

## **New California fire scorches wine country near San Francisco**

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Sept. 28, 2020

ST. HELENA, Calif. (AP) — California firefighters battled destructive new wildfires in wine country north of San Francisco Monday as strong winds fanned flames in the already badly scorched state.

The new fires erupted Sunday in the famed Napa-Sonoma wine region and in far Northern California's Shasta County, forcing hasty evacuations of neighborhoods.

In wine country, flames engulfed the distinctive Chateau Boswell Winery north of St. Helena, The Black Rock Inn in the small community of St. Helena and multiple homes in the city of Santa Rosa, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. Residents of a senior home were among those evacuated.

The Adventist Health St. Helena hospital suspended care and transferred all patients elsewhere, according to a statement on its website.

The wine country blaze had burned 17 square miles (44 square kilometers) as of early Monday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire.

Numerous studies in recent years have linked bigger wildfires in America 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.

Evacuations were also ordered in Shasta County as that fire spread.

The causes of both new fires were under investigation.

During the weekend, the Pacific Gas & Electric utility turned off electricity to targeted areas where the winds raised the potential for arcing or other power equipment damage that could spark new fires.

So far this year, more than 8,100 California wildfires have scorched 5,780 square miles (14,970 square kilometers), destroyed more than 7,000 buildings and killed 26 people.

Most of the losses occurred after a frenzy of dry lightning strikes in mid-August ignited a massive outbreak of fires.

Conditions were also hot, dry and windy in parts of Arizona, where the Sears Fire in Tonto National Forest north of Phoenix has grown to more than 14 square miles (36 square kilometers) since it erupted Friday afternoon. Authorities reported zero containment.

## **Creek Fire updates: Fresno, Madera counties ease more evacuations, water alert issued**

By Robert Kuwada

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers Sunday, Sept. 27, 2020

The Creek Fire, already the largest single wildfire in state history, has now burned more than 300,000 acres but remained little changed throughout Sunday.

Fire officials in a 7:17 p.m. update said the acres burned remained at 302,870 and containment at 39%. The date for expected full containment has been pushed back to Oct. 31 from Oct. 15, according to Cal Fire.

In the North Zone, the fire continued to be active overnight and flare up as it entered pockets of fuels, including timber and brush. The fire is expected to remain active around Norris Lake, Cora Creek, Little Shuteye Peak, and south of Whisky Falls.

In the Creek Fire South Zone, the fire was aided by easterly winds. The complex terrain in the northern areas influences the wind and moves the fire in multiple directions, and the remainder of the fire has heavy material smoldering and is making short runs in the interior islands.

The fire is expected to be most active south of Mount Tom and to progress toward Florence Lake and the Dinkey Lakes wilderness.

Fire officials expected a significant shift in weather conditions Sunday afternoon, with down-slope and down-canyon winds impacting fire behavior.

With rising temperatures forecast through midweek, there will be an increase in fire behavior in areas where fuels are able to preheat earlier in the day and hot spots have more open flame and smoke.

Fuel loading in the timber is estimated at 2,000 tons per acre and brush in the area is at a critical fuel moisture level.

Five of the 26 active wildfires in the state are now more than 300,000 acres – the August Complex is listed at 873,120 acres, the SCU Lightning Complex at 396,624, the LNU Lightning Complex at 363,220, the North Complex at 305,188 and the Creek Fire 302,870.

#### **7:20 p.m.: 'Business as usual'**

Firefighters faced no significant challenges Sunday night on the Creek Fire, as containment and the size of the incident remained unchanged.

Although winds were a concern for some northern parts of the Sierra for Pacific Gas and Electric Co. customers, Creek Fire spokesman Chris Thompson said it was "business as usual" for the central Sierra wildfire region.

He said fire crews continued to build more containment lines.

Several evacuation warnings were lifted in the fire region throughout the day, and Thompson said residents around Shaver Lake had begun returning. More re-population efforts were expected Monday.

The Forest Service is expected to resume its live-streamed daily briefing at 7 p.m. Monday at the Millerton Fire Station.

#### **6:40 p.m.: More Madera County evacuations lifted**

Here are the latest evacuation warnings to be lifted in Madera County, according to the sheriff's office there.

**M8** – Douglas Ranger Station Road

**M9** – Willow Canyon Drive

**M10** – Road 274

**M11** – Marina View

**M22** – Gilpin Way

#### **4:30 p.m.: Water warning for wildfire areas**

Fresno County officials are warning residents returning to areas impacted by the Creek Fire to be mindful of water use, as conditions are not safe.

"Due to damage to the water/sewage system from the Creek Fire, water systems are about 50% capacity and the wastewater systems also have reduced capacity," the Fresno County Sheriff's Office advised Sunday afternoon.

Information from the county of Fresno recommended that residents avoid outdoor watering and take short showers, as well as fix leaky sinks and toilets in order to conserve water.

The county also issued a notice saying the water is unsafe to drink until the local government notifies them that it is. Maintenance staff is working to make repairs to the water facilities damaged by the fire.

#### **12:30 p.m.: 22 more evacuation orders lifted**

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office and fire officials announced that 22 more evacuation orders from the Creek Fire had been lifted and are subject to Regional Order No. 20-17 USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region Emergency Forest Closure Order.

**Zone F2O** – South boundary includes and extends south of Beach Parking 3. West Boundary includes Steven Creek Dam and Huntington Lake Road from Shaver Point to Sierra Marina.

**Zone F2P** – Zone extends to contain the west side of Tollhouse Road and Rockhaven Road, just north of the Central Sierra Historical Society.

**Zone F6C** – The south boundary includes the lake shore of Pine Flat Lake between Trimmer Campground to the east of the Trimmer Springs Road and Sycamore 2 Road intersection. The west boundary is the east border of the Trimmer Campground. The north boundary includes the Sycamore Creek area.

**Zone F6D** – Contains the intersection of Trimmer Springs Road and Big Creek Road. The south boundary is Pine Flat Lake. The west boundary is about a half a mile south of the Trimmer Springs Road intersection with Sycamore 2 Road. The north boundary is about a third of a mile south of Ross Creek. The east boundary is about a mile east of the Trimmer Springs Road and Big Creek Road intersection.

**Zone F6E** – Contains wilderness north of Pine Flat Lake, east of Bob's Flat Trail. South of Soaproot Saddle Road, and west of Big Creek Road.

**Zone F6F** – Contains both sides of Big Creek Road south of Cats Head Campground and north of Ross Creek.

**Zone F6G** – South Boundary is just north of the Dinkey-Trimmer Road and Ross Crossing Road intersection. West Boundary is a half a mile west of the Big Creek Road and Vomac Clovis Drive intersection. The north boundary is a mile north of the Nutmeg Campground (off of Big Creek Road). East boundary contains Dinkey Trimmer Road.

**Zone F6H** – Contains undeveloped land that spreads out about a mile and a half in most directions from the intersection of Bob's Flat Road and Soaproot Saddle Road.

**Zone F6I** – South boundary (includes) and runs south of Soaproot Campground. The west boundary is about half a mile west of the Blue Canyon Work Center. The north boundary is about a mile south of Providence Creek Road. The east boundary is a quarter mile west from the Duff Creek and Lost Creek transition.

**Zone F6J** – South boundary is just north of McClarty Farms Yard South Avenue. West boundary is about a quarter-mile east of the Soaproot Saddle Road and Bob's Flat Road intersection. North boundary is just south of the Big Creek Road and Soaproot Saddle Road intersection.

**Zone F7A** – Contains both sides of Dinkey Creek Road (including) just west of Blue Canyon Vista Observation. It follows Dinkey Creek Road to the east until just outside Summit Meadow Campground. The north boundary is south (excluding) of the shoreline of Shaver Lake and Fishing Club.

**Zone F7B** – South boundary is Bald Mountain and the south bend of Shaver Lake. The west boundary is west of the shoreline of Shaver Lake. The north boundary contains properties that lay south of Huntington Lake Road. The east boundary is west of Rock Creek Road from Tollhouse Road.

**Zone F7C** – South boundary consists of the north side of Highway 168, west of Tamarack Ridge and east of Sierra Marina. The west boundary and north boundary consist of the south side of Huntington Lake Road. This zone includes Tamarack Mountain.

**Zone F7F** – The south boundary contains both sides of Dawn Road from Huntington Lake Road and Musick Peak Road. The west boundary contains Million Dollar Road and continues to the San Joaquin River. The north boundary is a mile north of Musick mountain. The east boundary contains the west side of Huntington Lake Road between Sierra Marina in the south to the intersection of Huntington Lake Road and Musick Peak Road in the north.

**Zone F8A** – South boundary lays north of Sawmill Flat and south of Sugarpine Hill. The west boundary is a quarter of a mile from the Ross Crossing Road and McKinley Grove Road intersection. The north boundary extends (includes) property north of Courtright Reservoir. The east boundary ends east of (including) Wishon Reservoir.

**Zone F8B** – South boundary includes the areas both north and south of McKinley Grove Road, and runs south of Dinkey Mountain. The boundary runs north to include Dinkey Creek and runs about a half-mile north of Dinkey Creek Campground. The boundary continues to the east, west of Nelson Mountain.

**Zone F8C** – South boundary lays north of Sycamore Springs Road. West boundary is at the intersection of Ross Crossing Road and Trimmer Springs Road. The west boundary continues north to contain Nutmeg Glen along Ross Crossing Road. The north boundary ends south of Dinkey Mountain. The east boundary ends half of a mile east of Ross Crossing Campground.

**Zone F8D** – The south boundary contains both sides of Ross Crossing Road, north of Patterson Bluffs. The west boundary is roughly a half of a mile southeast of Ross Crossing Campground. This section contains Patterson Mountain.

**Zone F8E** – West boundary begins at the intersection of Blackrock Road and Vomic Road. The north boundary runs a quarter of a mile north of the intersection of McKinley Grove Road and Blackrock Road. The east border runs east of Granite Gorge in the north and runs east of Rodgers Ridge at the end of Vomic Way.

**Zone F8F** – The south boundary lays roughly a mile south of Black Rock Road. The west boundary is just east of the end of Vomic Road, and west of Patterson Bluffs. The north boundary is south of Ross Crossing Road, and the east boundary is at the intersection of Blackrock Road and Vomic Road.

**Zone F8G** – The south boundary runs along the north side of Kings River and begins in the west at the western outlet of Pine Flat Lake, and continues to the east past Kirch Flat Campground. The north boundary is south of Balch Camp.

**Zone F8H** – The south boundary lays north of Kirch Flat Campground. The west boundary is at the intersection of Trimmer Springs Road and Ross Crossing Road. The north boundary contains the areas north of Trimmer Springs Road and Sycamore Springs Road. The east boundary is at the end of Vomic Road.

Fresno County has an up-to-date [map of evacuation orders and warnings](#).

Regional order No. 20-17 USDA, the Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region emergency forest closure order, prohibits going into or being upon National Forest system lands, being on a National Forest system road and being on a National Forest system trail within the national forests in the Pacific Southwest Region, which include the following:

- Angeles National Forest
- Cleveland National Forest
- Los Padres National Forest
- San Bernardino National Forest
- Inyo National Forest
- Sequoia National Forest
- Sierra National Forest
- Klamath National Forest
- Six Rivers National Forest

It is in effect through Sept. 30, 2020. The following persons are exempt ...

- Persons with Forest Service permit No. FS-7700-48 (permit for use of roads, trails, or areas restricted by regulation or order), specifically exempting them from this order
- Any federal, state, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.

- Persons with a Forest Service non-special-use written authorization to conduct non-recreational activities, such as harvesting timber or forest products, or grazing livestock.
- Owners or lessees of land, to the extent necessary to access their land.
- Residents, to the extent necessary to access their residences.
- Persons engaged in a business, trade, or occupation are not exempt from the prohibitions, but may use National Forest system roads to the extent necessary to carry out their business, trade or occupation.

#### **10:20 a.m.: More Fresno County evacuation orders lifted**

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office announced that evacuation orders have been lifted for eight zones impacted by the Creek Fire.

**Zone F1P** – The south boundary is the intersection of Peterson Road and James Mountain Road. The west boundary is the intersection of Cressman Road and Glenwood Lane. The north boundary is south of Wild Rose Lane and Fawn Lily Lane (Includes properties off of Yellow Lupin Lane). The east boundary is the intersection of Taylor Creek and Rush Creek.

**Zone F2B** – Includes only the east side of Tollhouse Road and its community that lays off all of its offshoots from Lakeview Drive and Dalton Avenue to the Shaver Lake shoreline.

**Zone F2C** – Includes only the east side of Highway 168 (Huntington Lake Road). North boundary includes Shaver Lake Watersports, just south of the Cottages at the Point. South boundary includes the Central Sierra Historical Society. The east boundary includes all off Camp Edison to the Shaver Lake shoreline.

**Zone F2D** – South boundary includes the north side of Dinkey Creek Road at its intersection with Sparrow Road. The south boundary extends to include all houses and offshoots on the north face of Sparrow Road. The west boundary includes all properties on the east side of Highway 168. The north boundary lays south of Camp Edison. The east boundary extends to the Shaver Lake shoreline.

**Zone F2E** – The south boundary begins north of the Shaver Post Office. The west boundary contains properties on the east side of Tollhouse Road. The north boundary contains properties on the south side of Sparrow Road and Dinkey Creek Road. The east boundary extends to contain properties on the east side of Musick Drive from Dinkey Creek Road.

**Zone F2K** – South boundary begins north of the Shaver Post Office. West boundary extends to contain all properties on Hillcrest Road from Highway 168. The north boundary is south of Sweet Grass Street. The east boundary consists of the properties that lay on the west side of Highway 168.

**Zone F2M** – Zone contains the undeveloped area west of Tollhouse Road north of Ken's Market and south of the Stevens Creek Dam.

**Zone F2N** – Contains a largely undeveloped area along the shoreline of Shaver Lake. Contains the north and east side of Shaver Lake.

Fresno County road closures remain in effect on Tollhouse Road at Highway 168, Tollhouse Road at Shaver Springs Road, Highway 168 at Huntington Lake Road, Dinkey Creek Road at Ockenden Village Road and Trimmer Springs Road at Maxon Road.

#### **9:45 a.m.: Bullfrog Fire update**

The Bullfrog Fire, burning in the Sequoia National Forest east of the Creek Fire, has burned 1,185 acres with 46% containment, according to a Sunday morning update from fire officials.

Water drops from two Chinook helicopters aided fire crews in significant gains in containment, which had been listed at 30%.

The fire, burning on the eastern fringe of the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness west of Courtright Reservoir, started Sept. 9 and is not related to the Creek Fire.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Fire crews on Sunday will continue fire suppression and containment along the southeast edge with further support from the air, while clear of smoke.

### **8:45 a.m.: Red Flag warnings in place, new fire in Napa**

A Red Flag warning will continue through Monday for much of Northern California due to gusty winds and low humidity, creating critical fire weather conditions.

Those winds have fanned a new incident in Napa County. The Glass Fire, east of Calistoga, started early Sunday and quickly spread to 800 acres. There are evacuation orders in place for all of Crystal Springs Road and North Fork Crystal Springs.

The cause of that wildfire is under investigation.

A Fire Weather Watch also is in effect across Los Angeles, Ventura, and San Diego mountain areas, and the Santa Clarita and San Diego valleys due to gusty Santa Ana winds and low humidity.

A Red Flag Warning is issued when conditions including low humidity, strong winds, dry fuels and the possibility of dry lightning strikes may result in extreme fire behavior within 24 hours.

A Fire Weather Watch signals when weather conditions could exist within 12 to 72 hours.

PG&E started a Public Safety Power Shutoff on Sunday morning due to forecast high winds, with parts of 16 Northern California counties to be impacted.

The shutoff is expected to affect about 89,000 customers in Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lake, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Tehama and Yuba counties.

The winds are expected to ease through Sunday, but then pick up again late in the afternoon.

### **8 a.m.: Fire crews gain on SQF Complex Fire**

Cal Fire reports that the SQF Complex Fire is now 47% contained, while total reported acres burned remained at 149,888 on Sunday morning.

The cause of that blaze is listed as lightning.

The fire crept through unburned areas overnight at a slow pace, fire officials said, though heat in dead standing logs remains a significant threat. Damage estimates continue, with 173 structures reported as destroyed and 12 as damaged. There also are 59 minor structures reported damaged.

Officials downgraded several mandatory evacuation orders for the area to voluntary on Saturday afternoon, including South Fork Drive in Three Rivers from Conley Bridge (just south of Heidi Drive) to Cinnamon Canyon Road; east from South Fork Drive to Cinnamon Gap and Blossom Peak Road; south of Mountain Springs Road to Blossom Peak Ridge and Cinnamon Canyon Road.

Residents in those areas may return to their homes after showing proof of residency to law enforcement.

Sequoia National Park remains closed, and evacuation orders remain in place for Ponderosa, Alpine Village, Sequoia Crest, Doyle Springs, Cedar Slope, Upper Tule River Corridor (Camp Nelson, Pierpoint, Coy Flat, Mountain Aire, and points between, Mineral King, Silver City, Portions of Three Rivers, and Cahoon Mountain.

Voluntary evacuation orders are in place for the community of Springville (all points between Globe Dr. and Balch Park Rd.), the remainder of Three Rivers, Cherokee Oaks, Old Three Rivers Road.

The SQF Complex Fire is a combination of the Castle Fire and the Shotgun Fire, which formed a complex on Aug. 24.

The Shotgun Fire started Aug. 18, the Castle Fire on Aug. 19.

### **7:30 a.m.: Small animal shelter closing**

The shelter at the Fresno Fairgrounds for small animals displaced by the Creek Fire will be closing on Sunday at 5 p.m. and relocating to the county animal shelter in Fresno.

The remaining animals at the Fairgrounds will be moved, and animals from the disaster area that need to be sheltered can be taken to the county facility Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The shelter is located at 760 W. Nielsen.

## **Power shut off set for 65,000 California electric customers**

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 27, 2020

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Power will be shut off for 65,000 Northern California electric customers in 16 counties to prevent the spread of wildfires that have engulfed areas of the state, officials said Sunday.

Pacific Gas & Electric, the nation's largest electric utility, shut off power to 11,000 customers beginning at 4 a.m. Sunday and planned to cut service to another 54,000 customers by 8 p.m.

The company expected to have power restored by Monday evening to all customers.

PG&E Incident Commander Mark Quinlan said the initial plan was to temporarily cut service to 89,000 customers but continuous monitoring enabled the company to reduce the number by 27%.

The initial power outage for 11,000 customers occurred in Butte and Plumas counties.

The second shutdown phase beginning Sunday evening was planned for Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lake, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Tehama and Yuba counties. Two customers were also scheduled for shutdowns in Sonoma County.

Shutoffs were also scheduled to begin Monday at 7 a.m. in Kern County for a small number of customers.

The company plans to begin restoring power after receiving confirmation that the weather and wildfire risks enable patrols, inspections and repairs by 50 helicopters and about 1,700 ground personnel in vehicles and on foot.

The shutoff was enacted as result of a red flag warning because of high winds, officials said.

PG&E Senior Meteorologist Scott Strenfel said beginning Saturday evening there was a reported wind speed of 15-30 mph (24-48 kph), 40-55 mph (64-89 kph) wind gusts and humidity levels of 15% to 20%.

The company continues to monitor weather conditions in concert with federal agencies including the National Weather Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Customer Experience Manager Vanessa Bryan said PG&E sent 913,000 customer notifications and is operating 28 community resource centers from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. while power is out. As of Sunday evening, the centers had received about 1,200 visitors, Bryan said.

The shutoffs came as a new, swift-moving wildfire broke out in Napa County, which prompted evacuations of homes and a hospital. The fire was burning near several wineries and churned through 1.9 square miles (4.9 square kilometers) Sunday, the San Francisco Chronicle [reported](#).

Fire-weary California is facing a new siege of hot, dry weather with potentially strong winds that could cause power lines to arc and spark new blazes in parched vegetation that's ready to burn.

Red Flag warnings for extreme fire weather conditions were issued for the northern and central areas of the state from late Saturday to Monday, the National Weather Service said. Similar warnings were in place for parts of Southern California's San Bernardino and Riverside counties on Monday.

So far this year, more than 8,100 California wildfires have scorched 5,780 square miles (14,970 square kilometers), destroyed more than 7,000 buildings and killed 26 people.

Most of the loss has occurred since a frenzy of dry lightning strikes in mid-August ignited a massive outbreak of fires. The causes of other fires remain under investigation and authorities said one was caused by a pyrotechnic device at a gender reveal event.

On Sunday, wind drove smoke from the new Napa County fire toward Sonoma and Marin counties, worsening the air quality, said Gerry Diaz, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"We just have smoke on all fronts, unfortunately," Diaz said.

## **Mexican fire crews arrive in Tulare County to fight Sequoia Complex on park's 130th birthday**

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times-Delta, Sunday, September 27, 2020

LAKE ISABELLA — On Sequoia National Park's 130th birthday, the jewel of the Sierra Nevada received a desperately needed gift: 100 Mexican firefighters who made the long journey from Guadalajara to assist in the battle against the SQF Complex that threatens the famous giant trees and several Tulare County mountain communities.

Firefighters from 22 Mexican states filled the bleachers of Kern Valley High School on Friday as California officials warmly greeted and thanked the men and women for their help, highlighting a partnership between the two countries that stretches back to the 1980s, agency leaders said.

"We would like to thank the leadership of Mexico for sending you to help us during a time of historical need in a record fire season," Incident Commander Mike Milton told the crowd clad in yellow jackets and green Nomex. "California is dealing with some of the most challenging wildland fire in the state's history."

He said international aid is crucial as the Golden State grapples with a brutal fire season that has scorched more than 3.6 million acres, destroyed 6,700 structures and killed 26 people.

The SQF Complex has scorched 150,000 acres and destroyed more than 200 structures, forcing thousands of people to evacuate eastern Tulare County earlier this month. It's nearly half contained after weeks without progress.

The Mexican crews will begin working Saturday on the fire's southern edge to defend the Tule River Indian Reservation in the southern Sierra foothills. Crews will work "hand in hand" with 1,400 other firefighters already on the front lines to battle the blaze before returning home safely, officials said.

Milton spoke of the Sierra's unique geography that is beautiful to behold but can pose challenges for firefighters with its thick blanket of dense vegetation and dried-out trees.

"You will likely get the opportunity to see some of the largest trees on the planet ... Each one of those (Giant Sequoia) groves are highly important values that are at risk of this fire," he said. "Life is just a series of experiences, and we hope this experience is one you will carry back with you to your home country and make you a better firefighter."

For Mathlla Cortina of Veracruz, the sequoias are a familiar sight. She spent three months in the national forest learning about California's uniquely dry conditions during a 2018 exchange program.

"I'm very excited to return (to Sequoia National Forest) with all of my colleagues from CONAFOR (the National Forestry Commission of Mexico)," she said via a translator. "We're looking forward to returning home safely and applying the knowledge we learn on the fire line."

Though it's the wet season in most of Mexico now, Cortina says "more fires in more parts of the country" are becoming the norm as climate change causes drier conditions to creep closer toward the equator.

CONAFOR firefighters have also been deployed to Chile, Canada and many other countries under international mutual aid agreements.

"Fires do not have borders, fires do not have different languages and cultures. In the end we all speak the same language when it comes to fighting fire," said Eduardo Cruz, the Mexican agency's fire director.

Decades ago, Cruz spent a "career-defining" summer in the Sequoia National Forest, he said. It was above the Giant Sequoias that Cruz learned to orchestrate a helicopter attack, dropping thousands of gallons of water and retardant from hundreds of feet in the air.

"It's a pleasant feeling coming back to provide support for this major incident ... We understand the historic importance of the sequoia," he said.

The SQF Complex has so far spared many of the famed trees from serious damage. The redwoods are "friends of fire" and depend on low-intensity flames to reproduce and clear the forest floor of competitors.

High-intensity blazes, though, can damage and even kill the massive monarchs that grow in just two California ranges.

"It takes time to assess the damages to the Giant Sequoia. Early evidence shows a mixed intensity of fires that may even be beneficial for the trees in the long-term," Milton said.

The Sequoia National Park and forest will remain closed while firefighters from around the globe work to contain the SQF Complex. Park officials called the closure a "significant bummer" but a necessary measure to keep people safe. The park's entrance and headquarters remain under a mandatory evacuation order with fires burning on the park's southern edge.

"This is not how we were expecting to celebrate our 130th birthday," said Perri Spreiser, the park's fire information officer. "Deciding to close the park was not an easy decision to make."

## **Gusty winds, 100-degree temperatures: Fire danger on the rise again throughout California**

By Jessica Skropanic

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020

Much of California will be at greater-than-usual risk from fire this weekend, and into mid-fall.

Fire weather watches are in effect this weekend throughout most of Northern California, and meteorologists expect to issue watches for parts of Southern California next week when temperatures soar into triple digits.

Temperatures could reach 100 degrees in places along the Valley floor and inland Southern California, and up to 110 degrees in desert regions like Palm Springs/Sonoran Desert. Heat coupled with 20-mph winds and 30-mph wind gusts will drop humidity levels as low as 10% throughout most of inland Southern California, the Central Valley, the Western Sierra Nevada foothills and the San Francisco Bay Area to South Santa Clara County.

That dry weather could feed wildfires already burning throughout the state. Areas affected include Mendocino County where the August Complex is burning, and the Sierra Nevada Mountains where the SQE Complex burns near Visalia and the Creek Fire near Fresno.

"The outlook predicts warmer than average temperatures through November and little precipitation," said meteorologist Alex Tardy at the National Weather Service in San Diego. "(Conditions) remain critically dry and sensitive to any wildfire starting at (this) time."

California has been dealing with an outbreak of fires sparked by dry lightning and driven by winds in a dry, hot year. As of Thursday, firefighters were battling 26 major wildfires burning throughout the state, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. More than 8,000 wildfires burned more than 3.6 million acres; 26 people have died and at least 6,700 structures were destroyed.

The Weather Service this week issued a fire weather watch for much of Northern and Central California.

Conditions will likely worsen next week, said warning coordination meteorologist Brian Garcia at the National Oceanic Atmospheric and Administration office in Monterey. He expects the San Francisco Bay Area's fire weather watch to "be upgraded to a Red Flag Warning, if models continue to show gusty winds over the hills."

The NWS' Sacramento Valley forecast included wind and temperatures in the 90s starting Saturday, with triple digits possible on Sunday. That heat is making dry conditions even drier, said meteorologist Hannah Chandler-Cooley in Sacramento.

This first week of fall is likely a harbinger of what is to come, said meteorologist Alex Tardy at NWS in San Diego. "The outlook predicts warmer than average temperatures through November and little precipitation. (Conditions) remain critically dry and sensitive to any wildfire starting at (this) time."

April heatwaves, and winds — warm Santa Anas in June and winds flowing up into Northern California from the Bay Area — started to dry the state earlier than most seasons, Tardy said.

Temperatures reached 115 degrees in Escondido and 121 degrees in Chino. That heat, followed by little rain and more dry Santa Ana winds, caused drought expansion in the Southeast this summer.

"August was the hottest (month) on record for the entire state," Tardy said. Humidity levels dropped to all-time lows.

Now fire weather risk is extreme, and will likely stay that way this fall, he said.

For more information on weather in your area go to the 's interactive weather map at [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov).

## **Air district considers alternatives to open burning of ag waste**

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020

Almost five years have passed since regional air quality regulators undertook a comprehensive analysis of pollution created by open burning of agricultural waste. What that means, under state law, is that it's time to do it again.

But what's going to be different this time? What more can the regulatory agency responsible for overseeing the process — the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District — do to minimize such pollution in an economically feasible way?

Not surprisingly, changes in technology and business are likely to be the biggest determinants going forward. And while some old problems remain, there's also hope that new approaches might pan out to the benefit of every breathing human in the region.

For years the state's favored practice was to have local farmers gather up their woody waste, such as prunings, old almond trees and former vineyards, and haul it to a biomass plant equipped to take in the material and burn it to create energy. Some of these facilities have also generated steam for the benefit of local oil production.

It wasn't a perfect alternative, in that the process still emits particulate matter. But in the end market forces, and some say lack of support from policy-makers, led to the shutdown of several biomass plants around the Central Valley.

Since then, district officials say, open ag burning has been unavoidable at times, leading farmers to apply for permission to rake up their waste into a pile and light it on fire. That option, allowed only when weather conditions permit, only exacerbates some of the worst air quality in the country.

There are alternatives — several, actually — but they're not equally attractive. In some cases the technology isn't as refined as it ought to be; in others the technology is there but it hasn't been commercialized to the degree necessary to make it economically viable.

Jon Klassen, the district's director of air quality science and planning, said this year's assessment will likely focus on options known as soil incorporation, pyrolysis, composting and air curtain burners, as well as biomass incineration when possible and open burning in situations where no feasible alternatives exist.

Soil incorporation refers to the process of chipping and shredding ag waste that is then buried in ag fields where it is left to decompose.

There are benefits, including the sequestration of carbon that contributes to global warming. Since late 2018 the air district has invested \$8 million in creating incentives that resulted in 17,000 acres worth of waste being plowed back into the ground.

But some say ag waste is being generated more quickly than farmers can bury it.

"Typically, there's too much orchard waste to be incorporated back into the soil," Karen Norene Mills, director of legal services for the California Farm Bureau Federation, said by email.

Klassen added that soil incorporation "may work for some (farmers) and not for others."

Pyrolysis, or gasification, is another option. It involves heating up ag waste without actually burning it. The process creates a gas that can be sold, as well as a byproduct called biochar that can also be used or stored efficiently.

For all its potential, however, Klassen said pyrolysis is not yet widely available.

"This is kind of a developing area," he said.

Composting is another alternative available to farmers. Klassen said the air district has looked at it in the past and found there are a number of limitations in local and state regulations.

It's still not very widely used, he added, but it's something the district does plan to review as it considers the whole range of viable options to open burning.

A process he said does seem to hold considerable potential is what's called air curtain burners. It's a technology that blows and recirculates hot air over a closed box.

The result is a cleaner burn, but the drawback is cost: Klassen said farmers generally have to pay someone to come perform the service, which can be prohibitively expensive.

Mills, at the farm federation, said the group sees biomass plants as a strong option but that more such facilities are needed to handle the volume of waste being generated.

"We hope the consideration of the double value of biomass energy, in improving air quality and adding another source of renewable energy, could help stabilize California energy supplies," she wrote.

The president of the Kern County Farm Bureau, John C. Moore III, said by email the valley's agriculture community is interested in new ways to incorporate or reduce ag waste. But an important consideration is timeliness. When farmers need to dispose of wood they generally need to do it quickly to make room for something else.

Given the shortage of biomass plants, he said, soil incorporation might be a good option to open burning.

"At the end of the day," he wrote, "we all breathe the same air."

## **Ecologist Says the USFS Needs To Get Out of the Way in Wake of Massive Fires**

By Jim Jakobs

GVWire, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020

After nearly three weeks the Creek Fire continues to burn and is now the largest single wildfire in recorded California history at 291,426 Acres according to CAL FIRE. The USFS is still estimating full containment won't be reached until October 15th.

Madera County Supervisor Tom Wheeler says he knows why the forests are burning at a record rate in the state. "California used to have over 120 Saw Mills to build the roads to and in the Forest, thin, cut, and mill the most renewable resources we have. Trees," says Wheeler in a text to GV Wire<sup>SM</sup>. Wheeler says he's spent the better part of the last 2 decades working through all the necessary red tape to get a biomass plant built in North Fork. Recently, Wheeler signed a 10-year logging contract with the U.S. Forest Service, but still has to spend the next year going through red tape before he can remove one tree.

Recently, Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Steve Daines (R-Mont.) introduced the Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act. If passed, the bill would create a program to incentivize the collection of woody biomass and help expand processing facilities to make biomass more economically viable.

Wheeler says one of the biggest opponents to his biomass project and logging efforts was John Muir Project co-founder Chad Hanson.

So, GV Wire<sup>SM</sup> reached out to Hanson to get his perspective on why he doesn't think logging or biomass is the way to manage forests in California. He believes the problem and solutions are in the hands of regular people.

### **Madera County Projects**

“Let me say that over the 60 plus years I have worked the land here in the foothills and forests I have witnessed many drought years,” says Wheeler. “Before the 3 saw mills shut down here in our area (5 different ones all together) we did not have these great big totally devastating 100,000 acre fires.”

Before he became a county supervisor, Wheeler started his career working at the North Fork Saw Mill cutting, burning brush, and logging.

Wheeler says he doesn't view the environmental movement very kindly. “In the early 90's the environmental community started using the Spotted Owl endangerment as a excuse to stop logging to save them. We now only have around 20 Saw Mills in California. And guess what? The Spotted Owls are now burning up along with our unmanaged forests,” says Wheeler.

### **Sierra Nevada Conservancy Work**

The Rim Fire started in August of 2013 after a hunter's illegal fire got out of control. It was named for its proximity to the Rim of the World vista point, a scenic overlook on Highway 120 leading up to Yosemite. The fire burned 257,314 acres.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is administering a \$28 million NDRC grant for forest resilience efforts where the Rim fire burned including fuels reduction, reforestation, noxious weed abatement, rangeland improvement, and strategic fuel break expansions.

“There has been some public opposition to the project work, but it has not stopped or delayed efforts on the ground,” says Executive Officer Angela Avery in an email to GV Wire<sup>SM</sup>. She says the SNC board took public comments (Chad Hanson was one) at a June 2018 board meeting that led to a tour with a wide variety of people with differing viewpoints including representatives of the John Muir Project.

“That informational tour was held in May 2019 and no changes were made to the project following the tour,” said Avery.

### **John Muir Project Perspective**

“A lot more dead trees do not burn more intensely. I know that sounds really counterintuitive,” Hanson tells GV Wire<sup>SM</sup> over the phone. “What studies are finding is a forest with more dead trees whether they're recently dead or whether it's years and years after they died – those forests do not burn more intensely than other forests.”

Hanson says other research even shows forests with more dead trees actually burn less intensely. He says when trees die, their small twigs fall and decay in the soil very quickly. Hanson says after that happens, there's not much on the tree that can carry the flames even though the outer surface of the tree will get scorched.

Hanson co-authored a study on the issue of dying forests in California that he says shows no correlation between the density of dead trees and fire intensity. He says his and other studies keep coming back to the same conclusion. “What they (studies) found is that fire behavior is driven overwhelmingly by weather and climate change,” says Hanson.

### **Hanson's Thoughts on Preventing Wildland Fires**

“We need to get the US Forest Service out of the commercial logging business and protect our forests,” says Hanson. “Logging is making the fires burn more intensely.” He also believes the removal of dead trees is also leading to problems.

“I'm very well aware of the area where the Creek Fire made that 16 mile run (Saturday September 5),” explains Hanson. “That run was through an area that had been heavily post fire logged several years earlier after the French Fire.” He also says areas of the devastating 2018 Camp Fire that burned in the first 6 hours had been heavily logged.

So, his answer to the question of what needs to be done to prevent large wildfires? Two things.

“You're not going to avoid fires. You're going to have lightning strikes, but you can certainly stop unplanned human ignitions,” says Hanson. “We need more rangers to prevent unplanned human ignitions during fire season.”

He believes the large sums of money being spent on logging operations would be better spent on fire prevention.

“The other thing I would say in terms of a better way forward is we need to devote our resources to helping homeowners make their homes fire safe,” said Hanson. He thinks residents need to install fire resistant roofing, rain guards, ember proof vents, and provide defensible space pruning within 100 feet of their homes.

### **Biomass**

GV Wire<sup>SM</sup> asked Hanson about Senator Dianne Feinstein’s push for more biomass, and the work Wheeler is doing to bring a biomass plant to North Fork.

“What I would say to Feinstein and Wheeler is shame on you,” said Hanson. “Biomass is not stopping fires. In fact, the fires that we have seen burn the most intensely, the most rapidly, have been in areas that were biomass logged.”

Hanson points to a study he co-authored in 2016 that dealt with biomass. “The vast majority of the biomass being pulled out of the forest is literally non combustible to wildland fire.”

### **Smoky Conditions Remain Over Foothills. Could Soon Return to Valley Floor.**

By Jim Jakobs

GVWire, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020

The National Weather Service Hanford office computer models have shown stagnant smoky air hovering over the areas of the Creek Fire and the SQF Complex fire in Tulare county for several weeks. The valley will likely be impacted this weekend.

“We will see a wind shift late this weekend from a high pressure system using winds from the northeast to push smoke into the Valley,” said Hanford NWS Meteorologist Colin McKellar.

When GV Wire<sup>SM</sup> asked, McKellar was kind enough to use output from their Experimental High-Resolution Rapid Refresh computer model to provide a fresh forecast for the upcoming weekend. In the model (seen below from NWS Facebook page), the darker colors are over the areas of the fires. As the model progresses through the weekend, the smoke shifts back towards the Valley floor.

### **Health Caution Remains in Place**

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District still has a health caution in place.

The District anticipates air quality to be unhealthy in a number of regions in the Valley, and to worsen as the week progresses. Smoke will remain on the Valley floor and will increase as the weekend approaches, eventually impacting the entire San Joaquin Valley which includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare Counties, and the valley portion of Kern County. Additionally, the Creek Fire, located in Fresno/Madera counties and the SQF Complex Fire, located in Tulare County are still impacting nearby foothill communities and neighboring counties.

### **Fire Danger in Northern California**

PG&E has issued a Public Safety Power Shutoff notice for Saturday in parts of the Sierra Nevada foothills. Areas stretching from Calaveras County to the south, up to Plumas County further north are all included in the notice.

CalFire says a significant warm up will begin Saturday, stretching across the state into the following week, with a chance of record-breaking high temperatures in some areas. Locally gusty winds may also occur, bringing elevated fire danger.

A Red Flag Warning has been issued for gusty winds, high heat, and low humidity beginning Saturday through Monday, affecting areas including the East Bay Hills and interior valleys, and North Bay mountains. A Fire Weather Watch is in effect beginning Saturday morning through Monday over a large portion of Northern California for gusty winds and low humidity, bringing critical fire weather conditions.

## **Creek Fire updates: Wildfire stays at 291,426 acres while containment improves to 39%**

By Joshua Tehee

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020

The Creek Fire remained at about the same size while containment improved slightly, Cal Fire announced during a Friday evening news conference.

Burning for a third straight week in the Sierra National Forest, the Creek Fire stayed at 291,426 acres and was 39 % contained, a daily improvement of 3%.

The Creek Fire, located near Shaver and Huntington lakes and toward the southern border of Yosemite National Park, is not expected to reach full containment until the end of October.

There currently are 3,263 personnel combating the wildfire.

“The fire really has not grown that much over the past couple of days,” said Dean Gould, U.S. Forest Supervisor and Agency Administrator. “And the acreage that has increased, to some degree, that’s intentional.

“Meaning, it’s the burning operations that we’re doing. Very positive sign there. The percent containment, it’s going up — an outstanding trend.”

On Friday morning, the wildfire was at 291,426 acres and 36% containment as it was Thursday evening, according to Cal Fire.

Many points of the fire line continue to see little progress and re-entry and repopulation efforts continued on Friday, especially in the southern zone.

Kaiser Pass Road remains a critical travel route, out toward Edison Lake and Mono Hot Springs, and the fire is now burning within miles of the High Sierra Ranger Station. This was predicted, Cal Fire said, and resources have been assigned to hold the fire on the road and protect resources and structures in the area.

- Progress is being made on the nearby SQF Complex Fire, which includes the Castle and Shotgun fires and has been burning in and near the Sequoia National Forest for more than a month. As of Friday morning, it had burned 144,777 acres and was 36% contained.

The Tulare County Sheriff’s Office on Thursday night downgraded some evacuation orders and removed the evacuation warning for Springville between Globe Drive and Back Park Road.

Evacuation warnings have been left in place for Balch Park Road from Highway 190 to Yokel Valley Road; Balch Park Road below Blue Ridge Road and Bear Creek Road below SCICON.

People in those areas are able to return to their homes, but should be ready to evacuate should fire conditions change. These areas will continue to have checkpoints and only residents with proof of residency are allowed to enter.

- The Bullfrog Fire, east of Shaver Lake near Courtright Reservoir, has burned 1,185 acres and is 30% contained, according to the incident report online.

### **8:40 p.m.: Repopulating Shaver**

Re-population efforts are expected to begin Sunday for Shaver Lake, Pine Ridge, and Cressman’s, according to Jean Rousseau, Fresno County Administrative Officer.

The Shaver Lake sewer plant is operating in limited capacity, with some still without service, Rousseau added.

“We’re excited to start the repopulation process, but we want to warn residents to be careful on the roads, Rousseau said. “There’s a lot of utility folks and public safety folks who are driving on this road.”

### **6:15 p.m.: Caring for animals at Reedley College**

There are 66 displaced cattle being taken care of by Reedley College's Agriculture Department, according to the junior college.

Among the cattle being attended to is a three-week-old calf named "Stuart," who lost his mother in the Creek Fire.

#### **5:50 p.m.: Free bottled water**

Due to the Creek Fire's impacts on the water system, Fresno County is providing free bottled water for residents at the following locations:

Bald Mountain Fire Station (49167 Auberry Road)

Pine Ridge Elementary (45828 Auberry Road)

Cressman's (36088 Tollhouse)

Shaver Lake Community Center (41344 Tollhouse Road)

#### **2:40 p.m. Auberry Branch Library reopens with limited service**

The Fresno County Public Library will reopen the Auberry Branch Library on Monday.

The library will open and resume limited services. Customers can reserve books, CDs, DVDs and other library materials online and pick up items at the library.

The Auberry branch was one of three libraries that closed Sept. 8 due to the Creek Fire.

The Big Creek branch and the Shaver Lake branch libraries remain closed.

All materials on hold at those branches will still be available once the libraries are open again. Library users can have any item sent to any of the library's remaining locations. Wi-Fi is available for customers who need access to the internet at all open branches.

#### **2:15 p.m.: Re-entry continues for several Fresno County areas**

The Fresno County Sheriff's Office has identified several more safe zones within the Creek Fire and will be allowing short-term visits into these areas beginning at 8 a.m. Saturday.

Residents in zones F2L, F2M, F2N, F7D and F7G who have had their homes destroyed will be granted the temporary access with identification and proof of residence. Check-in is at Foothill Elementary School, 29147 Auberry Road in Prather.

Those entering safe zones are urged to wear pants, a long-sleeved shirt and sturdy close-toed shoes and bring a second set of clothes or Tyvek coveralls and to personal protective equipment (goggles, face masks, gloves, etc.).

Residents will be able to take items from the property in boxes and bags, but not loaded up on trailers.

All visitors must check out at a location designated by 4 p.m.

A complete list of evacuation orders, warnings and zones can be found on the Creek Fire Evacuation map.

#### **10:30 a.m.: Mariposa heli-base closes as winds change; fire moves toward Mount Tom**

The Creek Fire actively burned in the northern section of the south zone over Thursday night, torching single and group trees within the interior of the existing perimeter, according to a CalFire update Friday morning.

The fire is expected to progress south of Mount Tom and could reach the Portal Forebay. On the eastern side of the fire, progress will be seen toward the Dinkey Lake Wilderness and Florence Lake, where crews are working to build and improve containment lines.

Smoke conditions are expected to increase along the 41 Road Corridor in the fire's north zone as winds begin to shift to the northeast creating a down-sloping wind on Saturday.

Crews are working to extend the containment line north of Peckinpah Meadows.

Air operations will assist firefighters in the north zone on Friday, weather permitting. This includes the use of a PSD (plastic sphere dispenser), an ignition device for areas too dangerous for firefighters, and a Cobra helicopter with an infrared camera to capture any non-visible hot spots.

The Mariposa heli-base will terminate close Friday, with helicopters relocating to Mammoth Lakes Airport. The move comes in response to the expected wind change through the weekend and is not a result of any increased threat of fire progression, CalFire said, though the fire is currently 10 to 12 miles west of Mammoth Lakes, where conditions continue to be monitored closely.

### **8:15 a.m.: Yosemite reopens; Forrest Service extends closures**

Yosemite National Park re-opens Friday morning after being closed for a week due to thick smoke and poor air quality. Day-use reservations are still required to enter the park at this time, what were implemented earlier this year due to COVID-19.

Mariposa Grove remains temporarily closed due to the Creek Fire.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service extended the closure of nine national forests, including Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra. Being in the forests, or on road and trails inside the forests is prohibited. The order runs through Sept. 30.

### **8 a.m.: Air quality at moderate levels for most of the Central Valley**

Friday is expected to be another day of moderate air for all of the Central Valley, save for Sequoia National Park and forest, which is predicted to be unhealthy for sensitive groups. The Air Quality Index is expected to once again to "good" in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties.

As of 7 a.m. Fresno was in the good range of the AQI and its PM2.5 particulate level was reading zero, according to the Real-Time Air Advisory Network.

The National Weather Service is predicting wind flow turning offshore early next week, which will transport smoke from Sierra fires are in a more westerly direction. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has an air advisory in place until the fire are out.