

Evacuations lifted for thousands in Tahoe as wildfire stalls

By Sam Metz Associated Press

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2021

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CALIF. - Thousands of people who fled South Lake Tahoe under threat of a wildfire were allowed to return as crews stalled the flames from advancing, but many shops remained dark Monday and the resort town's normally bustling streets remained quiet.

A week ago, the scenic tourist town on the California-Nevada state line emptied out when authorities issued an evacuation order as the fire approached from south. Now, traffic is trickling back but nothing like the crowds that typically pour in over the summer to enjoy Lake Tahoe's crystalline waters, which are covered by a smoky haze.

Lake Tahoe Community College student Dakota Jones returned Monday to South Lake Tahoe after being evacuated to Carson City, Nevada. He said he worried he'd find buildings damaged or covered in ash and was pleasantly surprised to find the city of 22,000 people largely untouched when he and his roommates, who were in the process of moving when the fire approached, drove a U-Haul full of their belongings back to their old apartment.

"I was honestly convinced this place was gonna go down," Jones said. "It was nice to see that I was wrong."

Evacuation orders for South Lake Tahoe and other lakeside areas were downgraded to warnings Sunday afternoon and California Highway Patrol officers began removing roadblocks along State Highway 50 from Nevada to the city limits. Authorities warned that residents of the scenic forest area weren't out of the woods yet, with risks ranging from smoky, foul air to belligerent bears.

The threat from the Caldor Fire hasn't entirely vanished but downgrading to a warning meant those who wish could return to their homes in what had been a smoke-choked ghost town instead of a thriving Labor Day getaway location. South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Clive Savacool said officials hoped to have the hospital emergency room open within 24 hours but people with health problems might want to consider staying away due to the air quality.

Authorities also warned that in the absence of humans, bears had gone to town, spreading trash everywhere that must be picked up.

"The delicate balance between humans and bears has been upset," and anyone who thinks a bear may have entered their home should call law enforcement, El Dorado County sheriff's Sgt. Simon Brown said.

Mandatory evacuation orders remained in place for parts of unincorporated El Dorado County south of South Lake Tahoe, including Meyers and Christmas Valley.

The lifting of mandatory evacuation orders for the Tahoe area marked a milestone in the fight against the fire, which erupted on Aug. 14 and spread across nearly 340 square miles (880 square kilometers) of dense national parks and forests, tree-dotted granite cliffs and scattered cabins and hamlets in the northern Sierra Nevada.

At its peak, the fire burned as much as 1,000 acres an hour and last month virtually razed the small community of Grizzly Flats.

But in recent days the winds eased and thousands of firefighters took advantage of the better weather to hack, burn and bulldoze fire lines, managing to contain 44% of the perimeter by Monday.

Most of the western and southern sides of the fire were corralled, although some areas still were off-limits.

No homes were lost on the northeastern side of the fire nearest to the lake, and crews managed to carve more fire line along one edge of a fiery finger.

Authorities noted the progress but said single-digit humidity on Monday and slightly more wind could spur spot fires up to half a mile (0.8 kilometers) away. They urged firefighters to stay alert.

"We are drier than I have seen on my 20 days on this fire," said Jim Dudley, incident meteorologist. "There's a lot of potential weather-wise for little things to become maybe not so little."

California and much of the U.S. West have seen dozens of wildfires in the past two months as the drought-stricken region sweltered under hot, dry weather and winds drove flames through bone-dry vegetation.

In California, more than 14,500 firefighters were battling 14 active fires. Since the year began, more than 7,000 wildfires have devoured 3,000 square miles (nearly 8,000 square kilometers), Cal Fire said.

On Sunday, a new fire broke out in Placer County, burning half a square mile (1.2 square kilometers) and prompting evacuation orders and warnings and road closures.

The fires have been concentrated in Northern California, where the weather is expected to cool slightly and the humidity to rise starting Tuesday.

No deaths have been reported specifically from the fires.

Fire concerns have shut down all national forests in the state.

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable.

French Fire spreading slowly amid high heat, containment tops 50%

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2021

The French Fire, which has sent smoke and ash into Tulare County for weeks, is slowing its spread.

As of Monday, the Kern County fire burned 26,493 acres and was 52% contained — up 500 acres and 10%, respectively, since Friday.

More than 1,100 firefighters are working through yet another few days of near-critical fire weather conditions. The area remains dry and windy with low relative humidity, around 10-to- 15%.

Breezy conditions were expected this weekend across the Kern County mountains and desert, according to National Weather Service. Temperatures jumped Monday and will remain in the triple-digits through Friday.

Although there was no real growth around the fire, scattered hot spots remains within the perimeter. Over the next few days, moderate fire behavior is expected, but containment lines continue to hold well, according to a report from Great Basin Incident Management Team 6.

As residents return to their homes, fire officials are asking them to be careful and use caution as there may be unstable trees and down power lines.

Safety tips for returning residents:

- **Checking propane tanks:** Propane suppliers recommend homeowners contact them for an inspection prior to reusing their system. If the fire burned the tank, the pressure relief valve probably opened and released the contents of the tank. Tanks, brass and copper fittings, and lines may be heat-damaged and unsafe. Valves should be turned off and remain closed until the propane suppliers inspect the system.
- **Checking home heating oil tanks:** Heating oil suppliers recommend homeowners contact them for an inspection prior to reusing their system. The tank may have shifted or fallen from the stand and fuel lines may have kinked or weakened. Heat from the fire may have caused the tank to warp or bulge. Non-vented tanks are more likely to bulge or show signs of stress. The fire may have loosened or damaged fittings and filters. If the tank is in tact and heating oil remains in the tank, the heating oil should still be good. If you have questions on the integrity of the tank, fuel lines, tank stand, or the fuel, or need assistance in moving the tank or returning it to service, contact your fuel supplier.
- **Removing debris:** Cleanup of your property can expose you to potential health problems from hazardous materials. Wet down any debris to minimize health impacts from breathing dust

particles. The use of a two-strap dust particulate mask with nose clip and coveralls will provide the best minimal protection. Leather gloves should be worn to protect your hands from sharp objects while removing debris.

- **Restoring water systems:** Unless impacted by a fuel spill, the fire should not have affected wells at undamaged homes. If your house was damaged, your water system may potentially have become contaminated with bacteria due to loss of water pressure. In this case it is recommended that the well be disinfected and the water be tested before consumption. To disinfect your water system, pour ½ - 1 cup of chlorine bleach inside the well casing and turn on all faucets until a chlorine scent is noticed. Allow the chlorine solution to remain in the system overnight. The following morning, open all faucets and flush the system until free of chlorine smell.
- **Is There Fire Retardant Gel On Your House?** Fire retardant gel or compressed air foam may have been applied to your home or other structures to protect them during fire suppression operations. These chemicals are not hazardous to you or your pets and should not damage your paint or other exterior surfaces. The gel may be removed by simply washing your home with a garden hose or pressure washer. Please contact your local fire station if you have any questions or concerns.
- **Evaluation of Trees Damaged by Fire:** The following information will assist you in evaluating any trees that have been scorched or burnt by the fire. Identification of the type of tree affected is important and can easily be done. Two basic types of trees exist in this area: deciduous and evergreen. Deciduous trees are broad leaf trees that lose their leaves in the fall.

Should residents come across damaged or fallen power poles or lines, they should immediately call Southern California Edison at 800-684-8123. Fire officials ask that residents never touch downed wires.

Additionally, residents should be especially careful when cutting trees and operating heavy equipment around power lines. Vegetation and power poles may have lost stability due to fire damage.

Evacuation orders remain in effect for the following communities:

- Keyesville
- Shirley Meadows
- Alta Sierra, Slick Rock
- Waggy Flats
- Black Gulch
- The area around Fulton Peak south of Windmill Tree Peak

Residents who want to know the status of evacuations can search their address in the French Fire Interactive Evacuation Map.

Final evacuation orders at French Fire lifted; caution still urged

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Sept. 6, 2021

The Kern County Fire Department reported Monday that the final evacuation orders due to the French Fire have been lifted for Keyesville, Alta Sierra, Shirley Meadows, Waggy Flats, Black Gulch and Fulton Peak.

Fire officials urged people in the area and those returning to their properties to be aware of surrounding activities and potential hazards in and around the fire area.

The fire, which began Aug. 18 west of Lake Isabella, has burned 26,702 acres and is 52 percent contained. Some 1,201 personnel continue to work on the fire.

A national Incident Management Team continues to manage the fire, integrated with Great Basin IMT 6 and coordinating with the Bureau of Land Management, Sequoia National Forest and Kern County Fire Department in unified command.

Highway 155 from the Glennville side of the western boundary of the Sequoia National Forest to Rancheria Road at the Greenhorn Summit remains closed.

Fire officials also issued these updates Monday:

- A structure group is patrolling and mopping up around infrastructure within the fire's interior, including Alta Sierra, Shirley Meadows, the Shirley Peak communication hub, and the Southern California Edison 66kV sub-transmission lines north of Highway 155.
- Burnout operations on Sunday were successful in Cedar Creek and Alder Creek. Smoke may still be visible as crews work on securing the line and continue to mop up. On Monday, crews were to continue to improve handline north of Red Mountain from Bear Creek to Alder Creek.
- On the north side of the fire, crews continue to mop up, seeking out and eliminating any remaining heat sources.
- There is minimal fire activity on the east and south sides of the fire. Crews will continue to mop up and patrol the area. About 38 miles of fire hose needs to be removed.
- Very dry and warm conditions with low relative humidity will continue.

The public is encouraged to sign up for emergency notifications from Ready Kern at <https://kerncountyfire.org/education-safety/ready-kern/>. Also, property owners can search their address in the French Fire Interactive Evacuation Map at <https://bit.ly/38jmW6S>.

Wildfires, smoke snuff out outdoor adventures across US

By Brian Melley – Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Monday, Sept. 6, 2021

Andy Farquhar's plans for an outdoor adventure have gone up in smoke twice this summer.

The retired attorney and teacher from the Philadelphia area had planned to hike with a friend for several weeks on the Pacific Crest Trail north of Lake Tahoe until the second-largest fire in California history stampeded across the Sierra Nevada, closing a 160-mile (257-kilometer) stretch of the trail and blanketing the region in thick smoke.

"I saw a satellite view of where we were going, and all it was was fire," he said.

The two scrambled and chose a seemingly fireproof backup plan: canoeing a massive network of lakes and bogs on the Minnesota-Canada border. That plan went poof when lightning-sparked fires forced the closure of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

"We're batting zero now," Farquhar said.

Untold numbers of camping, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, rafting and biking adventures have been scrapped as U.S. wildfires have scorched nearly 7,900 square miles (20,460 square kilometers) this year in forests, chaparral and grasslands ravaged by drought. The vast majority are on public lands in the West that also serve as summer playgrounds.

More than 24,000 camping reservations out of 3.2 million so far this year have been canceled due to wildfires, according to data kept by Recreation.gov, which books campsites on most federal lands. That does not account for no-shows or people who left early.

All national forests are closed in California to prioritize fighting blazes, including the Caldor Fire near Lake Tahoe, a year-round outdoor paradise that attracts skiers, hikers, mountain bikers, boaters and paddleboarders.

Lassen Volcanic National Park also is closed because of the Dixie Fire, the blaze that forced Farquhar to cancel his plan to hike from the Lake Tahoe area to the Oregon border.

In June, fires closed several national forests in Arizona, derailing plans Kristin Clark made with family to camp by Lynx Lake in Prescott National Forest for her mother's 70th birthday.

She reserved the campsite in February. As the vacation neared, she watched as wildfires grew, bringing new closures. She knew her trip was over before it began.

"That is the reality in Arizona. More and more frequently, we get wildfires," Clark said. "I was bummed. My husband was bummed. We were really looking forward to a week in nature to kind of disconnect."

Intense wildfires have coincided with a sharp uptick in people trying to find serenity in the wild after being cooped up during the coronavirus pandemic. Competition for online campground and backpacking permit reservations is stiff, and they can fill up six months in advance, leaving less flexibility for spontaneous trips or easy rescheduling.

One of the toughest tickets to score in California is a pass to summit Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the contiguous United States. Hundreds who managed to win a permit and trained for the arduous hike were foiled in June when a fire broke out near the main trailhead in the Inyo National Forest.

The trail was closed 10 days, preventing up to 1,850 people from hiking, said Debra Schweizer, a forest spokeswoman.

In addition to forest and park closures that have required people to cancel or change plans, plenty of other trips have been altered by approaching fires and the omnipresent pall of smoke that has created a respiratory hazard for millions nationwide.

Kerry Ellis of Boise, Idaho, and her family didn't do anything last summer because of COVID-19. So they were excited for a July rafting trip on the Salmon River with friends.

After a daylong drive, they arrived to find the area blanketed in smoke that made it uncomfortable for Ellis, who has asthma, to breathe. The outfitter described scenarios of the fire jumping the river, embers flying and smoke making it impossible for guides to see.

"They pointed out that once you push off, you're committed for the entire six days," Ellis said. "You have no cell service. It's Idaho backcountry. With that level of wildfire and smoke, the chances of evacuation would be difficult."

The outfitter canceled the trip. It was disappointing, but Ellis said it was the right decision.

Wildfire smoke has increasingly become a fixture on the Western landscape, ranging from a strong campfire odor in its most mild form to a serious health hazard that causes coughing fits and headaches. Satellite images show plumes from fires pouring into the sky and spreading widely, even reaching the East Coast.

For many, though, smoke appears to be an irritating but tolerable inconvenience when pricey or hard-to-get plans have been made.

Even as smoke shrouded the Tahoe basin last week — before evacuations were ordered at the south end of the lake — people in masks walked the beach or pedaled bikes along the shore.

A study of 10 years of campground bookings on federal land found relatively few cancellations or departures when smoke was present. The study by Resources for the Future, an independent nonprofit research institution, suggested campers were less likely to pull out of popular destinations like Glacier National Park in Montana or Yosemite National Park in California.

"Limited visitation seasons at northern parks like Glacier, as well as competitive reservations at popular parks like Yosemite, could lead campers to brave the smoky conditions rather than forego a trip altogether," the authors said.

Those patterns could change, particularly after the past two years of severe, pervasive fires that were not accounted for in the study, said Margaret Walls, a senior fellow with Resources for the Future who co-authored the study. She thinks the potential for smoke could factor into future plans.

"In the past, maybe you just went. You didn't think about the smoke," Walls said. "You used to be able to say, it'll be all right around the Grand Canyon. Not anymore."

When the Boundary Waters in Minnesota's Superior National Forest was closed last month, Farquhar was one of hundreds of paddlers who lost out. The outfitters who rent canoes, sell supplies and help them plan their trips also were hit hard.

Typically, the parking lot of Sawbill Canoe Outfitters is full of cars in August and all its roughly 200 canoes are in the wilderness, said Clare Shirley, the third-generation owner. Despite a blue sky and no smell of smoke recently, the boats were all on their racks late last month and the parking lot was nearly empty.

"It's very, very quiet around here, which is eerie," said Shirley, who estimated she was losing tens of thousands of dollars. "We're definitely missing out on a big chunk of our peak season."

Farquhar has pivoted once again. He and his friend were fixing up a canoe last week for a trip to the Debsconeag Lakes Wilderness Area in Maine. The state's forest service designated that area with its lowest rating for fire danger.

National Weather Service extends heat advisory for Modesto through Thursday

By Deke Farrow

Modesto Bee, Monday, Sept. 6, 2021

A National Weather Service heat advisory for the Valley, from north of Redding to south of Merced County, has been extended until Thursday because of triple-digit highs and warm overnight lows.

For Modesto, highs are predicted to be near 101 degrees Tuesday and near 102 Wednesday and Thursday. Overnight lows are expected to be in the low 70s.

The advisory was issued because there is an increased chance of heat stress or illnesses to people and animals. Residents are advised to stay hydrated and avoid strenuous outdoor activities between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The temperatures are rising as air quality in Stanislaus County on Labor Day is unhealthy for sensitive groups, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Tuesday's forecast high of near 101 is well above the historical average of 90 degrees for Sept. 7, according to Modesto Irrigation District weather data. The hottest temperature for the date in Modesto was 105 degrees, recorded last year and in 2008 and 1998, according to MID.

Friday, the daily high is expected to be near 98, and Saturday should be near 93.

After an overnight low of 64 expected for Saturday, Sunday should reach near 88.

Electric vehicles to benefit more non-profit organizations in Fresno County

By María G. Ortiz-Briones

Vida en el Valle, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021

FRESNO - "The need that exist throughout the region is immense," said Dr. Jesús Martínez, Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative (CVIIC) executive director.

Martínez said that one of the major challenges that immigrant families face is that most of the agencies that provides services to them are based in larger cities in the Valley.

"It is important for agencies like us to be able to have the means to transport our staff members and to also organize events in conjunction with local organizations," Martínez said.

And thanks to a donation from Electrify America and Valley Clean Air Now, Martínez and his staff at CVIIC would have the means to serve those communities better.

CVIIC was one of the four local non-profit organizations that received the keys of one of the five vehicles donated by Electrify America and Valley CAN as part of the efforts to increase access to zero emission transportation in rural areas.

"We selected these organizations from among the eight counties of the San Joaquín Valley," said José Marín from Valley CAN, of the donation of five electric 2018 Volkswagen e-Golfs to local non-profit organizations.

The keys to each vehicle were presented to the nonprofits during a ceremony at the parking lot of the Consulate of México in Fresno on Aug. 27. More than 50 vehicles have been donated by Electrify America and Valley CAN.

Besides CVIIC, Fresno City College and Education and Leadership Foundation received one electric vehicle each while the LEAP Institute's Green Raiteros program received two.

"We can't do it alone. We need all the help we can get and we really appreciate the help that Valley CAN, Electrify America and the Consulate of Mexico is giving us," said Raúl Moreno, executive director of Education and Leadership Foundation. "We will continue to serve immigrants thanks to your support."

Marin said the donation is an effort "to further the message, further the work that they do and continue to serve those that are mostly impacted within our disadvantage communities."

Head Consul Adriana González Carrillo said the donations to those nonprofit organizations will support their efforts "to increase access to transportation in rural areas with zero emissions, thus helping to build cleaner and healthier regions, but also to support those who work hand in hand with the people of the San Joaquin Valley who need the most help, many of them are Mexican brothers and sisters."

To be able to have an electric, zero emissions vehicle, also puts small nonprofit organizations like CIVIC and ELF at a better position to use the new technologies.

"Many of us have children with asthma or other type of breathing problems, so we know about the importance of having Central Valley air as clean as possible. And is very important for us, small organizations to be able to have access to this technology," Martínez said.

For the LEAP Institute base in the rural community of Huron, the donation will increase their capacity in its electric vehicle ride-sharing program which takes clients to appointments in several locations in Fresno, Madera, Kings and Kern counties.

"These eGolf vehicles will help us increase the number of rides and other essential services that our communities are in dire need of," said Aldo Javier García, with the LEAP Institute, adding that those vehicles would help the nonprofit continue its mission of achieving social, economic and climate justice.