

Yosemite fire burns 2,600 acres, but rain, cooler weather help firefighters

By Andrea Castillo

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Sept. 8, 2014

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK — Rick and Barb Luick had been in Yosemite National Park for just several hours when they noticed something about the distant smoke visible from Glacier Point.

"You ever seen tires burn?" Rick Luick said. "Well it was kind of like that: Black."

The couple, both 62, from Peoria, Illinois were on their first trip to Yosemite National Park and had stopped at the lookout during a bus tour. They came back in the late afternoon to a different scene of billowing gray smoke and red flames.

Approximately 2,600 acres have burned in Little Yosemite Valley on either side of the Merced River. It is thought to be from a spot fire from a lightning-caused burn, dubbed the Meadow fire, which started in mid-July. Around 185 hikers -- 100 from Little Yosemite Valley and 85 from the Half Dome summit -- were safely evacuated Sunday night and relocated to other lodging areas.

Park officials don't yet know how much of the fire is contained or how long that will take. But they say cooler temperatures and some Monday rain likely slowed its spread and kept the Yosemite Valley from experiencing heavy smoke.

Katharine Harrison, 40, of Grass Valley, said she and the other campers were asked to leave Bridalveil Creek Campground because of the fire containment effort. She was relocated to Wawona Campground for the final week of her two-week trip.

Harrison, who has been to Yosemite dozens of times since she was young, said she never knows what to expect at the park.

"(The fire) definitely changed my experience, but that's the price we pay for this beautiful nature," she said.

CA has 100K plug-in cars, and counting

By Morgan Lee

San Diego United-Tribune, Monday, Sept. 8, 2014

Cumulative sales of plug-in electric cars in California have surpassed 100,000, industry experts announced Monday.

As of the end of August, Californians had purchased 102,440 plug-in cars, including both all-electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids that run on a combination of electricity and gasoline, according to figures compiled by HybridCars.com and Baum & Associates, a Michigan-based market research firm.

The sales records date back to December 2010, when the all-electric Nissan Leaf and plug-in hybrid Chevy Volt were first introduced to consumers in select U.S. markets.

California regulators celebrated the milestone as the state bets on plug-in vehicles to meet aggressive goals for reducing emissions of heat-trapping gases linked to global warming.

"This milestone shows that industry and government can work together for the good of the environment and the good of the consumer," California Air Resources Board Chairman Mary Nichols said in a statement.

Gasoline still rules the roads, with plug-in cars accounting for less than 1 percent of California's 23 million cars.

Electric cars are gaining ground though, accounting for 3 percent of car sales so far this year.

Gov. Jerry Brown has set the goal of putting 1.5 million zero-emission vehicles on California roadways by 2025.

Roughly half of the state's plug-in vehicles are zero-emission — running exclusively on electricity, according to records for state clean-vehicle rebates.

Sales have moved beyond the early-adopter demographic, but many people still disregard electric cars, said Christine Kehoe, executive director of the California Plug-In Electric Vehicle Collaborative, a group of 40 stakeholders including state agencies and companies involved in car-charger infrastructure.

"Many consumers don't understand the benefits, the economics of the electric vehicle," said Kehoe, formerly a state senator.

Brett Williams of the San Diego-based Center for Sustainable Energy, which administers state vehicle rebates, noted that plug-in vehicles have emerged much more rapidly and competitively than the original mass-market hybrid cars of the 1990s.

"It's an unprecedented success for an alternative fuel technology," he said.

California provides rebates of up to \$2,500 toward the sale or lease of plug-in electric cars, on top of federal tax credits of up to \$7,500. The state has reserved \$120 million to spend on clean-car rebates through June 2015, with a tiny percentage going toward hydrogen and natural-gas cars based on demand.

"Whether or not you drive an electric vehicle, a clean car benefits everyone in the state," Kehoe said. "Especially if you live near a freeway or a congested area."

Within the state, plug-in car adoption mirrors regional population demographics, said Williams of the Energy Center.

San Diego County accounts for about 8.5 percent of the state's plug-in cars, according to rebate figures. San Diego Gas & Electric estimates more than 10,000 plug-in vehicles are in circulation within its service territory, which extends across San Diego and southern Orange counties.

At least 15 plug-in car models are available to California consumers.

Plug-in sales are led by the Nissan Leaf, followed by the Chevy Volt and plug-in Prius. Tesla vehicles account for 13 percent of state rebates. Ford has made a strong recent entry with the Fusion and C-Max.

Switching motor vehicles from gasoline stations to the electrical grid is seen as crucial to California's long-term goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent of 1990 levels by 2050. The transportation sector accounts for nearly 40 percent of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions in California.

Three in four plug-in car buyers took advantage of the state rebates of up to \$2,500 per plug-in vehicle.

Californians buy about 40 percent of the nation's plug-in cars.

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2014:](#)

Efforts result in healthier air

As the summer begins to come to an end, I recently noticed that the air seemed just a bit cleaner than it had been in summers past. So it came as no surprise when I read that, for the second summer in a row, the ozone levels have once again fallen to all-time lows ("Valley ozone at record low levels ... but," Aug. 30).

This is not only due to the efforts of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's many programs to reduce emissions, but also by our community changing habits like idling in drive-thru lines, combining errands to take fewer trips and carpooling. I've also noticed more bicycles on the streets and on the Kern River Parkway bike path.

Can it be that more people are taking advantage of the more than 20 miles of new bike lanes and sharrows recommended by Bike Bakersfield to the city of Bakersfield and the county of Kern to encourage those in our community to commute by bicycle to work or take a short bike ride to the grocery store? All of these efforts will move Bakersfield towards a more active and healthy community.

Cindy Parra, Bakersfield

[Fresno Bee Earth Log, Monday, Sept. 8, 2014:](#)

Nobody's house is in the middle of all ozone problems

By Mark Grossi

Even though this week's clouds and sprinkles may have kept pollution down briefly, ozone has made a comeback in September. Six of the first seven days had ozone problems.

But did you experience the ozone comeback at your house?

If you live in Clovis or Arvin, yes. If you live in northwest Fresno or Visalia, not so much.

Which brings me to a question I get all the time. If the San Joaquin Valley has exceeded the federal eight-hour ozone standard 68 times this summer, does that mean all those bad days happened at my house?

No, nobody's house was in the middle of all 68 bad days.

The Valley is 25,000-plus square miles. It's huge. This is the largest air district in the country.

On plenty of summer days, you'll see only one or two monitors show a problem. On Sunday, Clovis and Arvin had bad days, but the rest of the Valley did not.

That still counts as a bad day for the whole Valley. Why?

Scientists and regulators have long told me that pollution drifts in this big basin. Arvin, which has few pollution sources compared to larger cities, is downwind of Bakersfield and other parts of the Valley.

When Arvin goes off -- or Parlier or Sequoia National Park or any other place -- the whole Valley is considered out of compliance.

Let's go back to the question about your house and raise another question. Which place in the Valley has been having the biggest ozone problem this summer?

So far, it has been the usual suspects: Sequoia National Park with 42 exceedances and Clovis with 41.

There's a pretty obvious reason for Clovis. It is downwind of Fresno's major freeway commutes. But Sequoia is another story.

The monitor is at Ash Mountain, the southern entrance at Highway 198. It gets pollution from the Valley. At 1,500 feet, the elevation is where ozone pollutants often hang in the air.

One other thing, vehicle exhaust in cities actually helps break up ozone when the sun goes down. That doesn't happen in Sequoia, so ozone levels often will remain higher overnight than they are in cities.