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At least 8 homes lost in fire

By Tammy Bain

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A strip of blackened grass lays about a foot from Velda Baack's home, but the log house remains nearly untouched.

Some of Baack's neighbors in Yucca Heights near Lemoyne weren't as lucky Sunday. An earlier weekend fire near Arthur Bay rekindled, burned more than 4 1/2 miles, forced evacuation of the homes that surround Lake McConaughy and claimed at least eight of them.



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Baack said some residents found safety in a hotel. Others watched the smoke from the nearby beach, spending the night in their car. She and her family tried to return about 8:30 a.m. Monday, but found roads and highways still barricaded from the day before. Then by mid-morning, they could access their homes and assess the damage.



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Baack's neighbor kept her scanner on and alerted others when the fire rekindled late Sunday morning. Baack's neighbor — who did not return a request for comment — would lose her home in the blaze.

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"She's dealing with it," Baack said. "But it's tough."

Source: Anthony Palmeri

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Baack said her neighbor had packed some belongings she wanted to save ahead of time, something Baack is now thinking about for the future. When Keith County Sheriff's officials knocked on doors in Yucca Heights, Baack's daughter asked her mother to save baby pictures.

"Yesterday was really hard," Baack said, "watching the smoke and not knowing what would happen."

But Baack was thankful. She called the firefighters who came from more than 20 surrounding departments “wonderful.”

“They saved a lot of structures that we thought would be gone,” she said.

East of Baack’s home, Todd Kaltenberger doesn’t know if his cabin-in-progress will be totaled, with one black wall and the structure having been doused by water from firefighters’ hoses.



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Kaltenberger had been staying between his cabin and North Platte, where he works at Union Pacific Railroad. After moving west from Lincoln about 10 years ago, he bought a 16-foot Crestliner boat and figured if work would bring him to west-central Nebraska, he may as well enjoy the lake life. Monday, the boat’s frame and surrounding rubble was all that was left.



Tammy Bain

It takes 1,200 degrees to melt aluminum, he said, holding up a melted piece. Kaltenberger said he hadn't insured the boat or his nearby damaged Ford Explorer. With the under-construction cabin, he estimated losing \$20,000 out of pocket.

"I'm glad I wasn't here to see it," said Kaltenberger. By the time he reached his property Sunday after a neighbor told him of the rekindling, firefighters had already barricaded the road. "Or I probably would have just hit my knees."

But like Baack, Kaltenberger found a positive: between last spring and fall, he planted 20 trees — all but the one that was knocked down in the firefighting survived.