

## **Huge California wildfire threatening more than 1,000 homes**

By Christopher Weber, Associated Press  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2020

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A wildfire scorching its way through brush and timber from the mountains to the desert northeast of Los Angeles threatened more than 1,000 homes on Tuesday as crews across the West battled dozens of other major blazes.

The Bobcat Fire in Southern California was advancing at one to two miles (1.6 to 3.2 kilometers) per hour at times and threatened the Mojave Desert town of Pearblossom after burning into the Antelope Valley foothill area, across the San Gabriel Mountains from Los Angeles.

The blaze that began Sept. 6 has destroyed or damaged at least 29 homes and other buildings, with the toll rising to perhaps 85 when damage assessment teams can complete their work this week, authorities said.

Cheryl Poindexter lost her desert home.

“That fire came over the hill so hard and fast that I turned around and I barely got my eight dogs and my two parrots out,” Poindexter told ABC7. “You can see everything is ash.”

Firefighters also battled flareups near Mount Wilson, which overlooks greater Los Angeles and has a historic observatory founded more than a century ago and numerous broadcast antennas that serve Southern California.

The fire was fueled by vegetation that hadn't burned in decades and pushed by erratic winds over the weekend, although they had died down by Monday, and were expected to remain light through Tuesday.

Numerous studies in recent years have linked bigger U.S. wildfires to global warming from the burning of coal, oil and gas, especially because climate change has made California much drier. A drier California means plants are more flammable.

Near Mount Wilson, firefighters set more than a mile (1.6 kilometers) of fires designed to burn out the blaze's fuel and act as a brake on its advance.

“We've got a fire here that is bigger than the city of Denver, and it did it in two weeks,” said Sky Cornell with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

About 1,100 homes and some 4,000 residents remained under evacuation orders and the fire was only 17 percent contained, fire officials said.

Evacuation warnings — meaning residents should be prepared to flee if ordered — remained in effect for the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena, home of the Rose Bowl and the annual Rose Parade, and Wrightwood, a mountain community near several San Bernardino County ski resorts.

The blaze was one of more than two dozen major wildfires burning across California, including five of the largest in state history.

More than 5,600 square miles (14,500 square kilometers) have been charred, an area larger than the state of Connecticut, and at least 23,000 people remain evacuated statewide, Gov. Gavin Newsom said.

Early estimates are that 6,400 buildings have been destroyed across the state, but Newsom said “by no stretch of the imagination do we think this tells the entire story.” Damage assessments are ongoing, he said.

Nearly 19,000 firefighters in California are currently battling 27 major blazes, Newsom said. At least 7,900 wildfires have erupted in the state this year, many during a mid-August barrage of dry lightning that ignited parched vegetation.

Twenty-six people have been killed. Officials were investigating the death of a firefighter at another Southern California wildfire that erupted earlier this month from a smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used by a couple to reveal their baby's gender.

Charles Morton, 39, died on Sept. 17 while battling the El Dorado Fire in San Bernardino National Forest about 75 miles (120 kilometers) east of Los Angeles.

Morton, was a 14-year veteran of the U.S. Forest Service and a squad boss with the Big Bear Interagency Hotshot Crew of the San Bernardino National Forest.

"Charlie was a well-respected leader who was always there for his squad and his crew at the toughest times," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen.

"Charlie is survived by his wife and daughter, his parents, two brothers, cousins, and friends. He's loved and will be missed. May he rest easy in heaven with his baby boy," Morton's family said in a statement.

In Wyoming, officials warned that "a high probability for fire growth" exists for a blaze burning toward cabins and an important water supply reservoir that's a major source of water for the state's capital city, Cheyenne. The Mullen Fire in the Medicine Bow National Forest is burning in heavily forested, rugged terrain that would usually be busy now with hunters at the start of elk hunting season.

And in Colorado, one of the state's largest wildfires continued to grow slowly, with firefighters benefiting as the flames spread into flatter ground Monday. The Cameron Peak Fire near Red Feather Lakes had burned 163 square miles (422 square kilometers) and was 15% contained. At higher elevations, it devoured numerous lodgepole pine trees that had been killed by a beetle infestation.

More than 9,000 firefighters were battling large wildfires across Oregon and Washington, where thousands of homes have been destroyed, the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service said.

## **SQF Complex Fire: 138,000 acres, 18% containment. 'We are still in a battle'**

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, September 21, 2020

The SQF Complex Fire in the Tulare County mountains grew to 138,000 acres and containment increased to 18% Monday morning, but firefighters say the battle is far from over and full containment is likely weeks away at a minimum.

"We are still in a battle, all day and through the night, to protect local homes," said Mike Goicoechea, incident commander. "On a daily basis, firefighters are making saves on homes by preventing spots from getting established near structures.

"We remain in an active, dangerous area."

The firefight remains most active in the community of Ponderosa, where crews have worked around the clock to build firelines since gusty winds caused the wildfire to roar back to life last week.

"By building a wide, defensible line, crews are ensuring that they have the best chance of stopping the fire's progression and catching spot fires if they occur," Goicoechea said.

On the fire's southwest corner, crews are battling flying embers and rolling logs to keep flames out of the eastern side of Coy Flat Road. Sprinklers and hose lines are being installed around Mountain Aire and Camp Rodgers, with bulldozer lines expected to be completed today.

In the fire's western zone, Cal Fire crews successfully completed a defensive burn that allowed officials to lift the evacuation order for the community of Cherokee along the fire's northwest corner.

Similar efforts along a three-mile stretch of Bear Creek Road will help keep the flames from reaching Springville. It's unclear when evacuation orders or advisories will be modified for the southeastern Tulare County town.

Crews are also headed to Mineral King and Silver City — at nearly 11,000 feet of elevation — to defend historical structures should the fire cross South Fork Road, officials said.

Farther down the mountain, crews continued to strengthen fire breaks and lines in collaboration with the Tule River Indian Reservation.

Over the weekend, Cal Fire and Tulare County released a "damage map" that shows which homes and structures have been affected by the Castle Fire, which makes up the vast majority of the SQF Complex. Officials say the map is updated daily as crews continue to assess properties.

On Sunday, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux downgraded evacuation orders to advisories for parts of Three Rivers, the most heavily populated community affected by the fire so far. That includes Three Rivers Road and portions of South Fork Drive, north of Conley Bridge (just south of Heidi Drive), including South Forks Estates.

South of Conley Bridge, South Fork Drive remains under a mandatory evacuation order, Boudreaux said. Sequoia National Park also remains fully closed to the public, though park officials say they are evaluating the situation daily.

Across the country, 32,000 personnel are fighting fires — the highest number in recorded history. Crews from Mexico are en route now to help with the Castle Fire as firefighters from around the globe flock to California and the western U.S. for a historic fire season.

In California alone, nearly 8,000 wildfires have scorched 3.6 million acres. Since Aug. 15, when a record lightning storm sparked several massive blazes across the Golden State, there have been 26 deaths and 6,400 structures destroyed.

The Creek Fire, which has grown to become one of the state's 10 largest blazes at 278,368 acres, is now 27% contained in the Sierra National Forest in Fresno and Madera counties. Like the Creek Fire, the SQF Complex has been assigned two of the nation's top incident command teams.

State fire officials continue to urge the public to be vigilant, with some of California's most destructive blazes happening in September and October.

## **Creek Fire live updates: Containment at 30%; some residents gain temporary access**

By Nadia Lopez and Joshua Tehee

Fresno Bee & Modesto Bee, Monday, Sept. 21, 2020

The Creek Fire, which ignited a little more than two weeks ago, topped 280,000 acres and hit 30% containment as of Monday night.

Situated in Fresno and Madera counties near Huntington Lake, Shaver Lake, and Mammoth Pool, the blaze is among one of the 10 largest wildfires in California's history, gutting more than 855 structures, damaging 71, and threatening about 7,700 others.

Fire officials expect to contain the fire by mid-October.

Fire officials expected thick smoke will be a concern for the next several days, affecting lower canyons the most with haze on the upper slopes and ridges.

Overall temperatures will remain warm with lower relative humidity. Fire officials expect daily terrain winds from the southwest will continue for the next three days.

Firefighters expect that most of the fire activity will be around Whisky Falls, Brown Meadow, East Fork, and Chiquito Creek toward Timber Butte and north of Strawberry Mine. Rocky terrain and less fuel on the eastern edge, from Bog Cabin to Pine Flat, will prevent the fire from spreading.

### **7:30 p.m.: Creek Fire inches past 280,000 acres**

The Creek Fire has now burned more than 280,000 acres, but containment increased to 30%, according to Cal Fire in a Monday night update.

Areas in the North Zone of the Creek Fire that still display active fire behavior include East Fork Chiquito Creek, Central Camp, Gaggs Camp Ground, Browns Creek and Camino Creek.

In the South Zone of the Creek Fire, active burning continued along the south fork of the San Joaquin River and progressed south in the driver drainage. The eastern side of the fire continues to burn toward the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness.

Limited humidity recovery overnight is expected to provide for more active burning in higher elevations. Fire progression will be to the north, burning to the south of Mount Tom and slow as fuels become more scarce in higher elevation rock.

The damage assessments are 98% complete with 7,759 structures still threatened by the Creek Fire.

The size of the wildfire is listed at 280,425 acres, still the seventh largest in state history but closing on No. 6, with full containment still predicted for Oct. 15.

### **7 p.m.: Containment jumps on SQF Complex Fire**

Fire crews working the SQF Complex Fire burning in the Sequoia and Inyo national forests had made sizable gains as Monday night arrived, with containment jumping to 33% from 18%.

The total acres burned remained at 137,508, the same as the morning update.

“Where they’ve been able to get some work done is on that south side of the fire, east of the Kern River,” said Mike Cole, a USFS spokesman. “Up around into the Inyo Forest. There’s still fire in there, but nothing has really moved for quite a few days. That’s where a lot of it is at.”

There are 1,481 personnel battling the complex, a combination of the Castle and Shotgun fires north of Kernville.

Evacuation orders remain in place for the following communities:

- Ponderosa
- Pyles Boys Camp
- South Fork
- Redwood Drive
- Alpine Village
- Sequoia Crest
- Doyle Springs
- Highway 190 along the south from the intersection of Balch Park Road, north to Blue Ridge Lookout, east to Moses Mountain, and south to Highway 190 at Mahogany Flat
- Upper Tule River Corridor (Camp Nelson, Pierpoint, Coy Flat, Mountain Aire, and points between)
- Cedar Slope
- Silver City
- Mineral King

### **3:35 p.m.: Helitorch operation launched**

After being delayed earlier in the day, the planned helitorch operation was launched Monday afternoon, CalFire officials said.

The aerial tactic involves attaching a 200-gallon tank to the bottom of a UH-1H helicopter to drop gelled flame into spaces firefighters can’t access otherwise.

### **3 p.m.: Evacuation warnings lifted in three new areas**

The Fresno County Sheriff’s Office on Monday afternoon announced evacuation warnings had been lifted in three new areas, which include:

Zone F15: Located on the west boundary, consisting of the east side of Highway 168, south of Nicholas Road. The south boundary lies north of Sample Road and west of Pittman Hill Road.

Zone F4A: Located in the south boundary, but excludes the properties that lay on the north side of Watts Valley Road. West perimeter is at the interchange of Sample Road and Pittman Hill Road and includes

properties on both sides of Pittman Hill Road until its intersection with Tollhouse Road to the north. The east boundary extends to include all properties off of Shady Oaks Road, Paradise Valley Lane, and Sales Creek Road.

Zone F13A: The south boundary is located on the northeast of the intersection of Watts Valley Road and Pittman Hill Road. The west boundary is west of the western properties on Big Springs Lane.

The following road closures are in effect starting 2:00 p.m. Monday:

Maxon Road at Trimmer Springs Road

Watts Valley Road at Sycamore Road

Highway 168 at Lodge Road

Lodge Road at Tollhouse Road

Auberry Road at Jose Basin Road

Auberry Road at Auberry Mission Road

### **2:15 p.m.: Some residents in Fresno County to be granted re-entry**

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office announced Monday plans to allow some evacuated residents temporary access to their properties to retrieve items and assess the damage to their homes.

Officials on Monday are in the midst of identifying safe zones for re-entry within the fire's burn area. These designated areas are located inside evacuation order zones.

Residents who were evacuated from zones F1SA, F1R, F1SB and F1Q will be allowed to re-enter the area starting Tuesday. Residents in zones F1SA and F1R will be granted temporary access to their properties on Tuesday, while residents in zones F1SB and F1Q will be granted access on Wednesday.

Additional zones identified in the re-entry process will be announced in the near future, according to county officials.

Only residents who have had their homes destroyed will be allowed to re-enter the area.

Residents will be required to check in with a county official before being granted access and are encouraged to bring protective equipment such as goggles, face masks and gloves as well as protective clothing that include a long sleeve shirt, sturdy close-toed shoes and long pants to protect against debris and ash. Residents should also bring a second set of clothes or Tyvek coveralls.

County officials warn residents to not stay in the hazardous area for long to minimize exposure to toxic waste and structural ash. Residents who re-enter their properties to evaluate damage may be exposed to several hazards including "embers, hot ash, asbestos, heavy metals, oils, fire retardants, pesticides, broken pipes, nails, glass, slippery surfaces, uneven ground, holes in the ground, unstable trees, unstable structures, propane tanks, ammunition, solvents, toxic airborne particles, by-products or plastic combustion and various other chemicals," according to public health officials.

Residents who need to re-enter into their properties must bring official documentation such as a driver license or passport and a document proving residency. If a driver license does not reflect a resident's current address, officials will allow a utility bill or a similar document as verifiable proof.

Starting Tuesday, the daily check in time to return to the area starts at 10 a.m. and residents will have until 4 p.m. to check out. The check-in station is located at Foothill Elementary School at 29147 Auberry Road.

For more information and resources for those who have lost their homes in the Creek Fire, Fresno residents can visit the Local Assistance Center at the Clovis Veterans Memorial District located at 808 4th St.

The disaster relief center is open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. until further notice. Some available resources include critical document replacement services, social services, economic recovery and financial help, motor vehicle services, healthcare, mental health services and Red Cross access.

### **1:30 p.m.: Some Madera County evacuation warnings lifted**

The Madera County Sheriff's Office has lifted evacuation warnings for the following zones:

M1 Kerckhoff Lake, M2 Corrine Lake Road, M3 Lark Lane, M4A Redinger Lake Area, M5 Rainbow Drive, M6 Lower Cascadel Road, M7 Cascadel Area, M15 Carmen Ranch Road, M16 Road 222, M15 Road 222, M18 Road 222, M19 Road 228 and M31: Forest Service North Fork Station.

### **1 p.m.: Planned aerial operation postponed**

The helitorch operation that had been planned for Monday will likely happen later this week, according to Cal Fire.

The operation was stalled because of smoke conditions in Mariposa near the northern edge of the fire, which grounded the helicopter and kept it from getting to Buckeye, the Heliport near Lodge Road on Highway 168 where the torch was being prepped.

The operation will resume when conditions permit.

### **10:45 a.m.: Firefighters to use helitorch to clear fuels**

A different kind of aerial attack was coordinated Monday morning, as firefighters prepped to use a helitorch on the Creek Fire.

As the name implies, the 200 gallon tank is attached to the bottom of a UH-1H helicopter, and it drops gelled flame into spaces firefighters can't access otherwise.

This is a controlled flame that firefighters use to clear fuels between the fire and established control lines, said Cal Fire information officer Jordan Scott.

"We're just trying to close that gap," Scott said.

Firefighters had been doing much of the work on the ground, by using hand flares and drip torches or other hand-held devices.

Crews have been unsuccessful in dealing with the area designated for Monday's burn because of terrain and recent weather.

The area hasn't burned for nearly 100 years, according to Cal Fire Battalion Chief Paul Karpus.

"We really want to force it."

Some 4,500 acres are expected to be burned during the operation.

### **10:12 a.m.: Creek Fire activity mostly to the north; mop-up in south**

A large percentage of the active fire is now burning in less populated areas at the northern end. In the southern zone, fire crews have made good progress over the last few days, said Daniel Solis, a spokesperson for Cal Fire.

Crews in the southern zone are moving into the mop-up mode and working to strengthen containment, which continues to sit at 27%. More evacuation notices are expected to be lifted this week and people are being allowed back into some areas on the outskirts of the fire.

There's still no word when people can begin to go back into other areas. Highway 168 remains closed at Lodge Road.

The skies above Highway 168 toward Shaver Lake on Monday morning had cleared compared to last week — the hills are now visible with just a thin layer of smoke and haze.

Solis said that means aircraft will be able to help with operations and helicopter crews are expected to be up in the air Monday. Air crews drop retardant and water to get into areas that aren't accessible to ground crews, but the drops on Monday will not be as heavy as the kind of massive dumping that was used at the beginning of a fire.

Fire crews have made progress on lines near the Blue Canyon southwest of Shaver Lake, an area that had been a major concern for the past week.

“Crews made really good work there,” Solis said.

### **9 a.m.: Smoky haze will continue, air quality remains top concern**

The region’s seven major wildfires continue to blow smoke into the Valley. However, air quality forecasts continue to show an improvement in several counties, including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, and Tulare, sitting between the 51-100 PM 2.5 in the moderate range. The air quality will remain poor in the unhealthy range in the Sequoia National Park and Forest and unhealthy for sensitive groups in Kern County.

Dry conditions and slightly warmer temperatures are expected through Monday and throughout the week with mainly clear skies, except for some areas across the Sierra Nevada and adjacent foothills that will experience higher amounts of smoke and haze. High pressure could significantly raise temperatures by next Sunday.

Across the state, more than 19,000 firefighters continue to battle 27 major wildfires. Since the beginning of the year, there have been more than 7,900 wildfires that have burned about 3.6 million acres in California. Since August 15, when California’s fire season ramped up, 26 people have died and 6,400 structures have been destroyed.

High temperatures and dry conditions across California continue. The marine layer along the coast has brought some humidity recovery to those areas, clearing some of the haze seen in the last few weeks. Temperatures are expected to rise in many areas in the northern and southern parts of the state towards later in the week, while high north winds are expected, increasing the potential for critical fire weather.

### **8:22 a.m.: Bullfrog Fire containment at 20%; fire crews ramp up efforts**

The Bullfrog Fire, situated in the Sequoia National Forest about 43 miles northeast of Clovis on the eastern fringe of the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness, has burned 890 acres and remained at 20% containment as of Monday morning.

Fire crews were to continue to contain the spread Monday along the wildfire’s southeast edge. On Monday, fire officials will set up a small spike camp for three to five days west of Helms Meadow and near the northeast portion of the fire battle the flames. The plan is to use a minimal impact suppression tactic using natural features, including trails and creeks, as fire breaks.

There is a low to moderate fire threat in Courtright Village. Firefighters have constructed a control line along with a hose lay to protect the area if the fire moves south as a contingency plan to protect structures. The village is located on the northwest part of Courtright Reservoir and consists of 50 residential structures.

Dense smoke will keep temperatures below normal the next few days while areas free of smoke could see higher temperatures, while dry weather will continue for the next week. Fire officials expect light terrain driven winds will continue through midweek, while southwest and west winds are expected for the end of the week.

### **8:19 a.m.: SQF Complex Fire at 18% containment**

The SQF Complex fire had grown to 137,508 acres and was at 18% containment Monday morning.

Firefighters expect that the massive blaze, comprising the original Castle and Shotgun fires, will not be fully contained until late October. The fire has destroyed a total of 184 structures, threatened 3,188, and damaged 11.

In the east zone, the fire was active mostly on the south and northwest parts of the fire from Camp Nelson to Ponderosa. All active fire edges grew overnight. Timber fuels coupled with strong winds and flatter terrain contributed to some of the fire’s spread, while steep slopes in some areas prevented the fire from spreading as quickly.

Firefighters continue to prioritize battling the west zone of the fire, where it continues to spread back down west, north, and east of Dennison Mountain. Fire crews are operating in the southwest area, from Mountain Home to Washon Road.

In the east zone, temperatures will be slightly warmer on Monday, with highs ranging from the mid-80s in the lower elevations to the mid-70s in the higher elevations. Wind patterns are expected to range from t 6 to 12 mph in the afternoon with the occasional gust of 15 to 20 mph. In the west zone, temperatures will remain high, while cold air runoff winds are expected through the mid-morning and afternoon. Fire officials project smokey conditions and low visibility through the morning but expect the haze to clear up by the early afternoon.

Evacuation orders remain in place for the following communities:

- Ponderosa
- Pyles Boys Camp
- South Fork
- Redwood Drive
- Alpine Village
- Sequoia Crest
- Doyle Springs
- Highway 190 south from the intersection of Balch Park Road, north to Blue Ridge Lookout, east to Moses Mountain, and south to Highway 190 at Mahogany Flat
- Upper Tule River Corridor (Camp Nelson, Pierpoint, Coy Flat, Mountain Aire)

## **Desert homes threatened by enormous California wildfire**

By Associated Press

In the Business Journal, Monday, September 21, 2020

(AP) — An enormous wildfire that churned through mountains northeast of Los Angeles and into the Mojave Desert was still threatening homes on Monday, but officials said calmer winds could help crews corral the flames.

At 165 square miles (427 square kilometers), the Bobcat Fire is one of the largest ever in Los Angeles County and it has burned for more than two weeks. It's just 15% contained.

Evacuation orders and warnings are in place for thousands of residents in foothill and desert communities, where semi-rural homes and a popular nature sanctuary have burned. No injuries have been reported.

Erratic winds that drove flames into the community of Juniper Hills over the weekend had died down, said U.S. Forest Service fire spokesman Larry Smith.

"It's slightly cooler too, so hopefully that will be a help to firefighters," Smith said.

Numerous studies in recent years have linked bigger U.S. wildfires to global warming from the burning of coal, oil and gas, especially because climate change has made California much drier. A drier California means plants are more flammable.

Officials said it could be days before teams determine the scope of the destruction in the area about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northeast of downtown Los Angeles.

Firefighters fought back against another flareup near Mount Wilson, which overlooks greater Los Angeles in the San Gabriel Mountains and has a historic observatory founded more than a century ago and numerous broadcast antennas serving Southern California.

The Bobcat Fire started Sept. 6 and has doubled in size over the last week as it ripped through forested areas that hadn't burned in decades. The cause is under investigation.

The wildfire also destroyed the nature center at Devil's Punchbowl Natural Area, a geological wonder that attracts some 130,000 visitors per year. A wildlife sanctuary on the property was undamaged, and staff and animals had been evacuated days earlier.

Nearly 19,000 firefighters in California are fighting more than two dozen major wildfires. At least 7,900 wildfires have burned more than 6,000 square miles (15,500 square kilometers) in the state this year, including many since a mid-August barrage of dry lightning ignited parched vegetation.

Officials were investigating the death of a firefighter at another Southern California wildfire that erupted earlier this month from a smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used by a couple to reveal their baby's gender.

The death occurred Sept. 17 in San Bernardino National Forest as crews battled the El Dorado Fire about 75 miles (120 kilometers) east of Los Angeles, the U.S. Forest Service said in a statement. That blaze is 59% contained.

In Wyoming, officials warned that gusty winds on Monday could cause more growth of a wildfire burning toward cabins and an important water supply reservoir that's a major source of water for the state's capital city, Cheyenne. The fire in the Medicine Bow National Forest is burning in heavily forested, rugged terrain which would usually would be busy now with hunters at the start of elk hunting season.

And in Colorado, more evacuations were ordered on Sunday as winds caused the state's largest wildfire to grow. Firefighters had to temporarily retreat from the massive Cameron Peak Fire near Red Feather Lakes. Flames later spread into flatter ground which gave crews a better chance to battle the blaze, fire managers said.

More than 9,000 firefighters continue to battle 27 large wildfires across Oregon and Washington, where thousands of residences have been destroyed, the Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service said.