

Wind Pushes Wildfire Within Metres of Souris Homes

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Glen Kirby

<https://southwestpost.ca/2018/05/07/wind-pushes-wildfire-within-metres-of-souris-homes/>

Firefighters from three municipalities stopped a wildfire on the outskirts of Souris on Sunday afternoon, just metres away from homes, although a large workshop filled with farm equipment was destroyed.

"When I saw it had crossed the railway tracks, I said 'let's think about packing a few things'," said Mary Williams, as she and her husband watched crews battle the flames across the street from their home.

RCMP say the fire started on a farm south of Highway 2, near Municipal Road 124 W.

Whipped by brisk wind, the blaze tore through grassland and trees west of Souris and raced towards homes in the community's southwest corner.

Souris-Glenwood fire chief Brian Parham says his volunteer squad got the call just before 4 pm Sunday. Oakland-Wawanesa and Grassland municipalities also responded with pumper trucks and firefighters.

Within the first hour, flames traveled nearly one kilometre (0.6-miles) to Souris, jumping the Canadian Pacific rail line which slices through the area.

Plum Creek prevented the fire from reaching homes on the western edge of community but wind pushed the flames south towards residences along 6th Street South, which borders open field and forest.

Gary and Mary Williams were in their backyard setting up a garden fence when they saw smoke drifting into town, then flames advancing towards their home.

"When it gets that close, and with a wind like that...whew!" Mary said Sunday afternoon, with thick smoke billowing across her lawn from a burning building across the street.

Firefighters were unable to save the shop on the west side of 6th Street, approximately 7.5 x 15 metres (25 x 50 feet) in size. Neighbours saw men removing tires stored in the shop before the flames arrived but police say farm equipment in the building was lost.

Concerned that sparks would leap across 6th Street, firefighters sprayed Williams' home with flame retardant foam. Meantime, neighbours pitched in when the senior couple was told by firefighters to evacuate.

"People helped me pack," Mary said. Surveying the burned down shop and charred landscape, she added, "I'm just thankful that it didn't come to that."

Fire crews got the blaze under control by 6 pm. Parham says nobody was injured. A triangle of land approximately two square kilometres (1.25 sq miles) in size was scorched, with a number of homes affected by drifting smoke but none damaged by flames.

RCMP and the Office of the Fire Commissioner determined the fire was accidental, although authorities did not specify the cause.

A ban prohibiting all outdoor burning in the Municipality of Souris-Glenwood was in effect since last week when fire blackened 2,400 acres near Lauder, in the neighbouring municipality of Grassland. *Read about that blaze [here](#).*

Local residents are not supposed to burn grass, leaves and crop residue or light fire pits, burn barrels and fireworks, under threat of a \$1,000 fine and all costs incurred in fighting the resulting wildfire.