

Valley residents barred from burning wood for now due to bad air quality Satellite images show how wildfire smoke from the Creek and SQF Complex fires continue to settle over the Valley.

By Dale Yurong

ABC 30, Friday, Oct. 30, 2020

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- Nights have been getting cool enough for some families to start thinking about using their wood-burning fireplaces.

Sunday would normally mark the start of the season when you can do that but the Valley Air District is expected to issue a no-burn day on Sunday and beyond due to bad air quality.

The district's Air Quality Science Director Jon Klassen said, "You can still see a lot of haze in the area."

Because of that, the district is expected to limit the use of wood-burning fireplaces.

Satellite images show how wildfire smoke from the Creek and SQF Complex fires continue to settle over the Valley.

The high levels of PM2.5 - fine particulate matter - means people won't be able to burn wood to stay warm unless they have an exemption.

Klassen said, "The weather really isn't projected to change until we get into late next week so even beyond what we'll see on Sunday we're expecting to have wood-burning curtailments in effect likely for most of next week."

It's important you check before you burn.

Smoke spotted coming from a chimney on days when wood-burning was not allowed led to over 400 citations last winter.

Heather Heinks of the air district said, "A wood-burning violation would run a valley resident \$100. They can cut that cost in half if they attend an educational training that the district hosts."

The district also has an app you can use to check which days you can burn.

Heinks said, "You can also use that same app to report a violation. Maybe your neighbor burns all the time. Maybe they don't understand the rule that exists."

There were also limitations on what you can burn - wood only.

Residents are not allowed to burn leaves, trash, or lawn clippings at any time.

Creek Fire update: Here's when major Fresno-area fires will be fully contained

By Manuela Tobias

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, Nov. 2, 2020

Roughly two months since the first sparks, dry brush, and dead trees continue to fuel the Creek Fire and SQF Complex Fire in the Sierra Nevada range on the east side of the central San Joaquin Valley.

The Creek Fire, burning in the Sierra National Forest in eastern Fresno and Madera counties, is already the fourth-largest wildfire incident in California history. Firefighters have contained 70% of the fire and estimate its footprint at 380,663 acres as of Monday morning.

It has destroyed more than 856 structures since it started Sept. 4. The cause remains under investigation.

According to the U.S. Forest Services, 865 people, 14 crews, six helicopters, 15 engines, and nine bulldozers are on the scene on Monday, and large, exposed rock is helping to keep the fire from growing. Most of the activity is confined to the northeast corner of the fire, near Vermillion Cliffs and the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin.

While the fire has not made significant movement, it has been burning most actively in the Ansel Adams Wilderness and north of Lake Thomas A. Edison, "picking and choosing its way around," according to Fire Behavior Analyst Bryon Kimball. That is also where the fire has the greatest potential to spread.

Full containment isn't expected until Nov. 15.

The SQF Complex, 3 miles east of the Giant Sequoia National Monument in eastern Tulare County, stood at 170,384 acres and 80% containment on Monday morning. The fire has been burning since Aug. 19.

Most fire activity is located on the northwest corner of the fire around Hockett Meadow and Sand Meadow. Full containment isn't expected until Nov. 20.

Sequoia National Park continues to have partial closures. The Mineral King area, some wilderness lands, and Sequoia National Forest Western Divide remain closed, while the Hume Lake and Kern River Ranger Districts are open.

Inyo National Forest is also open.

Warm, dry weather will continue through mid-week, and light sprinkles were expected on Monday afternoon and evening, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Colder temperatures and higher humidity are expected to arrive Friday, but not before southwest winds potentially flare the fire on Thursday.

Creek Fire Oct. 31 update: Alaska team on scene; air worsens; Sierra National Forest still closed

By Joshua Tehee

In the Fresno Bee, Sierra Star and other papers, Saturday, Oct. 31, 2020

Suppression repair continues through large areas of the Creek Fire, especially on the western edge, where crews will be working for the next several days to prep the area for the coming winter.

The overall footprint of the fire remains mostly unchanged, even as it continues to burn in the northeast, where crews used handlines to hold the fire spread near Lake Edison on Thursday.

As of early Saturday night, the fire area had grown to 380,002 acres, up slightly from 379,571 acres in the morning update, with containment at 70%.

Full containment isn't expected until Nov. 15.

The cause of the Creek Fire remains under investigation. It is the largest single-incident wildfire in California history and fourth-largest overall, the latter when including two or more separate fires that combined into one "complex" incident.

Here are California's top five largest fires of all time, with name, month it began, counties involved, total acres, structures lost and deaths:

August Complex: August 2020; Mendocino, Humboldt, Trinity, Tehama, Glenn, Lake, & Colusa; 1,032,648; 935; 1

Mendocino Complex: July 2018; Colusa, Lake, Mendocino & Glenn; 459,123; 280; 1

SCU Lightning Complex: August 2020; Stanislaus, Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, & San Joaquin; 396,624; 222; 0

Creek Fire: September 2020; Fresno & Madera; 379,571; 856; 0

LNU Lightning Complex: August 2020; Sonoma, Lake, Napa, Yolo & Solano; 363,220; 1,491; 6

Alaska management team joins fight

Command of the Creek Fire transitioned from the Type 1 California Interagency Incident Management Team to the Type 2 Alaska Interagency Incident Management Team at 6 a.m. Saturday, according to the overview posted at inciweb.nwcg.gov.

There are 72 members of the Alaska team, according to incident commander Ed Sanford. They are part of a larger firefighting force that still numbers nearly 1,000.

"We hope to wrap this thing up," Sanford said, "and I also understand what it's like to have a bunch of firefighters in my backyard and back home and I've been in your shoes where I've had teams come through and we want to see closure to this."

Closures, restrictions extended

Parts of the Sierra National Forest, including the High Sierra Ranger District, will remain closed through Nov. 30. Other closures are extended through Nov. 9. See fs.usda.gov/sierra for the full list.

Emergency fire restrictions have been extended for all National Forest System lands within the Pacific Southwest Region that includes the Creek and SQF Complex fire regions. Campfires and camp stoves are not permitted while dispersed camping.

Camp stoves are permitted in campgrounds and other developed recreation sites.

Post-fire assessment begun on SQF Complex Fire

More progress has been made on the containment of the SQF Complex Fire, which has burned 170,165 acres. Crews gained containment on Friday, advancing five percentage points to 80%.

Full containment of the fire that lightning sparked Aug. 19 is expected Nov. 20. It ranks as the 18th largest fire in the state since modern records began being kept in 1932.

A Burned Area Emergency Response (or BAER) team has begun its post-fire assessment and created a Soil Burn Severity map.

The map shows approximately 45% of the acres analyzed by the BAER team is either unburned/very low (21%) or low (24%) soil burn severity, while 49% sustained a moderate soil burn severity. Only 6% burned at high soil burn severity.

Air quality worsens in fire region

There may be some rain coming to the area, according to the National Weather Service, but it's a week away and dependent upon which of several forecasts actually plays out. The current forecast continues to call for warmer-than-normal temperatures through Sunday and into next week.

While the air quality forecast from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District remains mostly unchanged for Saturday (with moderate air quality expected in all counties but Kings County), the Air Quality Index spiked into the unhealthy range in parts of the city of Fresno on Saturday morning. The Woodward Lake area was at 152.

Areas closer to the fire — like Three Rivers — were pushing into the hazardous range.

The PM2.5 concentration levels in Fresno hit level four overnight.