

Terrace Bay - Schreiber

NEWS

Vol. 43, No. 27

July 5, 1989

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Hazardous forest fire conditions caused by lightning and dry weather

By Norm Gladish
Fire Prevention Technician

The past week has been explosive with new fire starts in Northern Ontario. It all began slowly with three fires on Monday, June 19, 1989.

The next day five new fires were burning 84 hectares. Then 17 fires Wednesday, jumping to 117 starts Friday, burning close to 44,000 hectares.

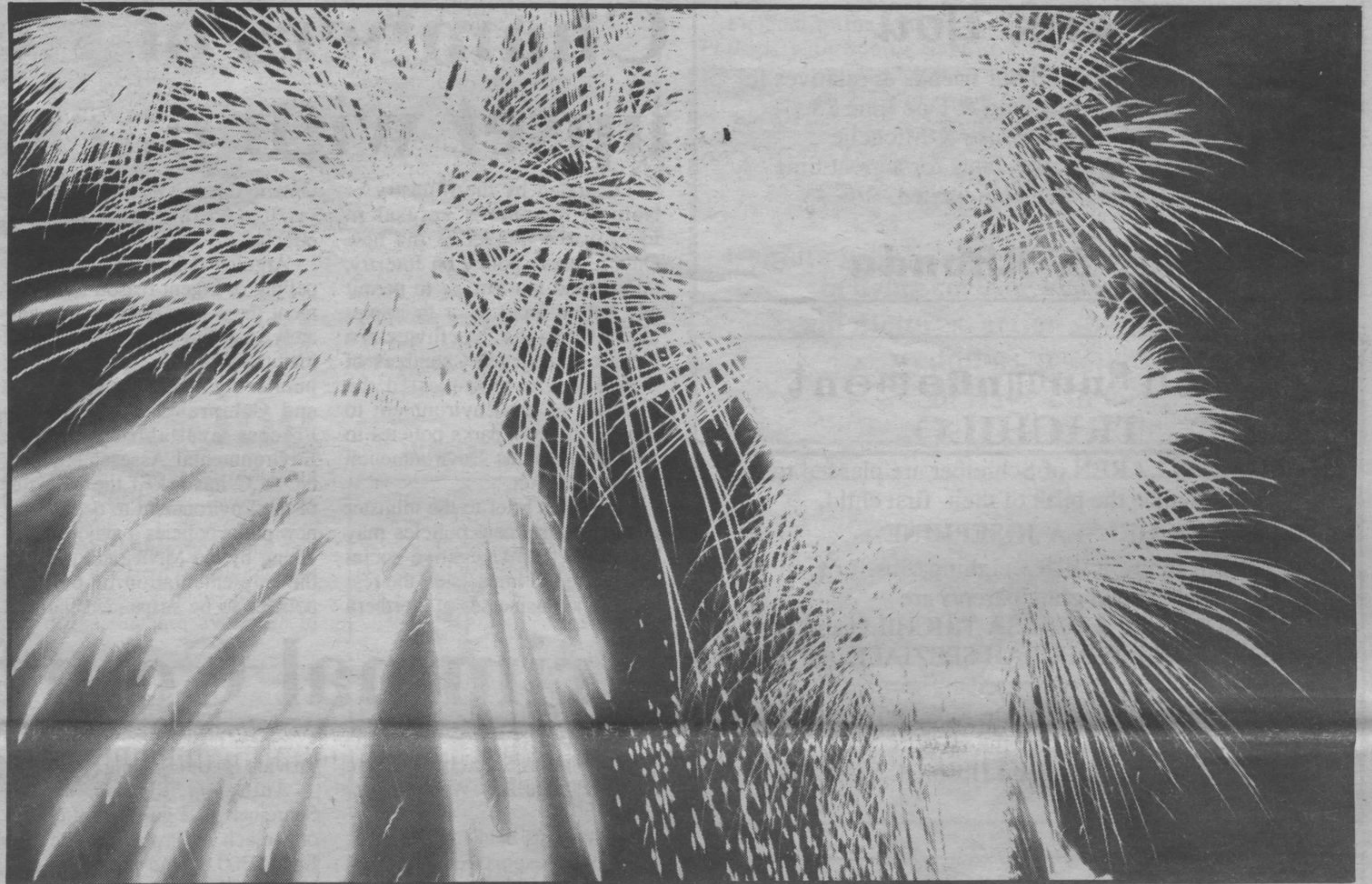
Terrace Bay District crews handled three lightning fires south-west of Gaffhook Lake. Inaccessible by road, fire fighters were dropped at the nearest water source.

Long hose lays over rugged terrain (up to 3,200 feet) were necessary. Because crews were slow to attack, the fires were cooled by CL-215 water bombers arriving from Geraldton Fire Operations Headquarters.

Initial attack was effected by MNR fire crews from Manitowadge. Final mop-up and equipment retrieval was completed by EFF crews. These back-up crews allowed regular fire fighters to return to the Manitowadge Fire Attack Base, ready to action new fires.

They did not have long to wait. Late Wednesday afternoon an industrial fire broke out at Noranda Minerals (Geco) mine-site. Suspected cause was sparks generated from steel tracks of a backhoe working on rocky ground adjacent to the tailings pond.

Crews were dispatched from Manitowadge at 4:30 p.m. Despite rapid initial attack, high winds and dry fuel conditions



Fireworks lit up the sky down at the Terrace bay beach last Saturday night. Hundreds gathered to watch the light show and enjoy a bonfire to help keep warm. The fireworks lasted for about 50 minutes and marked the final hour of Canada's 122 Birthday. Photo by Dave Chmara

caused flames to spread quickly.

Within half-an-hour the fire had exploded to nearly 12 hectares (30 acres) in size. Too hot to approach on the ground, CL-215 water bombers were called for.

The nearest aircraft in Geraldton were busy with far northern fires. Thunder Bay Fire Centre had the next closest available bombers. Within 1.5 hours, lead by BirdDog 6, Tanker 268 was dropping the first six-ton load of water on "Terrace 6".

Joined later by Tanker 265, the two planes dropped 41 loads of Wowun Lake water on the flames before leaving for home, shortly before 9:00 p.m.

Now MNR fire fighters, with the assistance of the Manitowadge Volunteer Fire Department and Geco employees, could action hose lines on the fire edge.

The fire was under control just before dark. An early return to the "lines" next morning ensured that winds and dry, hot weather did not fan the flames back to life.

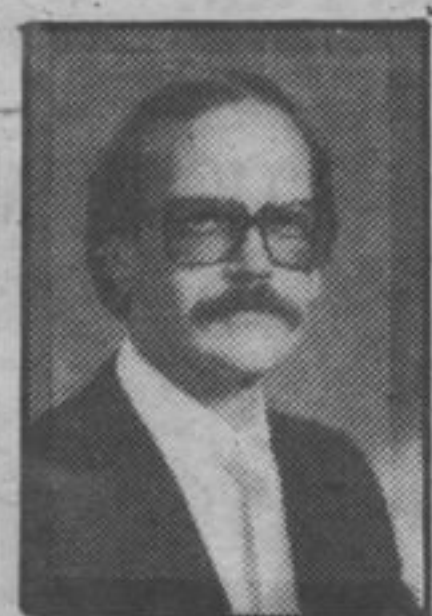
Meanwhile, in the Geraldton District, fire crews were buzzing. People from two villages had been evacuated. Fire had come within 500 metres of Webeque. Sparks and fire brands were carried by convection columns into Lansdowne House from a forest fire near that village. Geraldton was bursting with evacuated families from both places.

As of June 22, 110 fires were burning in North Central and North West Regions. Most were spawned by heavy lightning activity. People are urged to be extremely careful with campfires. Fire fighting resources are already being stretched to the limit.



Reeve Jim Ziegler presents Citizen of the Year, Peggy Thompson, and Youth of the Year, Karen Fournier, with plaques during Canada Day opening ceremonies outside the Terrace Bay Municipal Offices. Both were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the community.

Photo by Dave Chmara



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