

## **Pristine Lake Tahoe shrouded in smoke from threatening fire**

By Sam Metz and Brian Melley - *Associated press*  
In the Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021

Ash rained down on Lake Tahoe on Tuesday and thick yellow smoke blotted out views of the mountains rimming its pristine blue waters as a massive wildfire threatened the alpine vacation spot on the California-Nevada state line.

Tourists ducked into cafes, outdoor gear shops and casinos on Lake Tahoe Boulevard for a respite from hazardous air coming from an erratic blaze less than 20 miles (32 kilometers) away.

The Caldor Fire erupted over the course of a week into the nation's No. 1 firefighting priority and was "knocking on the door" of Tahoe, said Thom Porter, California's state fire chief. A major wildfire has not penetrated the Lake Tahoe Basin since 2007.

Tourists typically come to swim and hike, relax along the lake's calm shores or take their chances gambling, not risk their lives in the face of a potential disaster.

Although there were no evacuations ordered and Porter said he didn't think the fire would reach the lake, it was impossible to ignore the blanket of haze so thick and vast that it closed schools for a second day in Reno, Nevada, which is about 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the fire.

Visitors wore masks outdoors — not because the coronavirus pandemic, but because of the toxic air and inescapable stench of fire. The gondola that ferries summer passengers to the summit of the Heavenly Mountain ski area was closed until winter due to the wildfire risk.

Cindy Osterloh, whose husband pushed a relative in a wheelchair beneath the idled cables, said she and family members visiting from San Diego were all on allergy medications to take the sting out of their eyes and keep their noses from running so they can ride out the smoke for the rest of their vacation.

"We got up and it was a lot clearer this morning. We went for a walk and then we came back and now it's coming in again," she said of the smoke. "We're going to go and see a movie and hopefully it clears up enough that we can go do our boat rides."

An army of firefighters worked to contain the blaze, which has spread explosively in a manner witnessed in the past two years during extreme drought. Climate change has made the West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

Massive plumes have erupted in flames, burning embers carried by gusts have skipped miles ahead of fire lines, and fires that typically die down at night have made long runs in the dark.

The fire had scorched about 184 square miles (476 square kilometers) and destroyed at least 455 homes since Aug. 14 in the Sierra Nevada southwest of Lake Tahoe. It was 9% contained and threatened more than 17,000 structures.

Nationally, 92 large fires were burning in a dozen states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. Although many fires are larger, the Caldor Fire has become the top priority to keep it from sweeping into the Tahoe.

As the fire grew last week, politicians, environmentalists, and policy makers gathered on the shore for the 25th annual Lake Tahoe Summit dedicated to protecting the lake and the pine-covered mountains that surround it.

With the Caldor Fire burning to the southwest and the Dixie Fire, the second-largest in state history with a 500-mile (804 kilometer) perimeter, burning about 65 miles (104 kilometers) to the north, the risk to the lake was top of mind.

"The fires that are raging all around us nearby are screaming this warning: Tahoe could be next," said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif.

The last major blaze in the area took South Lake Tahoe by surprise after blowing up from an illegal campfire in the summer of 2007. The Angora Fire burned less than 5 square miles (13 square kilometers) but destroyed 254 homes, injured three people and forced 2,000 people to flee.

Scars from the fire can still be seen not far from the commercial strip where South Lake Tahoe meets the Nevada border in Stateline, where tourists go to gamble.

Inside the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, cocktail waitresses in fishnet stockings and leopard-print corsets served customers playing slots and blackjack who said they weren't overly concerned about the fire.

Sitting at a slot machine near a window looking out at cars driving through the haze on Lake Tahoe Boulevard, Ramona Trejo said she and her husband would stay for their 50th wedding anniversary, as planned.

Trejo, who uses supplemental oxygen due to respiratory problems, said her husband wanted to keep gambling.

"I would want to go now," she said.

## **French Fire inches closer to Tulare County as firefighters keep close eye on blaze**

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021

The French Fire is now threatening the Wofford Heights and Alta Sierra communities and continues to spread.

The fire's growth is now a concern for Tulare County firefighters, who are also battling a remote wildfire in the Sequoia National Forest.

Resources are limited with 12 active wildfires burning in California.

The Kern County wildfire is now one of the largest wildfires actively burning in the state. It has been burning in the Lake Isabella area for a week and is now at 20,678 acres and 19% contained.

The fire was 500 acres when the first fire crews arrived last week.

On Tuesday afternoon, a spot fire was burning in the dry brush around the hottest part of the day. The fire was spotted across Ice House Creek and Road 155 (Evans Road). Fire crews switched tactics to structure protection in Pala Ranches and west Wofford Heights.

Roughly an hour later, the forest service issued an imminent threat alert for residents in the Wofford Heights, Calgary Drive, and Pala Ranches areas. Only 50% of Wofford Heights residents had evacuated, Operations Section Chief John Owings said during Wednesday's briefing.

"The main focus was in conducting rescues," he said. "Once we got all the people out of there, the crews came back and started doing structure defense to save the homes they could."

There isn't an accurate count of structures lost or damaged in the fire, but there is a team on the ground assessing damages, Owings said.

"I will tell you, crews were heavily focused on defending your homes and getting you folks out of there," he added.

An evacuation warning was also issued for the following area: Burlando Road north of the current evacuation zone, including the Big Blue Mine area, west of the Kern River, to the Kern-Tulare County line.

Tulare County firefighters are monitoring the fire, which is now north of Highway 155 in Kern County. Although the growing wildfire is not threatening communities in Tulare County, local fire crews are asking residents to be prepared for the possibility of evacuations and to stay informed on fire suppression efforts.

There are 1,067 firefighters assigned to the French Fire, including crews from across Tulare County. There are 14,180 firefighters assigned to California incidents, according to Cal Fire.

Cal Fire Chief Matt Streck emphasized the limited resources available throughout the state. He urged Kern County residents under evacuation orders and warnings to leave when asked.

"We are simply strapped. The number of resources we normally have available to us at the local, state and federal level are simply not there right now," he said. "We need your cooperation. The worst of the fire season is still ahead of us."

The following areas have been placed under evacuation orders:

- Wofford Heights
- Pala Ranches
- Shirley Meadows
- Alta Sierra
- Slick Rock
- Dutch Flat
- Isabella Highlands
- Wagy Flat
- Black Gulch
- Keyesville North and South

Two evacuation centers are set up at Woodrow Wallace Elementary School, 3240 Erskine Creek Road and Kern Valley High School, 3340 Erskine Creek Road. Animal Services will assist with sheltering companion animals at the center. 661-868-7100.

Crews will provide immediate structure defense in the Wofford community, as well as continue firing operation along the Highway 155. Mountaintop communities including Greenhorn Summit, Shirley Meadows, and communities along Sawmill Road are threatened.

#### **Is a full forest closure imminent?**

Also burning in the Sequoia National Forest is the Walkers Fire. The fire is now 4,448 acres and is burning north through drought-stricken brush and standing dead trees.

Fire crews are focused on protecting the historic Quinn Patrol Cabin in Sequoia National Park and two private inholdings in Sequoia National Forest. The trail into Quinn Patrol Cabin was closed by Sequoia National Park to stop the public from entering the fire area.

The Sequoia National Forest has two closures in effect: Castle Fire area closure in the Western Divide Ranger District and the French Fire area closure in the Kern River and Western Divide Ranger Districts.

Despite these fires, both Sequoia National Forest and Sequoia National Park are open to visitors.

"If we continue to have wildfires similar to what is happening now, it is possible the Sequoia National Forest could implement a full forest closure," District Ranger Eric LaPrice said. "Closure of the forest, similar to those in northern California, would be considered due to the extreme fire conditions and the lack of available fire suppression resources."

Last week, US Forest Service announced the closure of nine Northern California forests due to fire dangers.

"Fires are running very quickly due to the drought conditions, dry fuels, and winds," Regional Forester Jennifer Eberlien. "This makes initial attack and containment very difficult and is even more challenging with strained resources who are battling more than 100 large fires across the country,"

Affected forests include:

- Klamath National Forest

- Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
- Lassen National Forest
- Mendocino National Forest
- Modoc National Forest
- Plumas National Forest
- Shasta-Trinity National Forest
- Six Rivers National Forest
- Tahoe National Forest

"We do not take this decision lightly and understand how this impacts people who enjoy recreating on the National Forests," Eberlien. "These temporary closures are necessary to ensure public and firefighter safety, as well as reduce the potential for new fire starts."

## **These charts show how fires have changed California**

By Yoohyun Jung

San Francisco Chronicle, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021

Fires are an inevitable part of California's natural landscape. They are sometimes necessary to remove dead vegetation from the ground and to prevent larger and hotter fires from destroying healthy forests, properties and even human lives.

As climate shifts trigger prolonged drought conditions, fires are becoming more frequent and severe. In recent years, data shows fires are burning an increasingly large number of acres of land and trees, and causing the release of toxic smoke and haze.

The Chronicle keeps track of various fire- and climate-related data from state and federal agencies, as well as research organizations, to understand how fires are changing and how they are impacting the state and its residents' lives. This collection of data-based visuals is updated weekly.

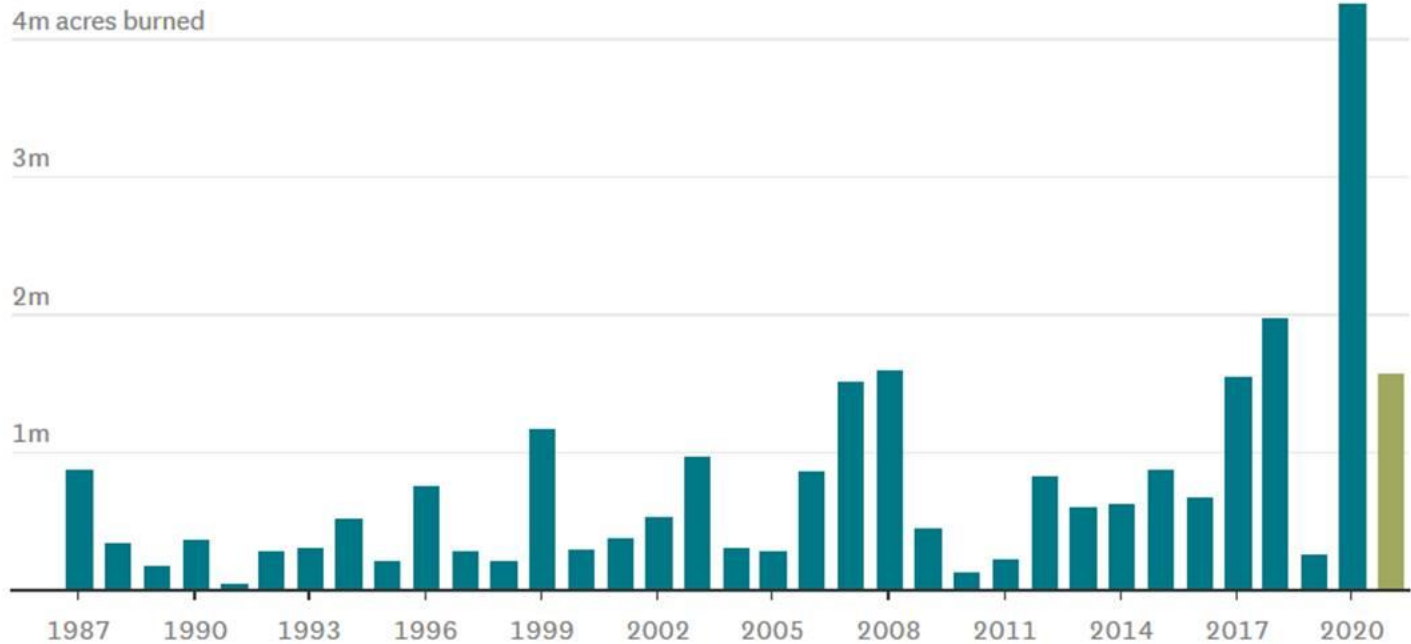
Last year was a historic year with fires burning almost 4.3 million acres across the state. This year's extremely dry conditions and powerful winds are once again fueling the growth of major fires, leading to what will likely be another destructive fire year.

The Dixie Fire, which started in July this year near the Cresta Dam in Plumas County, has grown at a rapid pace and is already the second largest fire in the state's recorded history. The largest fire event was the August Complex Fires of 2020, which was a combination of more than 30 fires.

Among the data points we collect is the total acreage burned by fires, which comes from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. Although 2020 was an exceptionally destructive year, it's not the only year to have surpassed the million-acre mark.

## Acres of California land burned by fire, 1987 to 2021

The 2021 figure is as of Aug. 23, 2021



Source: [Cal Fire](#)

There have been five other years since 1987, when Cal Fire started recording this data, that more than 1 million acres burned in the state: 1999, 2007, 2008, 2017 and 2018. It goes without saying that 2021 has long since passed the million mark. As of Aug. 23, nearly 1.6 million acres have already burned, which is slightly more than how much has burned during the same time frame in 2020.

Cal Fire also tracks which fires were the most destructive and deadly in state history. The Dixie Fire is also already among the most destructive fires, having destroyed more than 1,200 structures in just the first month since ignition. However, the Camp Fire of 2018, remains the most destructive, having destroyed nearly 19,000 structures.

The Camp Fire, which occurred in 2018, was the most costly fire in terms of human lives. The fire, which initially started near the community of Pulga in Butte County and later merged with a second fire ignited by PG&E power lines, led to the deaths of 85 civilians, according to Cal Fire.

Fire seasons are starting earlier and ending later. Government and fire management agencies, such as Cal Fire, identify which periods of the year “wildland fires are likely to occur, spread, and affect resource values sufficient to warrant organized fire management activities,” according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Cal Fire says the length of the fire season across the Sierras is estimated to have increased by 75 days and appears to correspond with the increase in forest fires.

## The start of the 2021 fire season in comparison to 2017 by fire unit area

Based on the estimated first day when wildfires are likely to occur



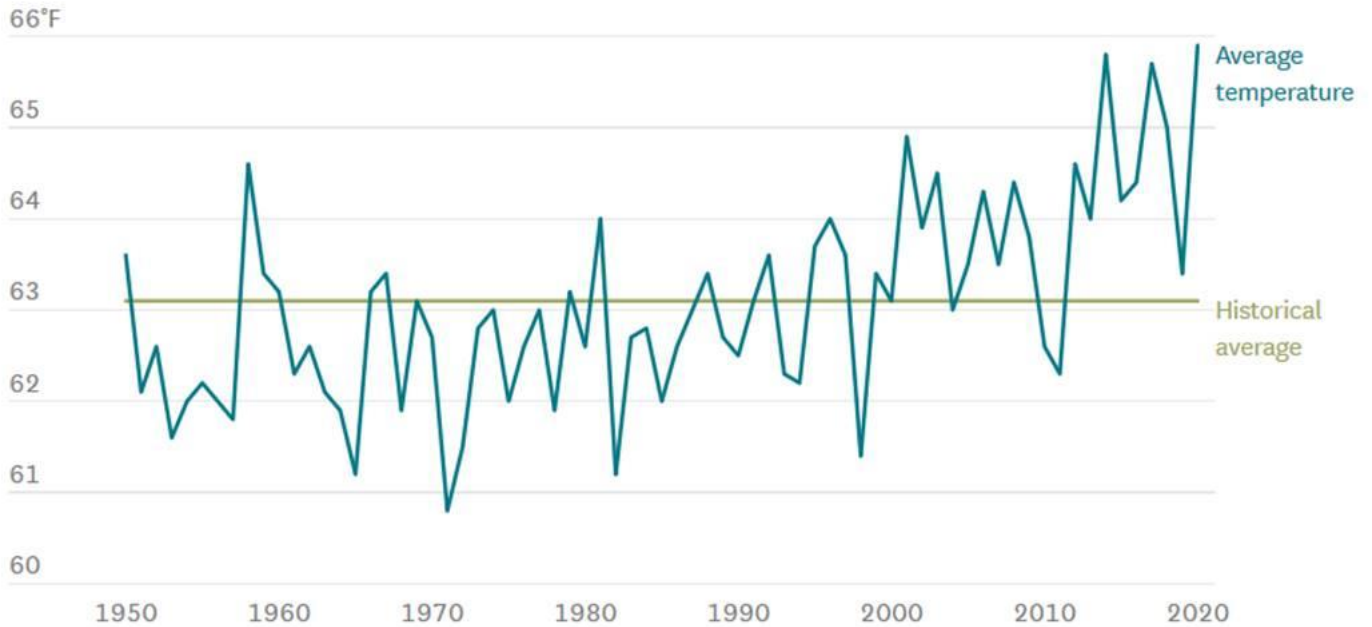
Source: [Cal Fire](#)

2017 is the first year for which data is public.

Cal Fire and other fire experts attribute the elongated fire seasons — and increased fires — to climate change. “Warmer spring and summer temperatures, reduced snowpack and earlier spring snowmelt create longer and more intense dry seasons that increase moisture stress on vegetation and make forests more susceptible to severe wildfire,” the agency explains on its website.

## California average temperature during fire season months

May through December of each year, 1950-2020



Source: [National Centers for Environmental Information](#)

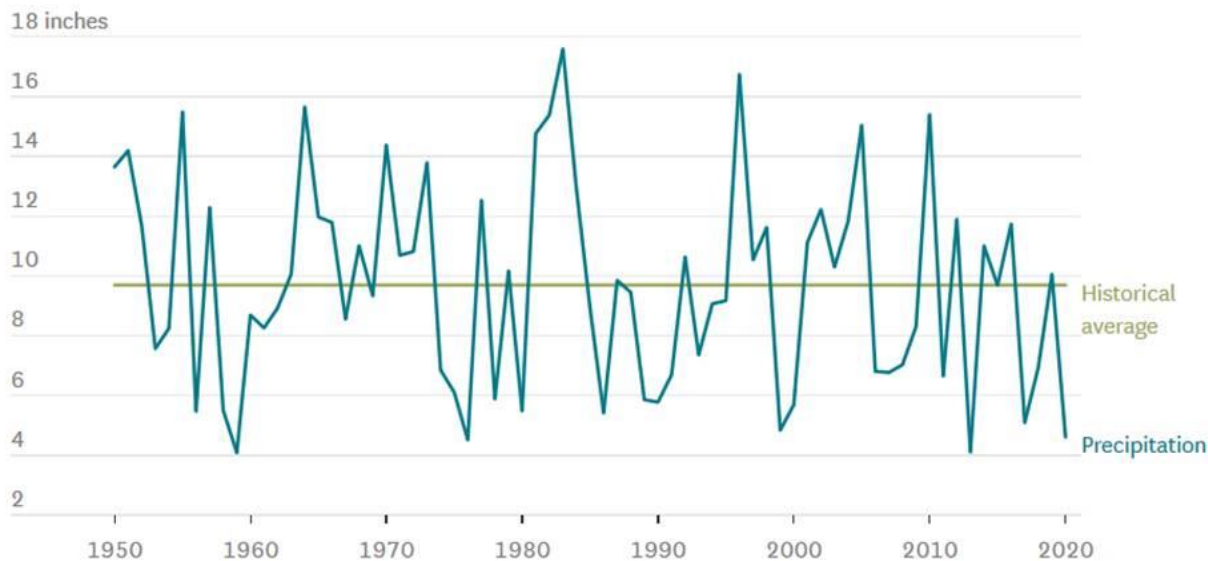
Historical average was calculated based on measurements made between 1950 and 2020.

The chart above shows the average temperatures between May and December — typical fire season — of each year since 1950. The upward trend is evident.

The chart below, which shows precipitation levels for the same timeframe, shows more fluctuation, but it's clear that 2020 was exceptionally dry.

## Precipitation in California during fire season months

May through December of each year, 1950-2020



Source: [National Centers for Environmental Information](#)

Historical average was calculated based on measurements made between 1950 and 2020.

California's snowpack has not fared well in the warming conditions. Data from the Department of Water Resources' California Data Exchange Center shows that this year's April snowpack levels, which experts point to because that's the end of the wet season, are at 62% of historical average. That might not sound so bad, but there are some years, like 2019, when the levels are above 150%.



## Statewide snowpack levels as percentages of historical average

Data for each year reflects measurements from the end of the wet season



Source: [California Data Exchange Center](#)

Historical averages are based on measurements from 1966 to 2015.

More fires naturally mean more trees are burned and forest lands are lost. According to data from the Global Forest Watch, an environmental research and policy organization, wildfires are the biggest drivers of tree loss in California. More than 650,000 of approximately 800,000 acres in tree cover loss that happened in 2020 could be attributed to wildfires.

The chart below shows which counties saw the biggest tree loss last year.

The state is spending more and more money to suppress fires. This year's estimate for emergency fire suppression, according to Cal Fire, is currently at \$1.3 billion. The emergency fund is money allocated specifically for the firefighting operations that continue past the first 24 hours of a wildfire, and pays for equipment, overtime, air support and incarcerated crews.

Suppression is one thing, but prevention is another. Experts from across regions and disciplines have called for increased use of "prescribed fires," or controlled burns, which are the practice of intentionally igniting fires to remove hazardous vegetation that can serve as fuel for larger and hotter fires.

Prescribed fires, which have not always been welcomed by some members of the public, as they lead to smoke, have increased in California in recent years, but fire officials and researchers say what's being done now is barely scratching the surface of what is needed.

### Crews struggle to stop fire bearing down on Lake Tahoe

By Sam Metz and Brian Melley Associated Press

The Business Journal, Bakersfield Californian and other papers, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021

(AP) — A California fire that gutted hundreds of homes advanced toward Lake Tahoe on Wednesday as thousands of firefighters tried to box in the flames and tourists who hoped to boat or swim were enveloped in a thick yellow haze of the nation's worst air.

The Caldor Fire spread to within 20 miles (32 kilometers) southwest of the lake that straddles the California-Nevada state line, eating its way through rugged timberlands and “knocking on the door” of the Lake Tahoe basin, California’s state fire chief Thom Porter warned this week.

Ash rained down on Tuesday and tourists ducked into cafes, outdoor gear shops and casinos on Lake Tahoe Boulevard for a respite from the unhealthy air.

South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City on the west shore had the nation’s worst air pollution at midmorning Wednesday, reaching 334, in the “hazardous” category of the 0-500 Air Quality Index, according to AirNow, a partnership of federal, state and local air agencies.

Inside the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, cocktail waitresses in fishnet stockings and leopard-print corsets served customers playing slots and blackjack.

Sitting at a slot machine near a window looking out at cars driving through the haze, Ramona Trejo said she and her husband would stay for their 50th wedding anniversary, as planned.

Trejo, who uses supplemental oxygen due to respiratory problems, said her husband wanted to keep gambling.

“I would want to go now,” she said.

South of Tahoe, Rick Nelson and his wife, Diane, had planned to host a weekend wedding at Fallen Leaf Lake, where his daughter and her fiance had met. However, the smoke caused most of the community to leave. The sun was an eerie blood orange and the floats and boats in the lake were obscured by haze.

In the end, the Nelsons spent two days arranging to have the wedding moved from the glacial lake several hours southwest to the San Francisco Bay Area.

“Everybody’s trying to make accommodations for the smoke. And I think it’s becoming a reality for us, unfortunately,” Diane Nelson said. “I just think that the smoke and the fires have gotten bigger, hotter and faster-moving.”

Climate change has made the West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

Although there were no evacuations ordered for Lake Tahoe, it was impossible to ignore a blanket of haze so thick and vast that it closed schools for two days in Reno, Nevada, which is about 60 miles (100 kilometers) from the fire.

The school district that includes Reno reopened most schools on Wednesday, citing improved air quality conditions. However, the Washoe County School District’s schools in Incline Village on the north shore of Lake Tahoe remained closed, the district said in a statement.

The last major blaze in the area, during the summer of 2007, took South Lake Tahoe by surprise after blowing up from an illegal campfire. The Angora Fire burned less than 5 square miles (13 square kilometers) but destroyed 254 homes, injured three people and forced 2,000 people to flee.

The Caldor fire has scorched more than 197 square miles (510 square kilometers) and destroyed at least 461 homes since Aug. 14 in the Sierra Nevada southwest of the lake. It was 11% contained and threatened more than 17,000 structures.

The western side of the blaze continued to threaten more than a dozen small communities and wineries. On the fire’s eastern side, crews bulldozed fire lines, opened up narrow logging roads and cleared ridgetops in hopes of stopping its advance, fire officials said.

More than 2,500 firefighters were on the line and more resources were streaming in, including big firefighting aircraft, fire officials said.

“It’s the No. 1 fire in the country right now ... there’s dozens of crews and dozers and engines and others that are on their way right now,” said Jeff Marsolais, supervisor for the Eldorado National Forest and an administrator on the fire.

The resources were desperately needed.

“This fire has just simply outpaced us. We emptied the cupboards of resources,” Marsolais said, adding that while the blaze had slowed its explosive growth in recent days, “that can change.”

Meanwhile, California’s Dixie Fire, the second-largest in state history at 1,148 square miles (2,973 square kilometers), was burning only about 65 miles (104 kilometers) to the north. It was 43% contained. At least 682 homes were among more than 1,270 buildings that have been destroyed.

In the southern Sierra Nevada, there was growing concern as the French Fire expanded near Lake Isabella, a popular fishing and boating destination.

About 10 communities were under evacuation orders. The fire has blackened 32 square miles (83 square kilometers) since Aug. 18.

Nationally, 92 large fires were burning in a dozen mainly Western states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

Northern California has experienced a series of disastrous blazes that have burned hundreds of homes and many remain uncontained.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden declared that a major disaster exists in California and ordered federal aid made available to local governments, agencies and fire victims in four northern counties ravaged by blazes dating back to July 14.

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This version corrects that the Caldor Fire is southwest of Lake Tahoe, not east of the lake.

## **Containment improves slightly as French Fire burns on**

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021

The French Fire scorched 19,502 acres and is 19 percent contained as of 9:48 a.m. Tuesday, said the California Interagency Management Team 12, which is overseeing the fire’s progression.

The conflagration ravaged land west of Lake Isabella and grew about 1,300 acres overnight from Monday to Tuesday. The fire activity grew in the Shirley Peak and the Alta Sierra region. Crews shored up Rancheria Road as the containment line to protect the Alta Sierra region, the management team said in a news release.

Firefighters also made a containment line near Wagy Flat and Sawmill roads. On Tuesday, the crew was to focus on protecting the structures along Sawmill Road, the management team’s news release said.

Alta Sierra and Shirley Meadows have not experienced much fire history, which enables the fire’s ability to spread, the management team added.

Cindy Huge, the public information for the Red Cross, said two shelters are open at Kern River Valley High School and Woodrow Wallace Elementary School.

Red Cross must abide by the COVID-19 protections, which prompted the opening of the second location, Huge said. About 30 people occupy the center as of 5:15 p.m. Tuesday. The shelters offer food, nurses, spiritual advisers, showers and cots. The Salvation Army is providing the food, Huge added. There are showers for people with disabilities.

Kern County Animal Services also is near the shelter and brought a semi truck with air conditioning, Huge said. They are on the scene to aid any animals that need help.

Evacuation warnings include:

- Wofford Heights, starting at Black Canyon Trail, into Calgary Drive east to Burlando Road
- Wofford Boulevard from the Sequoia Forest Boundary south to Old State Road.
- south of the Tulare County border on the west side, extending south to Rancheria Road, following east into Black Gulch and into south to 178.
- Sequoia Forest bordering Black Mountain East

- Black Canyon Trail, turning into Calgary Drive, north to the Sequoia Forest Boundary.
- Lake Isabella Reservoir, following Highway 155 to Keysville South.
- Communities including: Pala Ranches, Shirley Meadows, Alta Sierra, Slick Rock, Dutch Flat, Isabella Highlands, Wagy Flat, Black Gulch and Keysville North and South.

Evacuation warnings:

- areas surrounding Split Mountain
- Kernville
- areas surrounding Neyer Canyon

## **As Caldor Fire smoke chokes Lake Tahoe, a Northern California paradise reels**

By Danielle Echeverria, Michael Cabanatuan

San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021

**SOUTH LAKE TAHOE** — Smoke and ash pouring into the Lake Tahoe basin from the Caldor Fire turned this alpine paradise Tuesday into a place not to be enjoyed but endured.

The skies, typically as blue as the lake, were a yellowish gray and the normally pine-scented air reeked.

Campgrounds and beaches were closed, boats were banned from the lake and even the signature gondola that carries visitors from the Stateline area to Heavenly's mountaintop resort was shut down. Brewfest, a craft beer tasting fundraiser slated for the coming weekend was called off along with a pair of Eric Church concerts in the outdoor Lake Tahoe Amphitheater behind Harvey's casino.

It was not the late summer at the lake that residents and visitors are used to.

"We've never seen this much smoke here, ever," said Joe Stella, a manager at the Powder House ski, snowboard and bike rental shop. Normally, he would have rented 20 to 25 bikes to tourists eager to ride South Lake Tahoe's scenic bike routes.

But not on Tuesday. Air quality index levels reached hazardous levels and health officials advised people to stay indoors. And most did. The resorts, casinos and shopping centers — and the bike paths — were largely empty.

The Caldor Fire, which started on Aug. 14 south of Grizzly Flats, had burned 122,980 acres by Tuesday evening and was 11% contained.

Firefighters made gains Monday night, taking advantage of decreased wind and improved humidity to battle the flames, though small spot fires popped up, in some instances jumping a half-mile ahead of the fire.

The blaze has destroyed 461 homes, plus a school and two fire stations, and injured two residents. More than 17,000 structures remained threatened, Cal Fire said, and more than 33,000 residents in Amador and El Dorado counties have been evacuated.

So far, the fire remains outside the Tahoe basin and no evacuations or warnings have been issued for the community. But the smoke, pushed by winds from the southwest, flowed north toward the lake.

Air quality around Lake Tahoe was considered "very unhealthy" or "hazardous" Tuesday morning, according to The Chronicle's Air Quality Map.

The skies in South Lake Tahoe were surprisingly clear and sunny early Tuesday, residents said, but by late morning they turned gray then became yellow and grew increasingly thick by mid-afternoon, making it tough to see beyond the first rows of trees in the forested area.

At the Powder House bike rental shop, Stella said he was neither surprised nor distressed by the dearth of customers willing to pedal through the smoke.

"I wouldn't recommend it," he said, wiping ash from the seat of one of the bikes out front. "Think of all the stuff you're breathing in."

Many people bought N95 masks, air purifiers, and even air filters and box fans, to make makeshift air purifiers, said Don Carrington, general manager of Ace Hardware in the Village Center shopping center. He sold 50 to 100 N95 masks in a day and was down to his last box.

The choking smoke drove some residents to voluntarily evacuate and prompted pleas on social media for visitors to stay away to avoid interfering with firefighters.

Carol Chaplin, president and CEO of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, said the group is not discouraging visitors but recommending they check the latest fire and air quality conditions so they know what they're heading into.

"We just think best thing to do is to let our visitors make the calls they need to make," she said.

Some visitors were still arriving at Tahoe despite the smoke but finding little to do.

Six friends from the Bay Area who had been planning their trip for a while came anyway after seeing how bad the air quality was. It was too late to get refunds, they said.

They were supposed to go boating, but their reservation was canceled, Tommy Chea and Nicole Ferras explained as the group took photos at the giant chair made of skis at Heavenly Resort. Now, they were just walking around to whatever was open, figuring out how to spend time until Thursday.

"We just didn't want to lose money," Minh Tran said.

Eoghain O'Neill, visiting from Oregon with his two kids, said he would have canceled his trip had he known the smoke was so bad.

A section of Highway 50, which links the Bay Area and South Lake Tahoe, has been closed to give fire crews easier access to the Caldor Fire.

Farther north, the Dixie Fire grew to 733,475 acres by Tuesday night. Since it sparked on July 13, the blaze has burned parts of five counties and become the second-largest wildfire in California history. It was 43% contained Tuesday evening, up from 40% Monday.

The Dixie Fire has injured three first responders and destroyed more than 1,200 structures, including more than 700 residences. Another approximately 11,800 structures remain threatened, Cal Fire said.

Late Tuesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that the White House approved a request for a federal disaster declaration that will expand housing assistance, counseling, medical and legal services in several counties impacted by the Dixie and River fires. More areas, including those near the Caldor Fire, could be offered similar resources once conditions allow officials to assess the scope of the damage, the governor's office said in a news release.

## **Grant Funding To Assist In Phase Out Of Ag Burning**

Oakdale Leader, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021

The Valley Air District Governing Board unanimously accepted \$178.2 million in new State funding directed to the San Joaquin Valley to launch an expanded grant program. That program is designed to assist farmers in phasing-out the open burning of woody waste through the use of new cleaner practices, including the chipping of material for incorporation into the soil and other cleaner alternatives.

After nearly two decades of significant work to reduce agricultural burning in the San Joaquin Valley, the District and the California Air Resources Board have approved a strategy that will result in a near complete phase-out of all Valley agricultural burning by Jan. 1, 2025. To meet this deadline, the Air District has worked closely with agricultural stakeholders and leaders to bring new state funding to the Valley to help ensure that this phase-out is successful.

The \$178.2 million in state funding will be used to fund the District's Alternatives to Agricultural Open Burning Grant program on an expanded scale throughout the Valley. Originally launched by the District in 2018 as a pilot program, the Alternatives to Agricultural Open Burning Grant program provides financial incentives to agricultural operations to chip woody materials as an alternative to burning and helps to continue to improve air quality in the Valley.

With this new funding, the Alternatives to Agricultural Open Burning Grant program will be enhanced to provide additional funding for small agricultural operations of less than 100 total acres; expand funding options for vineyard removals; expand options for chipped material disposal through beneficial reuse alternatives such as mulch or compost; and provide an option to fund the purchase of new chipping equipment to be used within the Valley, amongst other program enhancements.

The District anticipates the new program to launch in early September 2021 and encourages interested agricultural operators in the San Joaquin Valley to learn more about this funding and other available grants by visiting [www.valleyair.org/grants](http://www.valleyair.org/grants) or by calling program staff at 559-230-5800.

## **Hazardous air quality breaks records as Caldor fire pushes toward Lake Tahoe**

Lila Seidman, Los Angeles Times

The Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021

LOS ANGELES — A spot fire that took hold on the eastern edge of the Caldor fire has pushed the growing blaze closer to South Lake Tahoe, belching smoke that has caused record-breaking air pollution and spurring anxiety the fire could reach resort communities.

The spot fire had jumped to around 100 acres and was “growing at a fairly rapid pace,” said Eric Schwab, an operations section chief with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The new growth had not yet triggered any evacuation warnings or orders for the Lake Tahoe area, but nearly 30,000 people have already fled the fire as it has chewed its way through El Dorado County. And due to the blaze, U.S. Forest Service officials recently ordered the closure of several backcountry areas near the lake, including Desolation Wilderness, Meiss Country, Barker Pass and McKinney/Rubicon.

Still, some on social media announced they were leaving or avoiding the Tahoe Basin because of another scourge: horrendous air quality that has turned skies an eerie orange and sent ash raining from the sky.

Just over the California line, in Reno and Sparks, Nev., the all-time worst concentration of small particulate matter — known as PM2.5 — was recorded Monday, according to the Washoe County Health District Air Quality Management Division. The agency said the area averaged an air quality index of 251, which is considered very unhealthy, and issued a stage 3 emergency.

An air quality rating of 300 and above is considered hazardous — a level many typically picturesque areas around Lake Tahoe far exceeded Monday.

On Tuesday morning, fire-embattled Pollock Pines, along Highway 50 to the west of Lake Tahoe, had a rating of 769 — the worst in the U.S. and a staggering 90 times above the World Health Organization’s exposure recommendation.

A dozen large wildfires that are raging in Central and Northern California are spewing hazardous smoke and ash into the atmosphere. To the east of the Caldor fire, the lightning-sparked Tamarack fire has burned 68,637 acres since igniting July 4 and was 82% contained, according to the most recent incident report.

Smoke from the fires even triggered an advisory in parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties — hundreds of miles to the south — through Tuesday. The South Coast Air Quality Management District, which issued the advisory, said the Coachella Valley was likely to experience air deemed unhealthy for sensitive groups, and parts of L.A. and the Inland Empire could see similar conditions.

On Tuesday, firefighters were continuing to focus on trapping the blaze west of Highway 89, an artery that borders the western edge of Lake Tahoe.

Since igniting more than a week ago, the fire has swelled to 117,704 acres, with explosive growth over the weekend. It has burned at least 455 homes, 11 commercial buildings and 166 minor structures. At least 17,000 structures are still threatened by the conflagration, which is 9% contained.

“This has become a huge priority, to stop the eastern spread of the fire,” Schwab said.

Growth has slowed in recent days, but weather officials say an incoming trough is bringing wind and atmospheric instability. Gusts around the burn area were expected to pick up Tuesday, which could clear out the smoke in some places but could also spread the fire, officials said.

A low-pressure trough sitting off the coast is forecast to move over the region Tuesday evening and into Wednesday, driving down temperatures but elevating wind speeds to an average of 20 to 25 mph, with gusts up to 30 mph, according to the National Weather Service. Winds will be coming from the southwest, likely pushing the flames northeast — toward Lake Tahoe.

Marvin Boyd, a meteorologist with the weather service's Reno station, said that vegetation is so parched in the area that winds, while not considered “critical,” could easily spur fire activity. Much of the state is in an exceptional drought, which has primed vegetation — fuel for fires — to burn.

Boyd called the situation “very volatile.”

Given the conditions, “it doesn’t take a lot for a tree to catch fire,” he said. “And then it will burn hotter, basically, and faster.”

Temperatures are expected to rise later in the week in Northern California, another factor that can increase fire behavior, meteorologists warn. Through Wednesday, the mercury is expected to hover in the low to mid-70s before jumping to the low to mid-80s beginning Thursday.

“The honest situation is there’s no help from the weather anytime soon,” Boyd said.