

Crews increase containment on California wildfire

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, July 28, 2014

PLYMOUTH, Calif. (AP) — Fire officials are optimistic they may soon have the upper hand on a wildfire burning near vineyards in Northern California that has led to evacuation orders for more about 1,200 people.

After growing rapidly since it began on Friday, crews were able to hold the Sand Fire in the Sierra Nevada foothills east of Sacramento to a little under 6 square miles overnight. Containment, meanwhile, increased 15 percent, to 65 percent.

The fire has destroyed 13 homes and 38 other structures, as it burns in rugged grassland and timber near wine-growing regions in Amador and El Dorado counties. About 450 homes are under mandatory evacuation orders.

State fire Battalion Chief Scott McLean says fire crews are still wary, however, with another day of possible triple digit temperatures expected.

Flames from California wildfire claim 13 homes

Associated Press

The Porterville Recorder, Monday, July 28, 2014

PLYMOUTH, Calif. (AP) — Wildfires burning near Northern California vineyards and in the Yosemite National Park area were threatening hundreds of homes even as crews worked to contain them.

The Sand Fire in the Sierra Nevada foothills east of Sacramento was 50 percent surrounded as of late Sunday, after burning 13 homes and 38 outbuildings. It has scorched roughly 6 square miles of rugged grassland and timber near wine-growing regions in Amador and El Dorado counties.

While crews significantly enlarged the area they had corralled Sunday, "the steep, dry terrain continues to be a challenge" and about 515 homes remain threatened and under evacuation orders, according to a statement the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The fire started Friday when a vehicle drove over vegetation that is tinder-dry from years of drought.

About 1,900 firefighters, aided by aircraft including a DC-10 air tanker, were working to control the blaze.

The fire destroyed homes, cabins and a collection of 13 antique cars that a man was restoring in the town of Plymouth, the Sacramento Bee reported.

Neighbors, however, stepped in to help those forced from their homes and ranches.

The Amador County fairgrounds made room for displaced animals and as of noon Sunday had taken in 12 horses, seven rabbits, 15 chickens, two dogs, three cats and seven goats, said Karen Spencer, the marketing director for the Amador County Fair.

"We're right in the middle of our fair, but our livestock people are just moving over and making room," she told the Bee (<http://bit.ly/1puo7An>).

While the Red Cross has been able to provide clothes and food for the evacuees, the neighboring communities have joined the organization to help.

"We've got like 10 bags of new and slightly new clothes," Rodney Stanhope of Placerville said.

Stanhope said his Facebook call has led to people offering to buy underwear and socks and others offering their homes to evacuees.

"Everybody wants to help," Stanhope said.

In Central California, a fire near Yosemite National Park had spread to about 4 square miles and continued to threaten the small town of Foresta, where it destroyed one home.

An estimated 100 homes in Foresta and the small community of Old El Portal were evacuated Saturday, and residents remained out of their homes Sunday. Two shelters opened for people and animals.

The park itself, home to such sites as Half Dome mountain, Yosemite Meadows, a grove of Giant Sequoia trees and other wonders, remained open throughout Sunday and authorities said none of its treasures were threatened.

Wildfires also burned in other Western states, including Washington, Oregon, Colorado and Utah.

The nation's largest wildfire — the 618-square-mile Buzzard Complex in eastern Oregon, 45 miles northeast of Burns — was almost fully contained Sunday.

In north-central Washington, the Carlton Complex fire, the biggest in the state's history, burned as temperatures rose Sunday, but no major flare-ups have been reported.

Sand fire to cause air quality to worsen today, Sunday

By Edward Ortiz

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, July 26, 2014

Sacramento-area residents will see a worsening of their air quality this evening due to the effects of the Sand fire that has burned more than 4,000 acres in El Dorado and Amador counties.

A high-pressure weather system will bring smoke from the fire into areas west of the timber and grass fire — with smoke visiting the Sacramento region in the early evening and also early Sunday morning, said Drew Peterson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

That means that residents — especially those with asthma and respiratory issues — will have to take measures in the evening if they want to avoid breathing smoke that comes into the Sacramento Valley.

Typically, when fires burn in similar conditions as the Sand fire, the smoke plume rises as a column in the afternoon and early evening, then descends through the early morning hours and drains into the valley, Peterson said.

“Today, as the day progresses, we’ll see the smoke column rise and the cycle will continue until the wind patterns shift, or until they’re able to contain the fire,” he said.

At present, the fire is 20 percent contained.

No major shift in wind weather patterns are due for area tonight or Sunday, Peterson said.

Wildfire and other fire smoke brings with it a complex mixture of carbon dioxide, water vapor, carbon monoxide and particulate matter known to affect those with asthma and other respiratory conditions. Particulate matter is the most troublesome, especially small particulate matter, which settles deep in the lungs.

A UC Davis study released last year established that there are possible implications for health when humans are exposed to wildfire smoke. That study, conducted by UC Davis scientists and the California Air Resources Board, found that rhesus macaque monkeys born at the university’s Primate Research Center in the summer of 2008 — an unusually intense fire season — had depressed immune systems compared with those born a year later.

For those that have issues with worsening air quality the key will be closing windows, Peterson said.

“People in places like Plymouth and Lone, that are near the fire, they may want to begin to closing their windows in the evening,” Peterson said. “For people in the Sacramento area, they need to close windows before they go to bed at night.”

“It’s deceiving in that during the evening people think the air quality might seem better, but the problem is that smoke descends at that time, and that is when it will move into the valley,” he said.

If people decide to run air conditioning units at night, “they should make sure they are recirculating the air from inside and not pulling in any air from outside,” Peterson said. “If they do not have that option, then it might be best to turn their air conditioning off at night.

Most air conditioning systems are made to recirculate indoor air. However, some systems may have both outdoor air and recirculate settings. Those that have such systems should change their setting to “recirculate.”

The combination of fire smoke and temperatures greater than 100 degrees forecast for the region today and Sunday has prompted the Sacramento Air Quality Management District to issue a "Spare The Air" alert for Sunday. The district is expecting unhealthy ozone levels to continue through Monday.