

Windy Fire damage assessment could take months to complete as containment nears

By Sheyanne N Romero

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The Windy Fire, now 97,554 acres, left a trail of destruction in the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument.

It may take months to complete a full evaluation of the impacts on the giant sequoia groves. With winter coming, fire crews will likely begin assessing the damage in the spring.

"Like many wildfires, the Windy Fire threatened people and communities and their protection was our highest priority," Forest Supervisor Teresa Benson said. "Our Forest and the public have lost homes, historic landmarks, and several natural treasures over the past few years due to wildfire. We ask for your patience while we fully assess damage to lands managed by the Sequoia National Forest."

So far, damage assessment teams know the fire burned into 11 giant sequoia groves: Eight within the Forest, two on the Tule River Indian Reservation, and one shared across both agency boundaries.

Resource Adviser Garrett Dickman said that the crew found Starvation Creek Grove experienced a high-severity fire that burned all but four mature giant sequoias within the grove boundary.

Recent wildfires and fuels reduction efforts helped minimize the damage to the Black Mountain, Red Hill, and Cunningham groves. The Long Meadow Grove, including the iconic Trail of 100 Giants, was targeted early with measures to prepare the trees before the blaze reached the area. Crews also worked to protect the iconic trees after fire spread through it.

For years, forest officials have been undertaking fuels reduction treatments, thinning small-diameter trees, hazard trees, and pile burning at the Trail of 100 Giants. These efforts kept the area near the trail "mostly unscathed," forest service officials said.

Several groves — Peyrone, South Peyrone, Packsaddle, and Deer Creek — need to be evaluated.

"Additional information will be shared as soon as it becomes available," Benson said.

The boardwalk was also damaged and was undergoing repairs after a fallen giant sequoia tree landed on it in 2019.

Several forest service improvements were destroyed by the Windy Fire including the Mule Peak Lookout and structures surrounding it. Three historic cabins, Frog Meadow Guard Station, Powder Horn, and Speas Dirty Camp Cabins were also lost in the fire.

While firefighters continue work to clean-up and make sure the fire doesn't spread, residents have started to return home.

On Tuesday, all remaining evacuation warnings and orders were lifted for the Windy Fire. Containment is expected on Monday, Nov. 1.

The Sequoia National Forest remains closed. Roadblocks are in place at M107 at Aspen, M99 at Lloyd Meadow, and M50 at Parker Meadow.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park will remain closed and only authorized Forest and Fire personnel are allowed inside the closed areas at this time.

Residents in need of information on the status of their property can call the Tulare County Information Hotline at 802-9790. Affected property owners should complete the September Lightning Fire Information Form online.

Officials address Valley Fever concerns amidst the high wind event

23 ABC, Monday, Oct. 11, 2021

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (KERO) — As the high wind event continues many are concerned with how it may affect their health. One concern that people have during days like this is getting valley fever.

According to the CDC there are about 15,000 cases in the United States each year and most cases are from California and Arizona. They also state that nearly 40% of people who get Valley Fever are hospitalized.

"Many of us are going to get valley fever and not even know we have it, but some of us are really going to experience more significant symptoms," Michelle Corson Public Information Officer, Kern County Public Health Department

What is Valley Fever?

"Valley fever is an infection caused by fungus. The fungus is known to live in the soil in the Southwestern United States. People can get valley fever by breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air."
CDC

Corson said while you may not know you have Valley Fever there are a few different symptoms to be aware of.

"It can be everything from a headache, a cough, you can also get a rash, but sometimes it can turn into disseminated Valley Fever and affect different parts of your body and it can become very serious," said Corson.

Symptoms of Valley Fever (Coccidioidomycosis):

Many people who are exposed to the fungus Coccidioides never have symptoms.¹ Other people may have symptoms that go away on their own after weeks to months. If your symptoms last for more than a week, contact your healthcare provider.

Symptoms of Valley fever include:

- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Night sweats
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Rash on upper body or legs

In extremely rare cases, the fungal spores can enter the skin through a cut, wound, or splinter and cause a skin infection.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms of Valley fever may appear between 1 and 3 weeks after a person breathes in the fungal spores.

How long do the symptoms last?

The symptoms of Valley fever usually last for a few weeks to a few months. However, some patients have symptoms that last longer than this, especially if the infection becomes severe.

Severe Valley fever

Approximately 5 to 10% of people who get Valley fever will develop serious or long-term problems in their lungs. In an even smaller percent of people (about 1%), the infection spreads from the lungs to other parts of the body, such as the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord), skin, or bones and joints.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

When it comes to valley fever symptoms Corson said they may be similar to COVID-19.

"These can be very similar to COVID-19 and flu-like symptoms, so it becomes important to really pay attention following a wind event like this, if these are persistent symptoms that don't go away, talk to your doctor," said Corson.

Heather Heinks with the Valley Air District said during high wind events, it's best to stay inside and protect yourself.

"Really just maybe alter your activities for today, be aware that there might be significant blowing dust from the dry soils out in the valley, picking up dust and making a haze and poor air quality in the Kern County area," Heather Heinks, Outreach and Communications Manager, Valley Air District

Heinks also added if you must be outdoors, use an N-95 mask.

"Certainly, put on a mask, in this instance, the COVID masks can help a little bit. Dust is bigger, so it's not going to hurt to have your COVID mask on outside, but we always talk about getting a fitted N-95 mask if you're going to be out in the midst of heavy particulate matter pollution and it should be fitted properly, and you should consult your doctor."

While this is the first high wind event of the season, it won't be the last.

Heinks also said that to stay updated download the Valley Air District and the EPA Air Now app for updates.

High winds down trees, worsen air quality in Stockton

by: Kristi Gross, Connor Malone

Fox 40 News, Monday, Oct. 11, 2021

STOCKTON, Calif. (KTXL) — Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties saw some of the highest wind gusts in the region, downing trees and sending dust flying into the valley air.

Ray Harris said he was in disbelief when his neighbor alerted him to the wind damage at his house.

"Oh man, I mean this is — this is incredible," Harris said. "My heart dropped. I rushed over here and the damn tree fell."

When Harris got home he found the large tree that once stood in his yard had collapsed onto the roof of his home. No one was home at the time.

"Thank God, no one was injured, so I'm really happy and pleased about that," Harris said. "But yeah, now we got to get the tree removed and cut down, and get it off the house and see what damage is done to the house."

The high winds also caused dangerous conditions, forcing county officials to close Oak Grove Regional Park early. All across Stockton, drivers had to navigate around trees and branches in the roadways.

The city of Stockton told FOX40 it had two crews responding to downed trees. The city's backup contractor was also on standby to respond if needed.

In addition to causing property damage, the high winds also create health problems. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued a health alert that's in effect until Tuesday night.

"When breathing in particulate matter in the form of dust, there is a great increase in the risk of respiratory infections," explained Anthony Presto, who represents the district, "aggravating asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis."

"We're already seeing unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter throughout the valley," Presto said.

Between the downed trees and the dusty, hazy skies, the air district recommends avoiding windblown dust altogether, if you can.

"By remaining indoors and making sure that all the windows and doors are closed inside your home," Presto said.