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— Kathy Miller



Reporter-Herald /Douglas Van Reeth

Jim Stetson and Kathy Miller talk Monday about problems they've been encountering in their neighborhood since the forest fire at Bobcat Gulch. Some of the charred ground is seen in the background.

# GAWKERS, GET LOST

## Bobcat Gulch area residents look into closing roads to keep onlookers away

By Pamela Dickman  
Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

They survived the Bobcat Gulch wildfire. Now residents who live in the area are dealing with another problem — gawkers.

Last weekend — the first weekend since the fire that a Larimer County Deputy was not guarding Forest Service Road 128 — hundreds of people flooded into the burned out area, residents Kathy and Carl Miller and Jim Stetson said. Residents stationed themselves at the bottom of the road and asked people not to come up just to look. They counted 300 vehicles and 600 people in 17 hours, the Millers said.

When asked, 90 percent of the people who were simply interested in taking a peek, turned

back. Others did not.

"We're not telling them they cannot come up," Carl Miller said.

They are simply asking people to give them time to recover instead of being what he calls "gawkies."

"All we want is to get our lives back," Kathy Miller said. "We need time. It's like a death."

The flood of onlookers has both positive and negative aspects, U.S. Forest Service district ranger Ellen Hodges said. A first-hand glance provides a lesson in caution, but it also makes residents feel as though they are under a microscope, she said.

"My heart goes out to these folks," she said. "This is a huge curiosity."

Hodges added, "It is a new thing now. It

happens after every natural event. People just have a natural curiosity. They just want to see things for themselves."

Kathy Miller — dressed in a white T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Obey the bans" on the front and a map of the wildfire on the back — stood Monday along Forest Service Road 128 at the T intersection at the top of the hill. The burned-out forest served as a backdrop and a reminder of the force that devoured 10,600 acres and 22 structures.

Having just come from a meeting with U.S. Forest Service officials, she spoke about people coming onto private roads, some simply looking and others breaking the law.

People are still coming to the area to camp and violating the open burning ban, resident Susan Kinzie said. Despite the fact that an abandoned campfire started the Bobcat blaze, some still light campfires, Kinzie said.

People also are coming into the area and stealing the remains of exploded propane tanks,

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## Bobcat

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hunks of old stoves and other items, Carl Miller said.

"One lady lost her mother's silver that she was trying to save," Kathy Miller said. "She had a pile of stuff. She was going to come back."

When she did, the items were gone.

"Why victimize people that have already been victimized?" Kinzie said. "Where's their class?"

Looting is definitely against the law and should be reported to the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, Hodges said.

Deputy Cindy Gordon agreed that it constitutes theft and people should report it. But no one has.

"No one has called us with that complaint," Gordon said.

The Millers, Stetson, Kinzie and the two other residents who met with Forest Service officials on Monday know what they want to do to stop it. They want to close the road.

Kinzie said she doesn't want it closed permanently, just until the fire danger has passed and people have had time to heal.

Carl Miller claims that most of the roads in the area are private, owned and maintained by the residents. He estimated that the residents receive nearly \$6,000 total per year from Larimer County and the U.S. Forest Service for maintaining miles of roads. They foot the rest of the bill, he said.

They are willing to work with the Forest Service, but if it comes to it, the Millers said they would go to court.

"We will close the private roads," Carl Miller said.

U.S. Forest Service officials want to work with the residents, Hodges said. Closing some of the roads may be a possibility, but first, officials need to examine county records to determine which roads are private and which allow public access, she said.

The county claims the main road

into the area, Road 128, is public access, while the residents contend it is private, Hodges said. If a road is deemed completely private, residents can close it even if it is the only access to a public area, Hodges said.

Other roads in the area also come under scrutiny. Each road may have different restrictions and complexities, which is why officials need to investigate, Hodges said.

Some roads are more cut and dried. There are many roads on Forest Service land that are unauthorized and do not lead to homes, Hodges said. On those roads, crews may plow out the grooves and spread seed, she said.

Before making any firm plans, officials will examine the roads and investigate county records, Hodges said. On Monday, she and other Forest Service officials drove around the Bobcat Gulch area looking at roads.

She added, "It's not a decision we'll make lightly."