

French Fire Morning

Sierra Star, Sunday, August 3, 2014

Location: The fire is burning in the area between Rock Creek and Fish Creek campgrounds, in the San Joaquin River drainage, Bass Lake Ranger District, in the Sierra National Forest.

Acres Burned: 12,827

Structures Threatened: 134

Containment: 20%

Structures Destroyed: 0

Fire Started: July 28, 2014

Injuries: 1

Cause: Human

Total personnel assigned to the Fire: 1560

Summary

The fire operation was completed on the southern end of the fire last night to secure containment lines down to the San Joaquin River. Direct fire line was also completed from Chiqito Creek to the 4S81 road on the northern perimeter. Fire crews are hoping to take advantage of cooler weather and higher humidity to construct direct fire line were possible on all open fire lines. Crews also continue to do structure defense in the Arnold Meadow area on the northern perimeter. An investigation has concluded that an abandoned campfire near the Rock Creek Campground was the cause of the French Fire. The abandoned campfire was located towards the bottom of Rock Creek Road, near the San Joaquin River. Investigators are asking for the public's help for information about anyone who was seen in the area of Rock Creek Road near the San Joaquin River during the afternoon or evening of Sunday July 27.

The French Fire will continue to produce large amounts of smoke, which has impacted local communities. Smoke is typically greater in the morning and evening hours. Plan outdoor activities for times and places with low smoke levels. Up-slope breezes occur during the day, which will often take smoke into higher elevations. In the evening, these winds change direction and bring smoke down slope to lower elevations. For more information about smoke impacts, please visit the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Districts website at: <http://valleyair.org/wildfires.htm>

Evacuations

Residents living in the community of Arnold Meadow were notified to evacuate due to increased fire activity along the northern perimeter of the fire. Several summer homes in the Hogue Apple Ranch and Wagner's Resort were evacuated earlier in the week. Closures
A Forest Service Area Road and Trail Closure, Forest Order # 15-14-07, has been issued for the French Fire area. More information about the Forest Closure and the closure can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/o44cvyu>.

California is burning

Staff Writer

The Porterville Recorder, Saturday, August 2, 2014

Firefighters in Northern California were battling several lightning-sparked wildfires Friday, including a blaze in rural Modoc County that forced about 120 people to evacuate.

The Day Fire near the community of Day had burned through nearly 18 square miles of brush and heavy timber and was threatening 150 structures Friday, two days after it began. It was only 10 percent contained.

Meanwhile, in the southern Sierra Nevada, fire crews continued to battle a trio of blazes, including the French Fire in the Sequoia National Forest and the El Portal Fire in Yosemite National Park.

Local volunteer firefighter Brent Gill of Springville was helping to battle the El Portal Fire, which has burned more than 4,200 acres near the communities of El Portal and Foresta in Yosemite National Park.

"We have a large crew of people here and we're making very good progress at the moment," Gill reported. The fire, which began Monday, is 58 percent contained.

California is in its third year of drought, which has heightened the fire danger. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services announced Friday that it has asked the state's National Guard to activate specially trained helicopter units to help fire agencies.

Smoke continues to hug the Valley floor

Staff Writer

The Porterville Recorder, Saturday, August 2, 2014

San Joaquin Valley - Smoke from wildfires in the Sierra Nevada will continue to affect air quality in foothill and mountain communities through the weekend and remain on the San Joaquin Valley floor, local air officials said.

A public health caution issued this week has been extended through Sunday.

"We urge Valley residents to take note of their local air quality conditions and take precautions as needed," said Jaime Holt, the Valley Air District's chief communications officer.

For the past several days, the French, Dark Hole and El Portal fires have sent smoke to foothill and mountain communities in Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties, and to the Valley floor. New fires have also started in northern California.

Smoke from wildfires contains particulates and ozone precursors. Young children, elderly people and persons with existing respiratory conditions are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants, Air District officials said.

French fire started by abandoned campfire, investigators seek culprits

By Eryn Baldrice-Guy, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Sat., August 2, 2014

An abandoned campfire started the French fire that has destroyed 12,827 acres and cost close to \$8 million, investigators said Saturday evening.

The remains of the campfire were found near the bottom of Rock Creek Road, close to the San Joaquin River in eastern Madera County. Investigators believe a long log was left burning, spreading the fire to nearby pine needles.

The fire then spread into the forest, investigators said. Campfires have been restricted in Sierra National Forest since June 25.

Sierra National Forest investigators are seeking the public's assistance in identifying anyone who was seen near Rock Creek Road during the afternoon or evening of July 27.

The French fire remains just 20% contained. A total of 1,560 people have been assigned to fight it, including air operations specialists who are now fighting the fire with water drawn from Bass Lake.

"It is an unfortunate and unnecessary loss for all of us," said Dean Gould, supervisor of the Sierra National Forest.

Madera County sheriff's deputies and forest service workers are rounding up cattle and horses in the area of Wagners and Arnold Meadow, the sheriff's office said Saturday.

Forest service workers and a Madera County resident deputy evacuated the Minarets Work Center due to the fire. On Friday afternoon, residents living in the seasonal mountain community of Arnold Meadow were told to evacuate

because of increased fire activity along the northern perimeter. The fire was first spotted Monday.

Cattle caught in the fire were herded to higher ground. Horses were taken to safety at Minarets Pack Station.

Citizen volunteers from the Madera County Sheriff's Office have set up roadblocks at Minarets Road by the Redinger Overlook and U.S. Forest Service Road 8S09 at Cascadel Road.

Anyone with information about the French fire is asked to call the Sierra National Forest information line at (559) 877-2605.

Meanwhile, the El Portal fire that has been burning since July 26 in Yosemite National Park now is 89% contained, with 4,689 acres burned. It has taken 1,341 people to fight it, officials said.

Air officials continue to warn residents about wildfire smoke, which has been creeping into the central San Joaquin Valley, although impacts haven't been severe.

Some of the most sensitive to smoke -- usually worse in the mornings and evenings -- are those with respiratory conditions, children, pregnant women and the elderly, who should avoid outdoor activity.

Valley Air District officials extend wildfire smoke health caution through weekend

Merced Sun-Star staff report

Also in the Fresno Bee, Sacramento Bee, Friday, August 1, 2014

Valley Air District officials have extended a health warning sent out earlier this week, reminding residents to protect themselves from wildfire smoke.

Smoke from wildfires in the Sierra Nevada will continue to affect air quality in foothill and mountain communities through the weekend and remain on the Valley floor, officials said Friday.

"We urge Valley residents to take note of their local air quality conditions and take precautions as needed," said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

For the past several days, the French, Dark Hole and El Portal fires have sent smoke to foothill and mountain communities in Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties and to the Valley floor. Also, new fires have started in Northern California.

Smoke from fire is mainly particulate matter that can be very harmful to public health. Particulate matter can lodge deep in the lungs, causing illnesses such as emphysema, bronchitis and asthma, as well as lung infections.

People with respiratory conditions, are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants. Children and the elderly are also vulnerable. Air District officials urge residents to follow their doctors' orders when exposed to wildfire smoke.

If people can see or smell smoke, there is a high chance their lungs are being affected, officials warn. The best way to protect oneself is to stay indoors with filtered air.

For more information on smoke and updates on air quality, people can visit the Valley Air District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Foresta reopens but French blaze growing fast

By Carmen George, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Friday, August 1, 2014

Fire officials on Friday said they are "cautiously optimistic" they may have the upper hand on the El Portal fire burning in Yosemite National Park -- but the French fire in Sierra National Forest continues to grow swiftly.

That Madera County blaze, engulfing more than 8,200 acres by Friday morning, was about a 1,000 acres smaller the day before.

Officials on the El Portal fire -- which has burned at least 4,198 acres -- were allowing Foresta residents to return home at 3 p.m. Friday. Two homes were destroyed in this small Yosemite community Saturday, the day the fire started.

Foresta will be open to the general public at 10 a.m. Saturday.

A motorcycle fire around 2 p.m. Friday on Highway 120 between Crane Flat and Yosemite Valley has caused a temporary road closure.

The El Portal fire is 58% contained, compared to the French fire's 15% containment. All of the French fire's containment is around its southwest edge, near a cluster of homes in Hogue Ranch and Kinsman Flat, said Anne Grandy, a fire information officer.

On Friday afternoon, residents living in the community of Arnold Meadow were told to evacuate because of increased fire activity along the northern perimeter of the French fire, officials said. Forest Road 6S01 (Grizzly Road) between Beasore Road and Minarets Road -- the main route to Arnold Meadow -- remains closed.

Officials continue to warn foothill and central San Joaquin Valley residents about the impact of wildfire smoke on air quality.

Smoke has been creeping into the Valley, although the impacts haven't been severe, said Ana Reyes, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Friday afternoon, monitors in Fresno and Madera recorded air quality as "unhealthy for sensitive groups." Some of the most sensitive include those with respiratory conditions, young children, pregnant women and the elderly, who should avoid prolonged or strenuous activity outdoors. Indoor cooling systems will also help filter poor air, Reyes said.

Residents should expect the smokiest hours in the mornings and evenings, she said. During these times, and overnight, cooler smoke can get trapped beneath warmer air.

The Madera County Public Health Department also issued a warning: "If you can see or smell smoke ... (or) if visibility is decreased in your neighborhood to less than five miles, smoke has reached levels that are unhealthy."

Real-time Valley air conditions are available online.

At the El Portal fire on Friday morning, flames were a quarter-mile from Crane Flat Campground and about a mile and half from the Merced Grove of Giant Sequoias, which isn't believed to be in the fire's immediate path, said Mark Savage, spokesman for the firefighting effort. Containment is around the fire's southern edge, with most new activity in the northwest.

"We're cautiously optimistic that our efforts are paying dividends to stop the forward movement of the fire," Savage said. "But with the hot, dry conditions, it doesn't take much for that fire to start moving again."

Some back-burning -- fighting fire with fire -- has been successful, although hot spots within burned areas always remain a concern and firefighters are monitoring those closely, Savage said.

The French fire's eastern flank is running along the San Joaquin River, and the northern end of the blaze is southwest of Mammoth Pool.

Injuries have been minimal on both fires. Three firefighters on the El Portal fire appear to have received minor injuries, Savage said. At the French fire, there has been only a sprained ankle, Grandy said.

At the El Portal fire, Crane Flat, Yosemite Creek and Bridalveil Creek campgrounds remain closed.

At the French fire, there are 12 campgrounds and some Forest Service roads and trails closed. [They are listed online.](#)

The El Portal fire has at least 1,360 personnel fighting the blaze -- costing an estimated \$5.7 million, officials said. The French fire has at least 1,422 personnel, costing an estimated \$3.7 million.

The cause of the fires remain under investigation.

Another Yosemite blaze, the Dark Hole fire, has firefighters' special attention. Begun by a lightning strike July 16, the high country fire off Tioga Road has burned at least 725 acres and was 39% contained Friday, with 86 firefighters working to ensure it does not get out of control.

Air District: Smoke here to stay

By Joseph Luiz

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, August 1, 2014

Valley residents will be dealing with smoke from the Yosemite National Park wildfires for longer than previously expected.

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air District, smoke exposure from the wildfires is expected to last through the weekend and possibly extend into next week, including in Kings County.

While the Sand and El Portal fires have reached 95 percent and 34 percent containment, respectively, the French fire has still been only 10 percent contained as of Thursday, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

The fires, which started last week, have burned more than 15,000 acres so far, according to the U.S. Fire Service. The cause of the fires is still under investigation.

Allergist/Immunologist Dr. Rabinder Sidhu, who has offices in Hanford, Fresno and Visalia, said he has been receiving more visits over the past few days from patients with lung conditions that have been affected by the smoke.

"I think people are quite aware of the effect of the fire," Sidhu said. "People who live in the mountains have been coming down and telling me that their asthma or COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease] is acting up."

Sidhu said the smoke is spreading a lot of particulates and chemicals into the air that irritate and inflame the lungs when inhaled, often making lung conditions worse. People with other chronic illnesses are also susceptible.

"The health risk depends on the level of exposure, but there can definitely be a real health hazard for people," Sidhu said. "There are so many soot particles in the air and they're all very bad for any person's lungs. It's not good for anybody."

Sidhu advises that people who have chronic conditions and are exposed to smoke make sure they use their medication, especially any medication that is intended for emergencies.

"You may also have to increase preventative medicines, such as inhaling steroids that help expand the bronchial tubes and ease breathing.

Sidhu said the oral steroid prednisone, which helps reduce inflammation, should be used as a last resort when no other medications are working. Sidhu's primary advice, however, is to see a doctor immediately if you're experiencing a problem.

"People need to be careful," he said. "This isn't something you shouldn't take lightly."

For more information on the wildfires and their impact on Valley air, go to www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Valley congressmen propose law to improve public health

Central Valley Times, Friday, August 1, 2014

Federal legislation to further address the poor air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is being proposed by Reps. Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, and Jim Costa, D-Fresno.

The Air and Health Quality Empowerment Zone Designation Act, as it is dubbed, targets areas with poor air quality and child asthma rates that are above the national average. Areas meeting these criteria could request to be designated as "empowerment zones," making them eligible to receive federal grant funding.

In exchange for federal support, pollution control districts in these areas will develop and implement plans to improve air quality and public health in the zone.

"Our bill addresses the serious health issues that are a direct result of the poor air quality in our region," says Mr. McNerney. "Here in the San Joaquin Valley, we have higher childhood asthma rates than other areas in California and around the country. Not only are our children suffering needlessly, but these illnesses also place a financial burden on our communities."

"The disproportionately high numbers of children with asthma compared to the rest of California and the nation clearly demonstrates that action must be taken to improve the quality of life of our Valley's children," Mr. Costa says.

To be eligible for the grants, the areas must meet specified national ambient air quality standards for ozone, have particular emission levels from agricultural sources, meet or exceed national asthma rates, and suffer from high unemployment rates. Recipients will match federal investment dollar for dollar.

The Valley, which includes Kern, San Joaquin, Fresno, Stanislaus, Madera, King, Merced, and Tulare counties, suffers from some of the worst air quality in both the state and Nation. One in five children living in the Valley has asthma. Illnesses related to poor air quality cost the Valley approximately \$3 billion annually.