

KNP Complex Fire Live Updates: Hume Lake area threatened as blaze moves through sequoias

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, September 16, 2021

4:30 p.m. Wednesday: U.S. Forest Service issues closure order

The KNP Complex Fire is burning toward the Hume Lake Ranger District, "creating a very dangerous situation for the public," Forest Supervisor Teresa Benson said.

To protect public and firefighters, the U.S. Forest Service issued the KNP Complex Fire Areas, Roads, and Trails Closure Order.

"Roads and trail systems within the closure area are narrow and hazardous, with few routes for evacuation," Benson said. "Roads are also being used for staging heavy equipment, such as dozers and other suppression equipment, and fire suppression activities make the area unsafe for the public."

Exemptions to the order include residents and owners of private property, federal, state, local officers, or members of an organized rescue or fire fighting force performing an official duty. The order will be in effect on Thursday and will last until Dec. 31.

9:30 a.m. Wednesday: Fire operations to transition to Blue Type 1

The parks' fire management operation will transition with a Southern-area Blue Type 1 National Incident Management Team on Thursday.

Type 1 teams handle the "largest and highest-complexity emergency situations. A community meeting will be scheduled when the team is in place, according to park officials.

8.45 a.m. Wednesday: Fire grows towards Three Rivers

The community of Three Rivers — the gateway to the sequoias — is preparing for the worst.

The KNP Complex Fire continues to threaten the small foothill community, which is either under evacuation orders or a warning.

On Monday night, the Paradise Fire made a downhill run and crossed the middle fork of the Kaweah River and the Generals Highway, near Potwisha Campground.

As of Wednesday morning, the Paradise Fire is 5,914 acres and the Colony Fire is 1,125 acres, for a combined total 7,039. Containment is at 0%.

The KNP Complex has been a full suppression incident since the discovery of the smoke stacks the morning following a lightning storm last week. The Paradise Fire is inaccessible by ground, and only a limited number of ground firefighters can access the Colony Fire.

A Type 1 Incident Command team — an elite team reserved for the nation's most complicated blazes — will arrive by the end of the week. A Type 2 team arrived Tuesday and was absorbed into operations.

Efforts to protect the sequoias have taken priority.

Both fires were projected to advance in the direction of Giant Forest, home to more than 2,000 giant sequoias, including the General Sherman Tree—the largest tree on Earth by volume.

"People come from around the world to see the General Sherman tree, and that's been here for almost 3,000 years," Superintendent Clay Jordan said. "We want people to come 300 years from now to enjoy those trees. Some of the buildings we have will be falling apart in 30 years. That's the scale of things. It's a little unusual."

Between the Windy and Walkers fires in the Sequoia National Forest and the KNP Complex, roughly 18,000 acres of the park and forest land have burned in less than a month.

Evacuations in place

A mandatory evacuation order is in place for the following areas of Three Rivers:

- All of Mineral King Road, from the intersection with Highway 198 to the end of the road
- Areas along Sierra King Drive, Crest Lane, Hammond Drive, and Oak Grove Drive
- Areas along Highway 198 from the intersection with Mineral King Road to the Sequoia National Park entrance station

All employee housing in Sequoia National Park is also under mandatory evacuation.

An evacuation warning was issued for the remainder of Three Rivers, from Edison Drive west to the Mineral King Road. This includes North Fork Drive, South Fork Drive, Cherokee Oaks, Old Three Rivers Road, and Blossom Drive.

The evacuation shelter location is at the Woodlake Community Center at 145 N. Magnolia Street in Woodlake. The Woodlake location is open throughout the night. Residents who need help evacuating can call 2-1-1.

All park facilities were already closed and wilderness trailhead permits had been canceled. Kings Canyon National Park is still open at this time.

Air quality warnings

Air quality is seriously affected in Three Rivers. Particulate matter readings have been in the “hazardous” range for much of the day. Communities further from the parks are also feeling air quality impacts.

Track your local air quality at www.fire.airnow.gov.

Sequoia wildfires cause more road, trail closures as blaze moves toward Hume Lake area

By Joshua Tehee

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 16, 2021

On the same day the U.S. Forest Service ended a regional closure order affecting California’s national forests, it announced closures would continue for areas inside Sequoia National Forest due to the KNP Complex Fire.

That fire — which encompasses the Paradise and Colony fires — has now burned nearly 9,000 acres in nearby Sequoia National Park. On Thursday, the Paradise Fire was measured at 7,257 acres and Colony Fire at 1,683 acres. Both were burning with zero percent containment.

Because of the fires’ potential growth, rate of spread, and path — it’s growing toward the forest’s Hume Lake Ranger District — the decision was made to protect public and firefighter safety in that area, Forest Supervisor Teresa Benson said in a statement.

“Roads and trail systems within the closure area are narrow and hazardous, with few routes for evacuation. Roads are also being used for staging heavy equipment, such as dozers and other suppression equipment, and fire suppression activities make the area unsafe for the public.”

The order will remain in effect through Dec. 31 and includes two main areas within the forest. One runs for a stretch of the east side of Highway 180 along the forest’s boundary. The other runs from the forest boundary east toward the Jennie Lakes Wilderness. A map of the areas can be seen online.

Windy Fire updates

The forest service also called for additional closures in areas under threat from the Windy Fire. That fire has burned 2,202 acres on the Tule River Indian Reservation and in Giant Sequoia National Monument. It remains at zero percent containment.

On Thursday, Tulare County issued a mandatory evacuation order for the communities of Johnsondale and nearby Camp Whitsett, saying there is an immediate threat to life, safety, and property. All residents and visitors should leave before the fire reaches these communities.

Porterville College, 100 E. College Ave. is serving as a temporary evacuation point for those in need of information and assistance with shelter.

An evacuation map can be found online at tularecounty.ca.gov/emergencies.

Sequoia wildfires continue to grow uncontained. New Incident Management Team called in

By Joshua Tehee

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021

The KNP Complex Fire, burning in Sequoia National Park, continued with uncontained growth on Tuesday into Wednesday, prompting a mandatory evacuation order for parts of Three Rivers and a change in the wildfire's management operation.

More than 7,000 acres have now been burned by the Paradise and Colony fires — at 5,914 and 1,125 acres, respectively. Both fires have 0% containment.

The Paradise Fire growth has been to the west, where the whole of Mineral King Road is now under a mandatory evacuation, along with areas along Sierra King Drive, Crest Lane, Hammond Drive and Oak Grove Drive, and areas along Highway 198 from the intersection with Mineral King Road to the Sequoia National Park entrance station.

On Thursday, the National Park Service's fire management operation will transition to a Blue Type 1 National Incident Management team. There are 16 of these Type 1 teams in the country and they are equipped and deployed to handle the largest and highest-complexity emergency situations.

AIR QUALITY ADVISORY

The fires are seriously affecting air quality. Particulate matter readings in Three Rivers were in the hazardous range for much of Tuesday. Some monitors in the area are reading AQI levels near 700. The AQI index is typically counted on a scale of zero to 500.

An air quality advisory is in place for the San Joaquin Valley.

KNP Complex swells, expanding evacuation orders into Three Rivers

The Sun, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Sept. 15 – The KNP Complex Fire is continuing to spread in the southern Sierras threatening ancient giant Sequoias within the Sequoia National Park.

The park remains closed as park employees were ordered to evacuate their housing on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux extended and expanded a mandatory evacuation order into the following areas of Three Rivers:

- All of Mineral King Road, from the intersection with Highway 198 to the end of the road
- Areas along Sierra King Drive, Crest Lane, Hammond Drive, and Oak Grove Drive
- Areas along Highway 198 from the intersection with Mineral King Road to the Sequoia National Park entrance station

His agency also issued an evacuation warning for the remainder of Three Rivers east of Edison Drive and east of Mineral King Road.

Currently, the KNP Complex – comprised of the Paradise Fire and the Colony Fire – ballooned on Tuesday, with it cracking 7,039 acres affected.

The Paradise Fire is outstripping the Colony Fire, comprising 5,914 acres of the total complex acreage.

The combined complex remains at 0 percent containment with 300 firefighting personnel on the ground.

Sept. 13 – A set of wildfires in the Sierra Nevada foothills near Sequoia National Park and Forest have prompted a wave of evacuation orders from fire and Sheriff's officials.

The fires – KNP Complex and Windy – were all ignited by lightning strikes amid a Thursday night summer storm in the mountain range.

The KNP Complex Fire prompted officials to close key areas of the park Sunday night, including the Lodgepole Campground, Wuksachi Lodge, and the Giant Forest/Lodgepole area.

They also barred further access to the General Sherman Tree until further notice and closed the road connecting Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, directing visitors to evacuate via Highway 180.

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux also ordered mandatory evacuation for Silvery City and Cabin Cove along Mineral King Road

Currently, the KNP Complex sits at a combined 1,037 acres consumed, with zero percent containment, Forest Service

Meanwhile, the Windy Fire, which has spread to 650 acres in the Sequoias with 232 firefighting personnel on the ground to begin containment.

Want to help KNP Complex Fire evacuees? Here's how

By Sheyenne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

The KNP Complex Fire is burning in the Sequoia National Park and has forced portions of Three Rivers to evacuate.

More evacuation orders may be issued in the coming days, which means some Tulare County residents will be without shelter.

Currently the following areas are under an evacuation order:

- All of Mineral King Road, from the intersection with Highway 198 to the end of the road
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Three Rivers, from Edison Drive west to the Mineral King Road is under an evacuation warning. This includes North Fork Drive, South Fork Drive, Cherokee Oaks, Old Three Rivers Road, and Blossom Drive.

Those who want to donate items to the KNP Complex Fire can do so through the United Way of Tulare County. Suggested donations include: bottled water, non-perishable food, and hygiene products.

Drop off locations are set up at Salvation Army in Visalia and Tulare.

Tulare, 314 E. San Joaquin

- Monday and Tuesday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closed from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.); and Wednesday, 2 to 5 p.m.

Visalia, 1501 W. Main St.

- Monday and Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closed 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.); and Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Families who have been displaced by the KNP Complex Fire and need items can request to receive them by emailing fire@unitedwaytc.org. They will receive a referral to go to Salvation Army to receive what they need.

If people want to make a monetary donation, they can text FireTC to 41444. If they would like to donate gift cards, they can email donatefiretc@unitedwaytc.org. All proceeds will be used to help Tulare County evacuees.

Residents can call 2-1-1 for more information.

The evacuation shelter location is at the Woodlake Community Center at 145 N. Magnolia Street in Woodlake. The Woodlake location is open throughout the night.

Three Rivers under evacuation orders, warning. Crews work to protect giant sequoias from KNP Complex

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

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California’s poor air quality from wildfire smoke raises COVID-19 risk. Here’s why

By Brianna Taylor

The Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Natomas resident Alice Montes, a senior legislative aid at the state Capitol, started experiencing chest pain and coughing spells two weeks ago, making it difficult for her to get work done. So like many people during the pandemic, she thought it was COVID-19 and rushed to get tested at her job.

But when Montes tested negative for the virus, she realized she was experiencing wildfire smoke symptoms from the Caldor Fire. After being out of work for a couple of days and then housebound for a week, she now double-masks at work — not out of fear for the coronavirus, but for the many minute particles brought to the region by wildfires.

“I’m not typically one that gets sick often so my employer asked if I can get tested just to be sure because of the breathing problems and I did, I tested negative,” Montes said. “I called my doctor and was, like, ‘I don’t know what’s going on.’ I didn’t feel good and all of a sudden the fires are picking up more, and the air quality is so bad.”

As Sacramento and California continue to experience a longer and more pronounced wildfire season, regional air quality is suffering.

The smoke, which wafts hundreds of miles to the Valley floor depending on the wind, can irritate the lungs, cause inflammation and affect the immune system, making it seem like COVID-19. But, what’s worse: The smoke makes lungs susceptible to more infections including SARS-Cov-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

One lesson learned from 2020’s record-setting wildfire season is clear, experts say: Smoke is linked to an increase in positive COVID-19 cases and COVID-19 related deaths.

COVID exposure linked to wildfire smoke

Last year, smoke from California’s wildfire season contributed to an increase of 4,639 COVID-19 cases and an increase of 109 COVID-19-related deaths, according to a 2020 Harvard study. It’s not known how this year’s wildfire season will affect the number of COVID-19 cases, especially with the deadlier and more contagious delta variant.

“I have patients who are coming from El Dorado County ... they have all kinds of breathing problems and they’re like ‘I don’t know, a friend of a friend had COVID, I just want to get checked.’ And some of them, unfortunately, are coming up positive,” said Dr. Eric Tepper, a physician in private practice in East Sacramento.

Tepper has experienced a 30% uptick of concerned patients with wildfire smoke symptoms that overlap with traditional COVID-19 symptom indicators. As a result, he has seen an increase of patients requesting to be tested and has diagnosed an increase of positive cases within the past three weeks.

Wildfire smoke contains thousands of different compounds, but one of the most dangerous is PM2.5, particulate matter of soot, ash and chemicals measuring 2.5 microns or less. PM2.5, which is 30 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair, is really dangerous because it can get through the trachea and

embed into the lung tissue, according to Chris Easter, the director of air quality and noise in Northern California at Environmental Science Associates.

As fall approaches, Easter warns that the region has yet to see the most intense part of wildfire season. He recommends remaining vigilant of the air quality and wearing either an N95 or KN95 mask, which are proven to filter out PM2.5 and provide greater protection against COVID-19.

“We’ve had another challenging year,” Easter said. “The Caldor Fire in the Lake Tahoe Basin and the Dixie Fire ... have wreaked havoc really in those communities but have also severely degraded our air.”

Smoke from the fires, light winds and continued warmth are likely to persist in the region.

“Until we get a good storm event and I don’t mean just a light rain I mean a good solid quarter of an inch or more storm event, we will have these fires that will persist, and we may even have some more fires to deal with and that’s just the reality of it,” Easter said.

Vaccination, masks and patience

As wildfire smoke persists, causing people to cough and unintentionally spread the virus, Tepper said he’s urging his patients to get vaccinated — especially in the case of an evacuation.

“You may be staying in a gymnasium at a high school with 300 of your closest friends packed in like sardines because that’s the only place you have and now also your risk of COVID goes up greatly,” Tepper said. “Social distancing doesn’t work in a disaster.”

Sacramento’s air quality continues to be unhealthy for sensitive groups as particle levels continue to rise, according to AirNow, home of the EPA’s Air Quality Index. So health experts say it’s vital to be vaccinated, mask up and remain aware of your community’s air quality to decrease future health scares like Montes’.

“I was just tired, I was super fatigued because my lungs were overworking themselves,” Montes said. “I was coughing and the fact that I didn’t have a fever or any other symptoms was kind of making me feel better but still you never know.”

The CDC has compiled a list on how to remain safe from and recognize the effects of wildfire smoke during a pandemic; among their recommendations:

- Use an air purifier in one or more rooms within the home. Air purifiers work best when run continuously with doors and windows closed.
- Avoid activities that create more indoor air pollution including frying foods, sweeping, vacuuming and using gas-powered appliances.
- Know the difference between symptoms from smoke and COVID-19: A dry cough, sore throat and difficulty breathing can be caused by both. Symptoms like fever or chills, muscle or body aches and diarrhea are signs of COVID-19.
- The face-covering you wear matters: Cloth masks, that have become widely popular throughout the pandemic, do not protect you from smoke. N95 and KN95 respirators protect you from smoke and COVID-19. The mask should have a tight seal to the face.

Thunderstorms continue to increase risk of spread in Dixie Fire

By Amelia Davidson and Vincent Moleski

The Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Concerns over thunderstorms at the Dixie Fire remain over the weekend, potentially whipping up the blaze Sunday afternoon.

Officials warned Saturday that they do not expect the weather conditions to let up just yet, and a chance of thunderstorms remained Sunday. The National Weather Service predicted a chance of gusty, mostly dry storms with a potential for fire starts through Sunday afternoon along the Sierra Nevada in Northern California. The storms could also bring gusty and erratic winds to the region.

The Dixie Fire, which began July 14, has tended to follow cyclical patterns of growth based on the smoke cover. When the cover is strong, such as for much of the past week, the fire remains relatively suppressed and crews can expand containment lines. When weather conditions cause the smoke to lift, such as Friday, the blaze has the potential to explode once more.

Overnight, the fire grew by only about 4,000 acres, and although containment remained stagnant at 31%, fire officials said Sunday morning that they will be working to improve containment even as winds roll in.

"Firefighters continue to build and improve containment lines on the Dixie Fire," Cal Fire officials said in a morning update. "Vegetation is extremely dry, and burning conditions are near critical. Fire behavior may consist of wind-driven surface fire, isolated torching, and spotting the next few days."

Friday's 23,000-acre expansion was still relatively low compared to the previous Friday, when the blaze charred 110,000 acres in a single day. But officials had said Saturday that the thunderstorms had pushed the fire precariously close to homes in areas such as Keddie Ridge, Wilcox Valley and Westwood.

Now, fire officials say that the North Arm of Indian Valley, as well as Wilcox Valley, will take priority for firefighting resources as crews prepare for possible storms ahead.

"What we saw yesterday was unfortunately those thunderstorms did materialize and they did have gusty winds that went 360 degrees, up to 50 mph," Jake Cagle, the operations chief at the east zone of the fire, said in a Saturday morning incident briefing. "So our crews were highly engaged in the afternoon in structure protection in there. It was a very tough day yesterday in there in the afternoon."

The blaze, California's second-largest of all time, has burned 544,816 acres (851 square miles). The fire is now burning in five counties after crossing into Shasta County near Lassen National Park overnight Friday. The fire is also burning in Butte, Plumas, Tehama and Lassen counties.

Officials said Saturday that as thunderstorms remain in the forecast, total acreage could continue to increase significantly.

"We do have a forecast of thunderstorms again today," Cagle said. "A little bit less ... but if they do arise we can expect the same kind of fire behavior, winds pushing fire in all directions. So that's what we're faced with; another critical day today, another challenging day today."

Firefighters took advantage of mild weather conditions early in the week to boost containment. Nearly the entire southern portion of the blaze is now secured behind fire lines.

But the fire has continued to spread with limited control in sections in the north and eastern parts of the fire, prompting officials to scrap plans to lift evacuation orders in the Lake Almanor area Friday. Tehama County released additional evacuation orders for the Mill Creek area Friday, and Plumas County did the same for the Genessee Valley.

And officials warned Friday that the small Lassen County town of Westwood, just east of Lake Almanor, may be in imminent danger.

"Westwood is now a concern," said Brian Rhodes, the Forest Service's deputy fire and aviation director for California, on Friday. "It does appear that the fire wants to move that way."

The Dixie Fire has destroyed 1,120 buildings and damaged 74. Among the losses are 615 single homes, according to Cal Fire. Last Wednesday, the fire tore through Greenville, destroying most of the Northern California town. Canyon Dam was also burned last Thursday. No civilian injuries or casualties have been reported yet from either incident.

Through the week, officials have been able to locate 46 previously unaccounted for people from the area of the blaze. On Friday evening, the Plumas County Sheriff's Office announced that it was still searching for one person: Ronald Avila of Greenville.

As of Sunday, 14,838 homes and businesses remain threatened.

Many areas near the fire remain under evacuation orders, spanning across Butte, Plumas, Tehama and Lassen Counties. Local officials have an online map available with more details of evacuation orders and warnings.

A total of 6,550 fire personnel are assigned to the Dixie Fire, plus 20 helicopters and 570 engines. Three firefighters have been injured in the blaze, according to Cal Fire's morning update.

The official cause of the Dixie Fire is still under investigation, but just a few days after the fire started on July 14, PG&E released a report suggesting that its equipment may have sparked the fire. On Monday, PG&E released an additional report saying that they had found no fault with the power lines that allegedly could have begun the Dixie Fire.

Trinity County wildfires

A lightning storm began a series of fires in Trinity County in late July. Of those, two have ballooned into large-scale wildfires: the Monument Fire and the McFarland Fire.

The Monument Fire began near the town of Del Loma two weeks ago and has since grown to 82,435 acres with 7% containment. Overnight, about 3,000 acres were added to the total, and containment inched up by 2%.

The fire is burning squarely within Trinity County. The blaze has prompted evacuation orders for Del Loma, Big Bar, Junction City and other surrounding areas.

On Saturday, officials said that winds in the area pushed crews to focus on structure protection, especially in the Burnt Ranch area, rather than containment operations. On Sunday, fire officials said that winds will once again be a cause for concern.

"Today, firefighters will be challenged with consistent northwest winds aligning with drainages, creating uphill runs," U.S. Forest Service officials said in a Sunday morning update. "Hidden pockets of heat that exist around the perimeter of the fire will intensify and spread as they become exposed to stronger winds."

The fire moved forward only modestly in the north, but the Forest Service said that the south flank remains active, backing into Miners Creek. Officials expect that winds could reach 30 miles per hour in some areas of the fire.

The McFarland Fire has charred 43,708 acres south of the town of Wildwood, on the border of Shasta, Trinity and Tehama counties. It is 68% contained.

The fire's growth has slowed significantly since the weekend. The fire grew around 2,000 acres between Friday and Saturday, and crews increased containment by 6%. By Sunday morning, another 1,000 acres were charred and crews upped containment by 5%.

All evacuation orders have been lifted at the blaze. A few areas remain under evacuation warning Friday, including the community of Platina.

Six firefighters were injured Friday fighting the blaze. All are expected to fully recover.

Other fires

- The River Fire exploded more than a week ago on the border of Placer and Nevada counties, near the city of Colfax. But after its initial rapid expansion forced thousands to evacuate, the fire slowed last weekend and hit 100% containment Friday evening.

The blaze charred 2,619 acres in total. It has not grown in the past 72 hours.

The blaze ultimately destroyed 142 structures, 102 of which were homes. Much of the destruction came in the Chicago Park neighborhood near Colfax, which the fire hit during its initial rapid expansion. Two civilian injuries and one firefighter injury were also reported during the blaze's early hours.

Some ground resources will remain in the area in the coming days to aid in mop up and repopulation.

- The Glen Fire, burning in the foothills of Yuba County, ignited and expanded rapidly Wednesday, threatening the towns of Brownville and Challenge. But it ultimately slowed now spans just 184 acres.

The towns were briefly evacuated Wednesday afternoon as firefighters struggled to slow the initial spread of the vegetation fire. The blaze is burning just south of Brownville.

The blaze is 60% contained as of Sunday morning. Crews are engaged in mop-up operations and continue to construct lines around the fire.

On Friday, Cal Fire officials announced that the fire had been caused by a vehicle malfunction. The state fire agency said that the fire's ignition appeared to be accidental, and that they "have not found any evidence of malicious or suspicious activity related to this fire."

Sequoia National Park's giant trees at risk as fires grow

By Noah Berger and John Antczak Associated Press

The Business Journal and Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, September 15, 2021

(AP) — Fire crews moved to ramp up the battle Wednesday against two expanding forest fires threatening Sequoia National Park's giant sequoia trees and infrastructure.

The Colony and Paradise fires, ignited by lightning strikes last week, covered about 11 square miles (28 square kilometers) in California's steep Sierra Nevada.

The Colony Fire was a threat to Giant Forest, home to more than 2,000 sequoias, but not imminently, said Mark Ruggiero, fire information officer for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

The fires are among the latest in a long summer of blazes that have scorched more than 3,500 square miles (9,065 square kilometers) in California, destroying hundreds of homes.

Sequoia National Park has been closed and its headquarters and resident employees have been evacuated, along with a portion of the community of Three Rivers outside the entrance.

The park's historic wooden entrance sign dating to 1935 was covered in fire-resistant wrapping, and hoses were in place at the headquarters area for structure protection.

More than 300 firefighters were on the lines, aided by helicopters and air tankers when smoke conditions allowed. On Thursday, a national interagency management team will take over the fires, being managed collectively as the KNP complex, and even more resources are expected, Ruggiero said.

A 50-year history of using prescribed burns to remove other types of trees and vegetation in the park's sequoia groves was expected to help the giants survive by lessening the impact if flames reach them, Ruggiero said.

Giant sequoias, some thousands of years old, live on the western flank of the Sierra. They are adapted to fire, which can help them to thrive by releasing seeds from their cones and creating clearings that allow young sequoias to grow.

But Ruggiero noted that the extraordinary intensity of fires in current climate conditions can overwhelm sequoias, a scenario that played out when the 2020 Castle Fire killed many trees in the region.

Studies estimate that 7,500 to 10,600 large sequoias were killed by that fire, along with many of other sizes, according to the National Park Service.

The Colony Fire also poses a broader danger because it is burning at an elevation of the central Sierra where there are 280 million pines and other types of trees that have been killed by drought and bark beetles, Ruggiero said.

"The Colony Fire specifically is burning in a really bad spot ... where these trees are like jackstraws and it's difficult to put fire personnel into some of these areas because of that," he said.

Elsewhere, two California fires that have caused extensive destruction in the northern Sierra and southern Cascades were not growing.

The state's second-largest fire on record, the Dixie Fire, remained 75% contained after burning 1,500 square miles in the northern Sierra and southern Cascades region. Near Lake Tahoe, containment of the 342-square-mile (885-square-kilometer) Caldor Fire increased to 70%.

North of San Francisco, a 20-year-old Ukiah man was arrested Tuesday and jailed on suspicion of starting the Hopkins Fire in Mendocino County, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

said in a statement. The fire that sparked Sunday north of Ukiah charred 257 acres (104 hectares), destroyed homes and forced evacuations.

Fires shut Sequoia National Park, could threaten huge trees

By Associated Press

The Business Journal, Tuesday, September 14, 2021

(AP) — Sequoia National Park was shut down and its namesake gigantic trees were potentially threatened Tuesday as two forest fires burned in steep and dangerous terrain in California's Sierra Nevada.

Both fires were projected to advance in the direction of Giant Forest, home to more than 2,000 giant sequoias including the General Sherman Tree, the largest tree on Earth by volume.

The massive sequoias grow on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. The General Sherman Tree stands 275 feet (83.8 meters) and is over 36 feet (11 meters) in diameter at the base, according to the U.S. National Park Service.

"There's no imminent threat to Giant Forest but that is a potential," said Mark Ruggiero, fire information officer for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

Ruggiero estimated that the closest flames were about a mile (1.6 kilometers) from the grove.

Sequoia headquarters personnel, about 75 people, were being evacuated, he said.

The Colony and Paradise fires, named for locations where they started, were ignited by lightning last week and were being battled collectively under the name of the KNP Complex.

Their combined sizes grew to more than 4.7 square miles (12 square kilometers).

All park facilities were already closed and wilderness trailhead permits had been canceled.

The Silver City retreat and the summer cabins of Cabin Cove were under evacuation orders. Part of the community of Three Rivers outside the park entrance was under an evacuation warning.

Kings Canyon National Park, to the north of Sequoia, remained open.

The potential threat to the giant sequoias came just a year after a disastrous complex of fires in the same region.

Part of the wildfire complex known as the Castle Fire destroyed 10% of the population of sequoias, Ruggiero said.

California has had more than 7,400 wildfires so far this year, scorching more than 3,500 square miles (9,065 square kilometers).

California's second-largest fire on record, the Dixie Fire, remained 75% contained after burning 1,500 square miles in the northern Sierra and southern Cascades region. Near Lake Tahoe, containment of the 342-square-mile (885-square-kilometer) Caldor Fire increased to 68%.