

## **Creek Fire updates: Containment grows; when can firefighters declare victory?**

By Jim Guy

Modesto Bee, Fresno Bee and other papers, Sunday, Nov. 22, 2020

Firefighters battling the Creek Fire zeroed in on the last embers of the monster blaze in the Sierra and Inyo national forests Sunday, as containment was reported to reach the 95% figure.

The blaze, which erupted Sept. 4, burned 379,895 acres in eastern Fresno and Madera counties, destroying hundreds of structures, including homes in Shaver Lake. The cause remains under investigation. Fire officials estimate that complete containment will take place Nov. 30,

The fire caused a serious degradation of air quality in California's central San Joaquin Valley in October and November, but officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said it was not expected to be a factor Sunday in Fresno, although air quality for the region was forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive groups.

### **Biggest wildfires in California history**

The Creek Fire is the fourth-largest wildfire in California history and biggest single incident; the top three on the list are "complex" fires representing the merger of lines from two or more fires.

## **More than 100 displaced after fire ravages California town**

By John Antczak, Associated Press

The Business Journal, Friday, Nov. 20, 2020

(AP) — A week before Thanksgiving, more than 100 residents were displaced Thursday by a wind-whipped wildfire that ravaged a remote mountain community in California and killed one person, authorities said.

The inferno struck with sudden ferocity midday Tuesday during strong winds high in the eastern Sierra Nevada, destroying more than 80 structures, including homes, in the unincorporated town of Walker near the Nevada state line, according to the Mono County Sheriff's Office.

By early Wednesday, rain and snow were falling, reducing the fire to smoldering remnants after it scorched over 32 square miles (84 square kilometers).

By then, grave damage had been done to Walker, a community of widely spaced homes and businesses perched in a valley along a highway and the West Walker River, a six-hour drive north of Los Angeles. Homes and outbuildings were reduced to charred rubble. One person was dead, but authorities haven't released details yet.

The same ferocious winds, part of winter-like weather that blew into California and Nevada, also sent a wildfire roaring through a neighborhood about 100 miles (160 kilometers) north in Reno, Nevada. The flames forced more than 1,000 people to evacuate Tuesday — including the mayor — destroyed five houses and damaged 24. People began returning home Wednesday.

Though the fire burned a little less than 1 square mile (about 2 square kilometers), the damage there also was swift and then tempered by rain.

Reno Fire Chief David Cochran said extremely dry conditions helped fuel the blaze in rugged, hard-to-reach canyons that run between homes in the densely populated neighborhood.

The parts of California and Nevada where the wildfires flared are experiencing drought. Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas, which has made parts of the U.S. West much drier and more flammable.

In California, firefighters faced extreme fire pushed by strong and erratic winds gusting over 70 mph (112 kph), Don Shoemaker, a Bureau of Land Management official, said in an online video briefing.

"Our first priority was life safety and evacuations as well as doing point protection to try to save as many residences as possible," he said, describing "heavy structure loss" in Walker and nearby.

Residents fled Walker and the towns of Coleville and Topaz. The Carson Valley Inn to the north in Nevada was designated an evacuation point, and about 130 rooms are being used to house people for several days, the company said in an email.

The fire destroyed the home of firefighter Michael McCurry, his wife, Tess, and their four children, according to a GoFundMe page set up to help them.

“Rushing out the door with their fur babies, and only the clothes on their backs Tessa and the kids watched their home succumb to the inferno while Michael was actively fighting the fire. They have lost all of their worldly possessions,” the fundraising page said.

Local chambers of commerce were seeking donations to help those left homeless just a week before Thanksgiving.

The Mono County Sheriff's Office said information on the person who died in the fire was expected to be released later Thursday.

## **With 'explosive growth,' Sunrise Kern aims to make its presence known**

By Sam Morgen

The Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Nov. 20, 2020

Over the summer, a thick haze from wildfires across the state hung over Bakersfield for weeks. For some, the toxic air quality was nothing more than a consistently annoying reminder to stay inside. For others, the air had turned into a health risk. But to a select group of young people, the wildfires, which seem to be getting worse every year, represent something starkly different: a call to action.

Driven by an urgent desire to curb global warming, a new political crusade has started in Kern County. The local hub of a national movement, Sunrise Kern has quickly gained momentum since its launch in July.

Over its short lifespan, the group has already clashed with many local politicians. Whether it's hosting a break-of-dawn protest at Rep. Kevin McCarthy's house or calling out Gov. Gavin Newsom for his oil policies, Sunrise Kern has one message for local elected officials: Either enact policies that protect the environment, or we'll find someone who will.

The message has been catching on. Reporting “explosive growth,” the organization has gone from three people to around 70 active members, with hundreds signed up to hear from it over email and text.

“We've been growing really really fast,” said Riddhi Patel, who helped found the group and serves as hub coordinator. “I think people are starting to get scared about that, which is fun to see for us.”

Nationally, the Sunrise Movement has thrown its support behind the Green New Deal, the congressional proposal aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the country's use of fossil fuels. Over the course of this year's election, Sunrise organizers worked to put representatives in office who would push the proposal through Congress. New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is already a big supporter.

A key part of the plan is its promise to provide high-paying jobs in green industries. In Kern County, where oil reigns supreme, that promise is viewed as especially important.

“If you are someone who is worried about what a green transition of the economy will look like as an oil worker, we are here for you,” said Adrian Esquivias, a coordinator with Sunrise Kern, who at 28, is the oldest member of the local hub. “We are here merely to make sure that Kern County grows into the beautiful community that we envision.”

Although its focus may be climate change, Sunrise Kern has ventured into other realms not traditionally connected to the subject. The group has weighed in on efforts to reform the Bakersfield Police Department and has pushed for homeless issues to be resolved. It has even started distributing food to those in need over the weekends.

Still, its aggressive approach has rubbed certain local politicians the wrong way.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer found herself the subject of a vulgar social media post while campaigning for Delano City Councilman Joe Alindajao, who was running for reelection in October. When asked about Sunrise Kern this week, it appeared as if the message had stuck with her.

"Being engaged in politics is an important part of living in a democracy, as is expressing one's views on political issues," she said in a statement to The Californian, calling the group's actions publicity stunts. "Engagement in the political process, however, should be honest, transparent and civil. Some groups choose to engage in tactics designed specifically to harass, threaten, or demean public servants rather than engage in truthful advocacy. Such tactics often are just thinly veiled attempts at intimidation, and have little place in any democracy, much less a civilized society."

McCarthy, whose home was subject to a 4:30 a.m. protest by Sunrise Kern and other groups in September, did not respond to a request for comment from The Californian. At the time, he tweeted a message portraying the protesters as trying to intimidate his neighbors and family and thanked the Bakersfield Police Department on Twitter for showing up.

Even with the criticism, Sunrise Kern has no plans of slowing down. After a short holiday breather, the group plans to pick up where it left off at the beginning of the new year. Organizers have already set their sights on the 2022 elections.

"We've just got dedicated members. We have people who just feel it in their marrow," Esquivias said.

He and other organizers believe more and more recruits will continue to join, which could be potentially troubling for those elected officials who stand in the group's way.

"If you don't represent people who elect you into power," he continued, "watch out."