarah Smith | Forum News Service



## Calm winds helping fire fight; cleanup begins

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FORUM NEWS SERVICE | BEMIDJI PIONEER



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**P**ARK RAPIDS – Calm winds were allowing 40-some fire departments to get control of a wildfire that has scorched more than 7,100 acres in three counties since Tuesday.

"We'll make a lot of progress today," incident commander Mike Aultman said Thursday of the Green Valley fire, which has burned 12 homes and 43 other buildings between Menahga and Park Rapids.

Evacuees were allowed to return to their homes in the area at noon Thursday, and cleanup began for some residents.

Jim Carlson's home used to overlook the scenic No. 8 fairway at Blueberry Pines Golf Course near Menahga.

The view now looks like a lunar landscape. The home is rubble.

The north end of the course was so hot, it was simply too dangerous to send a firetruck into a contained space to try to save the home.

The firefighter apologized.

"I should have taken 10 minutes to pick up a few things," Carlson said. "I got some car titles and my wife grabbed a couple pictures."

That was all they were able to save.

The 18-hole course was scorched on the north and west ends.

Holes 5, 6, 7 and 8 all play a bit differently now. The cart paths are burned, but the freshly watered fairways stopped the fire's march — barely.

As fires raged all around, a battalion had to use a bulldozer down the No. 4 fairway and across the green to dig a trench.

"If it had jumped to number 16, the next stop was Menahga," said Jeff Yungbauer, who co-manages the course with Carlson.

"They saved Menahga," Yungbauer said of the firefighters who converged on the course.

Essentially, a nine-mile swath through Becker, Hubbard and Wadena counties is surrounded by heavy equipment and trenches.

Firefighters are moving from hot spot to hot spot, dousing or containing the fires in that bulldozed perimeter.

"We absolutely do not want to lose any more personal property," Ron Sanow, spokesman for the Department of Natural Resources, said at Thursday's media briefing.

Air and ground attacks on the fire continue, but in some cases it means letting the fire burn.

By Thursday, some hot spots remained at the golf course, but Yungbauer and his grounds crew was containing any further damage while beginning the repair work on No. 4, raising the deep tracks of the bulldozer, filling them with sand and seeding them.

Yungbauer marveled at the amount of property saved, including the town of Menahga.

The singed areas of the course didn't stop play Thursday. The course was busy, the beverage cart was humming along and nobody complained about the smell of burnt trees.

Golfers will want to stay out of the rough on the four damaged holes, or take a drop shot.

But overall, the destruction of one green seemed relatively minor, considering what could have been lost.

How to help and get help

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How to help and resources for victims of wildfire north of Menahga, Minn.

American Red Cross:

Available to help with emergency shelter, food, mental health services and referrals to other agencies. For help, call 800-560-7641.

Donations can be made to the Red Cross by texting 90999. This is an automatic \$10 donation on a phone bill. Donations can also be made online at [redcross.org](http://redcross.org) or mailed to 1900 Division St. Bemidji, MN 56601.

People interested in donating large quantities of items, such as crates of water, can call 612-460-3700.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Menahga

Brad Livingston of Menahga is organizing a donation site at the church in Menahga. He will be keeping a list of specific items that are needed. For more information, call the church at 218-564-4031 or go to the Facebook page "Green Valley Fire Donation at Our Redeemer Church."

They are looking for personal care items such as clothing and food. Cleaning supplies and yard tools also are needed.

#### Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership

Can help with shelter, food or transportation. Call 218-732-7204 or 218-632-3600.

#### Ruby's Pantry in Menahga

Can help with food, gas, medical and other resources. Call 218-564-4501.

#### Help for farmers

Mike Stevens, Wadena and Hubbard County Farm Service Agency executive director, will be starting the process to have a disaster declaration for the area. Producers who suffered damages can get help with assessments and finding help with forest restoration or building. Call 218-631-2876 or 218-732-9723.

#### Property tax help

Limited property tax relief could also be available. Call the Hubbard County Assessor's Office at 218-732-3452 or Wadena County Assessor's Office at 218-631-7781.

Article by Sarah Smith of Forum News Service.

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