

## **KNP Complex and Windy fires prompt poor air quality in Valley, 51,000 acres on fire in sequoias**

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, September 21, 2021

The damage caused by wildfires in the Sequoia National parks and forest is evident on the Valley floor.

Large amounts of smoke from the KNP Complex and Windy fires prompted air quality officials to issue an air quality advisory for the Valley.

The fires have burned more than 51,000 acres of wildland in Tulare County, so far. In addition to poor air quality, here's what we know about the fires.

### **Windy Fire**

The fire is now 26,051 acres with 5% containment.

There are over 1,136 firefighters at the Windy Fire working toward full suppression.

The fire burned a portion of the Peyrone Sequoia Grove. A preliminary assessment of the fire's impacts on giant sequoia trees will be difficult and may take days to complete, forest service officials said.

A community meeting is planned for 6 p.m. Tuesday. The virtual meeting will be recorded and posted to the Sequoia National Forest Facebook page.

Fire questions should be emailed by 4 p.m. Tuesday to 2021.windy@firenet.gov. Residents can also use the chat feature in Zoom during the meeting to ask questions.

### **KNP Complex**

The fire grew to 25,020 acres and remains at 0% containment.

Firefighters are making progress to improve containment lines. This includes areas on the southern perimeter of the fire near Three Rivers community, and bulldozer lines to protect other communities to the northwest.

Sequoia National Park is closed to the public. A large portion of Kings Canyon National Park was also closed Sunday due to the fire.

A community meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Central Sierra Chamber of Commerce in Pinehurst. The meeting will be streamed live and posted to Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks combined Facebook page.

## **Update: National Weather Service predicts Visalia area will be inundated by heavy smoke**

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, September 20, 2021

As predicted, extreme fire activity was reported on Sunday in the Sequoia National park and forest.

The Windy and KNP Complex fires forced additional closures and evacuation warnings throughout the weekend. The fires also grew significantly and now have a combined acreage burned of 47,544.

*Update 11:45 p.m.:* The Windy Fire is 25,191 acres with 4% containment.

The Western Divide Highway is being impacted by the fire, as well as the communities of Peppermint, Quaking Aspen, Camp Whitsitt, and Johnsondale. Firefighters have been able to defend structures in these areas and are also protecting homes in the Ponderosa area.

The fire reached the 2020 Castle Fire burn scar to the north. Flames are slowly backing down rock escarpments two miles south of Camp Nelson. On the northeast side, the fire remains two miles south of Ponderosa.

Calmer winds predicted for Monday will give firefighters opportunities to engage the fire safely.

### **Air quality**

The National Weather Service's air quality computer model is showing heavy smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires will inundate the Visalia and Fresno area on Monday and Tuesday.

The model predicts heavy smoke will descend on the Visalia area around noon Monday and will remain until Tuesday evening.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase the risk of respiratory infections. Residents are advised to use caution when outdoors.

People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctor's advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, as conditions dictate, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities, or heavy exertion.

Track your local air quality at [www.fire.airnow.gov](http://www.fire.airnow.gov).

### **Windy Fire**

On Sunday, there was strong northwest wind, which caused rapid downhill runs. The fire is now at 23,801 acres with 4% containment.

The fire made a 2 to 3 mile run on Sunday and is burning toward the Kern River, Operations Section Chief Seth Mitchell said.

Due to the fire activity, the Sequoia National Forest expanded the Windy Fire Area, Roads, and Trails Closure Order. Forest Supervisor Teresa Benson announced the closure, stating the fire continues to show "aggressive behavior."

"The fire is continuing to spread across the forest posing an extreme threat to public and firefighter safety," Benson said. "Over the last week, many of our mountain communities are once again threatened, with evacuations and evacuation warnings in place."

The roads and trails within the Windy Fire Closure Area are closed, along with Cherry Hill and Big Meadow roads. These roads were closed to prevent hunters from getting trapped behind closed gates.

The forest closure will remain in effect until Dec. 31.

### **Road closures:**

- Western Divide Highway is closed at North Road intersection near Quaking Aspen Campground to M50 above California Hot Springs.
- M99 is closed above Kernville at Sherman Pass intersection.
- M99 is closed north of McNally's Fairview Lodge at 7300 Kern River Highway going north towards Sherman Pass.

### **Evacuations orders:**

- Johnsondale and Camp Whitsett, including M107 at Dome Rock, east to Lloyd Meadow Road, south to M99 at Sherman Pass Road, west to M107 and M50.
- Ponderosa and Quaking Aspen. The area of warning includes M107 at Dome Rock, north to Highway 190 at North Road, east to Route 21S05, at Needles Trail, south to Lloyd Meadow at Lower Peppermint Road.

Camp Nelson and surrounding communities are under an evacuation warning.

### **KNP Complex**

Much like the Windy Fire, KNP Complex continues to threaten mountain communities in Tulare County.

The fire is now 23,743 acres, with 0% containment.

A new evacuation warning was issued for the Wilsonia area of Kings Canyon National Park. The warning includes all structures, side roads, associated roads and forest service roads.

Large portions of Kings Canyon National Park have now been closed, with further closures expected.

The closure includes:

- All lands within the boundaries of Sequoia National Park west of the Pacific Crest Trail.
- All lands of Kings Canyon National Park west of the Generals Highway and south of Highway 180.
- All lands within the wilderness of Kings Canyon National Park west of the Pacific Crest Trail and south of the ridgeline which lies north of Ionian Basin.

All campgrounds in Kings Canyon National Park are closed through at least Sept. 25. This includes all campgrounds in Cedar Grove and Grant Grove. All concession services are closed, and access into wilderness from Kings Canyon trailheads is no longer permitted.

Grant Grove and Cedar Grove are open, but visitors should prepare for poor air quality, smoke, and low visibility. Visitor services are very limited in these areas.

Sequoia National Park remains closed to the public.

## **Winds expected to push KNP Complex deeper into Giant Forest**

By Sam Whiting

San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, September 20, 2021

The KNP Complex burning in Sequoia National Park picked up speed overnight Sunday when it reached an uphill slope that allowed it to access dryer brush and grow by about 1,000 acres.

By Monday morning, the fire was moving toward Redwood Canyon, which contains more than 2,000 old-growth sequoia trees, making it the biggest redwood grove in the world.

“Fire likes to go uphill. It has a hard time going downhill,” said Mark Garrett, public information officer for the KNP Complex, which has been burning since a lightning strike sparked it on Sept. 10.

The main concern has been the Giant Forest, which contains the General Sherman, the largest giant sequoia on Earth. Garrett said spot fires flared up overnight in the Giant Forest, which is about 5 miles from Redwood Canyon.

“We are making sure those spot fires aren’t inside any sequoia trees,” Garrett said.

A firefighting crew of 810 personnel was bolstered by a National Guard unit that arrived Monday morning. They were aided by cooler temperatures and humidity that came in from the rainstorms in Northern California.

But those lower temperatures were accompanied by winds that were expected to increase Monday. The wind is coming from the northwest, which is pushing the fire line away from Redwood Canyon and toward the Giant Forest.

“The fire is still several miles away and has to go up and down a few canyons,” Garrett said. “It is not likely it will be there today.”

Hotter weather is expected to arrive Tuesday, when temperatures could reach as high as 97 degrees, Garrett said.

As of Monday evening, the fire was measured at 23,743 acres in size.

## **4 famous giant trees unharmed by Sequoia National Park fire**

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, September 20, 2021

THREE RIVERS, Calif. (AP) — Four famous giant sequoias were not harmed by a wildfire that reached the edge of Giant Forest in California's Sequoia National Park, authorities said.

The Four Guardsmen, a group of trees that form a natural entryway on the road to the forest, were successfully protected from the KNP Complex fire by the removal of nearby vegetation and by wrapping fire-resistant material around the bases of the trees, the firefighting management team said in a statement Sunday.

The KNP Complex began as two lightning-sparked fires that eventually merged and has scorched more than 37 square miles (96 square kilometers) in the heart of sequoia country on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.

There was no immediate word, however, on the full extent of damage in several other sequoia groves reached by a separate blaze, the Windy Fire, in the Giant Sequoia National Monument area of Sequoia National Forest and the Tule River Indian Reservation.

The Windy Fire has burned through the Peyrone and Red Hill groves, as well as a portion of the Long Meadow Grove along the Trail of 100 Giants.

A portion of one giant sequoia along the trail was confirmed to have burned, said Thanh Nguyen, a spokesman for the fire command.

Fire crews with hoses and water-dropping helicopters were working to limit damage to the giant sequoias in the groves, where there are also other types of trees.

Sequoias have adapted to fire and can benefit if the flames are low intensity.

The Windy Fire has scorched more than 39 square miles (101 square kilometers) and was just 4% contained.

The KNP Complex forced the evacuation of Sequoia National Park last week, and on Sunday much of adjacent Kings Canyon National Park was closed. Visitors to areas that were still open were warned of hazardous air quality due to smoke.

A large area of Northern California was under a red flag warning for extreme fire danger Monday due to dry offshore winds that can raise fire danger.

The warning did not extend into Southern California, but forecasters said there would be weak Santa Ana winds and significant warming — elevating the risk of wildfires.

Historic drought tied to climate change is making wildfires harder to fight. It has killed millions of trees in California alone. Scientists say climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

More than 7,000 wildfires in California this year have damaged or destroyed more than 3,000 homes and other buildings and torched well over 3,000 square miles (7,770 square kilometers) of land, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

## **Wabtec unveils its battery-electric train following the first official purchase**

Scooter Doll

Electrek, Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021

Rail freight manufacturer Wabtec Corporation has officially unveiled the newest version of what it calls "the world's first battery-electric freight train." The electric train, known as FLXdrive Battery Locomotive, is no longer just a prototype and has made its official debut in Pittsburgh, PA, following Wabtec's first sale of the locomotive earlier this week.

Wabtec Corporation is a manufacturer and freight company with over 150 years of experience in the rail industry. Looking ahead, the company has had the foresight to help bring in a new era of decarbonized locomotive transportation.

As we reported as June, Wabtec was in the midst of a pilot program in California with its FLXdrive — a battery-electric locomotive capable of hauling 430,000 pounds.

The battery-electric train was developed with a \$22.6 million grant from the California Air Resource Board that was awarded to Wabtec, BNSF Railway, and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The prototype locomotive delivered 22.5 tons of energy capacity (2.4 MWh) from over 20,000 lithium-ion battery cells. As a result, the FLX prototype could reach speeds around 75 mph, and travel 350 miles.

In addition to its pilot program, Wabtec also announced a collaboration with General Motors (GM) as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop and implement GM's Ultium battery technology into Wabtec's freight locomotives.

Most recently, Wabtec sold its very first FLXdrive electric train, and has now unveiled its latest version in Pennsylvania.