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Brush fires break out across Massachusetts

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 08, 2013

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MATT ROCHELEAU FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

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A high number of brush fires ignited across Massachusetts this weekend, and officials warned there will be a heightened risk for more wildland fires as conditions are expected to remain dry and windy as temperatures warm.

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said in a telephone interview that weekend brush fires were reported, “from the Berkshires, to the North Shore, South Shore and everywhere in between.”

He did not know exactly how many brush fires broke out, but said he knew of at least several. Coan said he had heard of at least a couple of fires that spread to adjacent structures, including a home in Saugus that was damaged Saturday. He said he had not heard of anyone being injured.

Coan said brush fires in the Massachusetts are most common during April. As winter transitions to spring, there are often windy days with low humidity and rising temperatures, making it easier for ground-level

plant-life that died over the winter to catch fire, he said.

An average of 1,400 brush fires have been reported in Massachusetts during each of the past five Aprils, Coan said.

He said there are several common causes for such fires: improper disposal of smoking materials; camp fires and cooking fires left unattended; from vehicles, like all-terrain vehicles, driving in wildlands; and from arson.

Coan said residents sometimes intentionally light fires to try to burn and clear brush near their homes, which is legal only if a permit is obtained beforehand. But those controlled fires can sometimes get out of hand. Coan said he believes some of the wildland fires that firefighters had to extinguish over the weekend began as permitted, controlled fires.

“It is important for people to be careful of their actions in and around wildlands and parks,” said Coan.

In the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston, a brush fire charred several thousand square feet of a wooded area off of Victoria Heights Road, Boston Fire Department spokesman Steve MacDonald said at the scene.

The smoky fire started at about 4:30 p.m. in a wooded area off a quiet access road, several hundred yards away from a housing complex in one direction and a grocery store in the other direction.

Seven engines, two brush units and three ladder trucks responded. It took about 90 minutes to extinguish it.

Firefighters had to move quickly to connect hundreds of feet of hose in order to reach the fire, MacDonald said.

“It was a very labor-intensive process,” he said

On Saturday, the National Weather Service issued a red flag warning for most of the state. It was the first red flag warning in Massachusetts this year.

That warning was lifted Saturday evening, but the weather service said there was an “elevated fire weather

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Boston firefighters battled a brush fire off Victoria Heights Road.

potential” on Sunday and that dry, warm and windy conditions may continue through the start of the week.

“If a wild fire develops, it may spread rapidly and become difficult to extinguish,” the service said in a statement.

The weather service said rain showers are a possibility on Tuesday.

Globe Correspondent Alli Knothe contributed to this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com.

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