

## **S. Lake Tahoe threatened by massive Caldor Fire, Calif. officials issue more evacuation orders**

By Chip Yost, Bridgette Bjorlo, Karma Dickerson  
Associated Press & The Sun, Monday, August 31, 2021

A popular vacation haven normally filled with tens of thousands of summer tourists was clogged with fleeing vehicles Monday after the entire resort city of South Lake Tahoe was ordered to leave as a ferocious wildfire raced toward Lake Tahoe, a sparkling gem on the California-Nevada state line.

Vehicles loaded with bikes and camping gear and hauling boats were in gridlock traffic in the city of 22,000, stalled in hazy, brown air that smelled like a campfire. Police and other emergency vehicles whizzed by.

Ken Breslin was stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic less than a mile (1.6 kilometers) from his home, with only a quarter-tank of gas in his Ford Escape. His son begged him to leave Sunday night, but he shrugged him off, certain that if an evacuation order came, it would be later in the week.

"Before, it was, 'No worries ... it's not going to crest. It's not gonna come down the hill. There's 3,500 firefighters, all those bulldozers and all the air support,'" he said. "Until this morning, I didn't think there was a chance it could come into this area. Now, it's very real."

By Monday night the fire had crossed state highways 50 and 89 and burned mountain cabins as it churned down slopes toward the Tahoe Basin. Flames came within just a few miles of South Lake Tahoe and residents of communities just over the state line in Douglas County, Nevada were warned to get ready to evacuate.

Monday's fresh evacuation orders, unheard of in South Lake Tahoe, came a day after communities several miles south of the lake were abruptly ordered to evacuate as the Caldor Fire raged nearby. The city's main medical facility, Barton Memorial Hospital, proactively evacuated dozens of patients, and the El Dorado Sheriff's Office transferred inmates to a neighboring jail.

"There is fire activity happening in California that we have never seen before. The critical thing for the public to know is evacuate early," said Chief Thom Porter, director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. "For the rest of you in California: Every acre can and will burn someday in this state."

The threat of fire is so widespread that the U.S. Forest Service announced Monday that all national forests in California would be closed until Sept. 17.

"We do not take this decision lightly but this is the best choice for public safety," Regional Forester Jennifer Eberlien said.

Overnight, the already massive Caldor Fire grew 7 miles (11 kilometers) in direction in one area northeast of Highway 50 and more than 8 miles (13 miles) in another, Cal Fire officials said.

More than 15,000 firefighters were battling dozens of California blazes, including crews from Utah, Washington, Wisconsin and West Virginia, said Mark Ghilarducci, director of California's Office of Emergency Services. About 250 active-duty soldiers were being trained in Washington state to help with the arduous work of clearing forest debris by hand.

Crews from Louisiana, however, had to return to that state because of Hurricane Ida, "another major catastrophic event taking place in the country and is a pull on resources throughout the United States," he said.

Porter said that only twice in California history have fires burned from one side of the Sierra Nevada to the other, both this month, with the Caldor and Dixie fires. The Dixie, the second-largest wildfire in state history at 1,205 square miles (3,121 square kilometers) about 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of the Lake Tahoe-area blaze, prompted new evacuation orders and warnings Monday.

The Lake Tahoe area in the Sierra Nevada mountains is usually a year-round recreational paradise offering beaches, water sports, hiking, ski resorts and golfing. South Lake Tahoe, at the lake's southern end, bustles with outdoor activities, and with casinos available in bordering Stateline, Nevada.

On weekends, the city's population can easily triple and on holiday weekends, like the upcoming Labor Day weekend, up to 100,000 people will visit for fun and sun. But South Lake Tahoe City Mayor Tamara Wallace said they've been telling people for days to stay away due to poor air from wildfires.

She said she thought the Caldor Fire would stay farther away. Fires in the past did not spread so rapidly near the tourist city.

"It's just yet another example of how wildfires have changed over the years," she said as she gathered treasures passed from her deceased parent and her husband's while they prepared to leave.

The last two wildfires that ripped through populated areas near Tahoe were the Angora Fire that destroyed more than 200 homes in 2007 and the Gondola Fire in 2002 that ignited near a chairlift at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Since then, the dead trees have accumulated and the region has coped with serious droughts, Wallace said. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive, scientists say.

Wallace said traffic was crawling Monday, but praised the evacuation as orderly because residents heeded officials' orders. Authorities have also been more aggressive in recent years, issuing warnings and orders sooner so people have more time to flee.

Not everyone agreed as fierce winds kicked up dust and debris and drivers sat in gridlock. The California Highway Patrol added "quite a bit of additional personnel" to help guide a chaotic evacuation from South Lake Tahoe, as huge traffic jams slowed the evacuation of vehicles, said CHP Assistant Commissioner Ryan Okashima. Congestion had eased by Monday afternoon.

South Lake Tahoe resident John Larson said the evacuation probably went as smoothly as possible, considering how swiftly flames moved into the area.

"The fuel went so fast and it climbed the ridge so quick," Larson said of the fire after settling into an evacuation center at a park in Carson City, Nevada. Red Cross volunteers set up the facility with 50 cots after another evacuation center in nearby Gardnerville reached capacity.

The fire destroyed multiple homes Sunday along Highway 50, one of the main routes to the lake's south end. It also roared through the Sierra-at-Tahoe ski resort, demolishing some buildings but leaving the main buildings at the base intact. Crews used snow-making machines to douse the ground.

Cabins burned near the unincorporated community of Echo Lake, where Tom Fashinell has operated Echo Chalet with his wife since 1984. The summer-only resort offers cabin rentals, but was ordered to close early for the season by the U.S. Forest Service due to ongoing wildfires.

Fashinell said he was glued to the local TV news. "We're watching to see whether the building survives," he said.

The Caldor Fire has scorched 277 square miles (717 square kilometers) since breaking out Aug. 14. After the weekend's fierce burning, containment dropped from 19% to 14%. More than 600 structures have been destroyed, and at least 20,000 more were threatened. Gov. Steve Sisolak on Monday declared a state of emergency in Nevada, citing "the anticipation" that the wildfire in the Lake Tahoe area in California would burn across the state line into the Silver State.

The National Weather Service warned of dangerous fire conditions and winds through Wednesday.

Diane Kinney, who has lived in the city since the 1970s, said this is the first time her neighborhood has been ordered to evacuate. She and her husband were packing up keepsakes, jewelry and insurance papers shortly after noon. They had to leave their 1964 Chevelle, but she hopes it stays safe.

"Everybody wants to live in Lake Tahoe. There are definitely advantages of being in the mountains, being with these beautiful pine trees," she said. "But we definitely have to get out now."

## **Caldor Fire forming pyrocumulus clouds over South Lake Tahoe**

By Eric Ting, Joshua Bote

SFGATE, Tuesday, August 31, 2021

A pyrocumulus cloud is forming Tuesday afternoon atop the South Lake Tahoe area, drawing concerns that it could further fuel the already fearsome Caldor Fire.

Views from an Alert Wildfire camera on Hawkins Peak showed the behemoth fire cloud emerging atop Tahoe and neighboring areas beginning at around 11 a.m. Pyrocumulus clouds are more than just menacing looking: If intense enough, this cloud could transform into a pyrocumulonimbus cloud — dubbed the "fire-breathing dragon of clouds" by NASA due to its sheer intensity. The clouds are formed when air heats up and moves upward, pushing smoke and water vapor with it. A pyrocumulonimbus cloud can bring with it its own set of winds and thunderstorms.

As the Caldor Fire inches closer to South Lake Tahoe, Cal Fire is bracing for winds that are even more extreme than the conditions that fueled rapid growth over the weekend and Monday.

Jim Dudley, a Cal Fire meteorologist, said at a Tuesday morning operational briefing that crews are expecting wind gusts up to 45 or 50 mph. For reference, Cal Fire said they were prepping for 35 mph gusts on Sunday and Monday. A red flag warning went into effect Monday morning and is in place until 11 p.m. Wednesday.

"Everywhere on the fire is going to see stronger winds than yesterday," he said.

The fire's northeastern edge is rapidly expanding into the communities of Meyers and Christmas Valley, and Dudley alerted crews to be prepared for wind movement in that direction.

"The overall direction is going to want to take it off to the northeast and east, but when you're down on the terrain it's going to be all over the place," he said. "That's going to happen today. Keep that in mind. I can't emphasize more the wind issues we're going to have on top."

In addition, the winds will pick up earlier in the day on the southern portion of the fire.

"Yesterday it took a while to get going, but we've finally got the southwesterlies kicking in," he said. "Those are going to kick in earlier today, and the speeds are going to be a little higher there."

The Caldor Fire continues its push towards South Lake Tahoe, as high winds fueled growth down highways 50 and 89 overnight. Cal Fire said at a Monday evening briefing the blaze has reached the communities of Meyers and Christmas Valley.

Reporters shared images of fire crews battling flames overnight in Meyers, which is a historical landmark town 10 minutes away from South Lake Tahoe that serves as a popular pit stop due to its adjacency to both Highways 50 and 89. It is unclear how much fire growth reached Meyers and whether there was structure damage or destruction overnight.

Fire crews also battled flames in nearby Christmas Valley, where KCRA reported overnight structure damage was minimal.

A red flag warning went into effect Monday afternoon and will last through 11 p.m. Wednesday. The winds have created "fire activity happening in California that we have never seen before," Cal Fire chief Thom Porter said Monday.

Currently, all of the South Lake Tahoe area is under a mandatory evacuation order, and residents of nearby Douglas County, Nevada were given an evacuation warning. The evacuation out of the South Lake Tahoe area created a traffic mess.

On Monday afternoon, spot fires began leaping into the basin, but the most urgent firefighting occurred along Highway 50 near Echo Summit. Videos from Monday night show flames on both sides of the highway.

Cal Fire said the fire also leaped Highway 88 and is pushing toward Kirkwood.

"The Highway 88 corridor got hit pretty hard today," Cal Fire operations section chief Cody Bogan said at a Monday evening briefing.

Even though there's a lot of rock between Echo Summit and Emerald Bay in the Tahoe Basin, which could theoretically slow the spread of the burn, strong winds of up to 35 mph likely will spur the fire on.

"The winds today are going to make it more challenging to reduce or slow the spread of the fire," said Henry Herrera, a spokesperson for Cal Fire. "The combination of the dry vegetation and the hot weather and the strong winds are going to pose a challenge even though there is some rock in that area."

"There is potential for the fire to move at a rapid rate of spread like it did yesterday or even faster," he continued.

The Caldor Fire started on Aug. 14, and crews thought they would gain an upper hand on the fire on Friday of last week. Then came a windier-than-expected weekend, when containment on the fire dropped from 19% to 13%.

Currently, the fire is at 16% containment and has burned 191,607 acres. 486 single-home residences have been destroyed. There are no fatalities, and five injuries.

## **Dixie Fire engulfs more than half of Lassen Volcanic National Park**

By Ashley Harrell

SFGATE, Tuesday, August 31, 2021

The second largest conflagration in California history has now spread over more than half of Lassen Volcanic National Park, with a total of 59,087 acres burned as of Tuesday morning, according to park officials. The Dixie Fire, which merged with the Morgan Fire as well as a fire set intentionally for damage control, has taken out structures and torched large swaths of vegetation. But with the fire still burning, it's too soon to assess the damage.

"The park does not yet know the details on the fire severity in every area that has burned," says Lassen spokesperson Kevin Sweeney. "That information will be shared as it is available."

What is available now are some initial reports and photographs from public information officers who have driven the main road through Lassen, a stretch of Highway 89 known as Lassen Volcanic National Scenic Byway and also commonly referred to as "the Park Road."

Cal Fire spokesperson Officer Steve McQuillan, who is assigned to the Dixie Fire, drove the road last week. In describing Lassen's appearance to SFGATE, McQuillan had to pause and cough several times because of the smoke he inhaled in the park, and he was unable to pinpoint the exact day of his journey. McQuillan had been working for 17 days straight, and he said the timing of things had all become "a bit of a blur."

But here's why he went inside: "We had an assignment to make sure that reporters did not interfere with the firefighting efforts," McQuillan says. "That had occurred the day before."

McQuillan drove through Old Station on Highway 44 and down to the park entrance on Highway 89. That entrance is now closed to the public, he emphasized. But he went in, and for about 5 or 6 miles, the park was "as pristine as ever."

About 8 miles in, he started seeing evidence of the fire burning on the eastern side. "It was generating a significant amount of smoke," he says. McQuillan continued driving, eventually catching sight of Mount Lassen and its distinctive peak. "There was not a continuous area of flame," he says. "But clearly, fire had gone through ... from the road, I could see where there would be patches of green, but then would be burn area."

As he drove around to the Bumpass Hell area, the landscape showed no remnants of fire, and Lake Helen was all good. But as McQuillan traveled south and the elevation dropped, he saw evidence on a far slope that an entire hillside had burned. "The farther south I went on [Highway] 89, the more evidence that I saw. Eventually I saw where the fire had come right up to the road."

The takeaway from McQuillan's journey and photos taken by Cal Fire spokesperson Officer David Janssen, who is also assigned to the Dixie Fire, is that some parts of the park are badly damaged, while others are untouched. In some places, though, it seems the fire burned very hot, which McQuillan could tell from the ashes and dark color of the ground and what was left of the trees.

One particular hillside was "just a field of sticks," he says. "That would be expected with ... a fire coming uphill with the wind behind it and dry brush underneath it. It just would have gone up that slope so fast."

The story is similar with the park's structures: Some were hit, some — thus far — have been missed. The fire destroyed the historic Mount Harkness Fire Lookout, seven of eight "in holder" cabins situated on Juniper Lake, two out of five units and one outbuilding on the Drakesbad Guest Ranch and an overlook at Kings Creek Falls.

Structures that remain intact include the lodge, dining hall, pool house, bunk house, annex and horse corral at the Drakesbad Guest Ranch, the Warner Valley Ranger Station and the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center, which was protected by a firing operation.

The Unified Command of the Dixie Fire — which includes Lassen Volcanic National Park, Lassen National Forest, Plumas National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management and Cal Fire — is still fighting the fire, and the park superintendent has authorized all firefighting tactical requests made by an incident management team, park spokesperson Sweeney says.

"Our Unified Command partners stand with the communities impacted by and threatened by the Dixie Fire," Sweeney says. "We continue to work together to fully suppress the fire as safely and quickly as possible."

The status of park resources will be posted to the Park Service's website as the information becomes available.

## **Newsom calls Caldor Fire the 'No. 1 priority' for California as flames approach South Lake Tahoe**

By Jeong Park

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Gov. Gavin Newsom called the Caldor Fire California's "No. 1 priority" and said the state is doing all it can to protect the Lake Tahoe Basin from the approaching wildfire.

"All I can say is we're doing everything in our power to have your back," Newsom said Tuesday morning at a press conference in Alameda County.

Newsom plans to visit the area Wednesday, he said.

The fire is now just a few miles south of South Lake Tahoe. Newsom said some 14,000 personnel from throughout the country are battling the fire, which forced the evacuation of South Lake Tahoe on Monday and threatens close to 34,000 structures.

Newsom said firefighters are making some progress, although conditions remain dangerous. The Caldor Fire has burned 192,000 acres and is 16% contained.

The National Weather Service has issued a red flag warning lasting through Wednesday due to winds that could reach about 30 miles per hour.

Newsom noted the state has 15 large active wildfires, including the Dixie Fire in Lassen National Forest which has burned 807,000 acres and is about 46% contained.

## **Caldor Fire burns close to South Lake Tahoe; heavy winds still in forecast**

By Michael McGough, Sam Stanton, and Jason Pohl

The Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Flames from the Caldor Fire descended Monday night from Echo Summit down into the Lake Tahoe Basin a few miles south of South Lake Tahoe, which remains virtually deserted after law enforcement ordered all residents to evacuate that morning.

The fire jumped Highway 89 late Monday near Christmas Valley, hitting a cluster of homes and cabins between highways 50 and 89 just east of the summit and about two miles south of Meyers.

Earlier in the day, streams of vehicles exited east from South Lake Tahoe into Nevada, jamming up Highway 50 for a few hours before the gridlock cleared in the late afternoon.

Winds and critically dry conditions could continue to push the Caldor Fire deeper into the basin Tuesday, as thousands of firefighters work to protect structures and grapple for control on the blaze, which sparked south of Pollock Pines on Aug. 14 and has crept along Highway 50 for more than two weeks.

The fire is now threatening close to 34,000 structures and has already destroyed nearly 500 homes, as well as some cabins, according to Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service.

### **Newsom: Caldor Fire top priority in California**

California Gov. Gavin Newsom called the Caldor Fire the state's "No. 1 priority."

"All I can say is we're doing everything in our power to have your back," Newsom said during a Tuesday news conference.

Newsom on Monday expanded a state of emergency proclaimed earlier in August for El Dorado County to include Alpine, Amador and Placer counties due to the growing wildfire.

"It is imperative that residents in the impacted areas stay safe and prepare to evacuate immediately if called for by local authorities," Newsom said in a statement.

The governor plans to visit the fire zone Wednesday, he said.

### **Lines holding well near Pollock Pines**

Containment lines on the west side of the fire, near Pollock Pines, are "holding really well for us," said Tim Ernst, a Cal Fire operations section chief for the Caldor Fire, in a Tuesday morning video briefing. Crews continue to patrol those western zones of the fire for hot spots.

But as winds on the east side of the fire near Tahoe breezed in as fast as 40 mph, with gusts up to 50 mph, Ernst said the fire spotted as far as a mile ahead of itself Monday night.

"That's an extremely challenging fire environment for firefighters to deal with," Ernst said. Concerns continue as red-flag wind gusts are forecast to last at least through Wednesday night.

Ernst said the fire established itself "well into" the Lake Tahoe basin after jumping Highway 89. Firefighters worked through the night on structure protection efforts. One challenge is the increasing number of structures to protect as the fire advances from the summit down into the basin, closer to populated areas like South Lake Tahoe.

Despite growth in acreage, "we still celebrate a number of victories" in protecting structures, including homes, Ernst said.

### **Crews protect homes in Christmas Valley**

The fire that erupted along the east side of Highway 89 Monday night reached within yards of some homes in Christmas Valley, but did not appear to have destroyed any.

Crews were working early Tuesday to put out spot fires burning on the hills near the holiday-themed community, where streets have names like Snowflake Drive. Larger fires were still burning in the hills on the west side of Highway 89 where the Caldor fire burned over Echo Summit Monday night.

Along Santa Claus Drive, crews that worked through the night appeared to have held back the fire that torched trees and crept down the hill toward homes. Chainsaws echoed in the hills Tuesday morning, while water dripped from second-level decks, courtesy of sprinklers left atop a roof.

On the other side of Highway 89, along South Upper Truckee Road, fire crews from across the Sacramento area stood guard around wooden cabins. They monitored debris pile burns as light winds fanned the flames away from the structures.

### **Red flag warning extended due to windy weather**

The National Weather Service issued a red flag warning due to critical wildfire weather conditions, originally set to last from Monday morning through Tuesday night. It was then shifted and extended to last from Monday afternoon through 11 p.m. Wednesday.

Forecasters warn that southwesterly gusts — pushing the Caldor Fire in the direction of the Lake Tahoe Basin — could reach about 30 mph near South Lake Tahoe.

Cal Fire in the Tuesday morning situation report said “erratic” winds increased spotting distances on the fire.

“Lower elevations of the fire saw strong down canyon winds that tested control lines,” officials wrote.

### **Fire burns near Echo Lake, but most cabins untouched**

Flames Monday night appeared to burn parts of the Echo Lake area, where many cabins are situated, on the north side of Highway 50.

But the cabins seemed to survive the flames as of Tuesday morning. Some still had their canvas pop-ups, umbrellas and deck chairs intact.

Firefighters used the wind-whipped lake to refill their engine tanks with water to put out spot fires throughout the area.

On the south side of the highway further to the west, Camp Sacramento remained untouched. Firefighters fought a pitched battle Sunday night to defend the 61-cabin summer retreat area owned by the city of Sacramento.

And although the fire ripped through the area again Monday, there appeared to be no new damage. Even a cart full of basketballs and footballs remained in place, as did a volleyball net.

Also untouched by the fire Monday was the Sierra-at-Tahoe ski area, as well as the Adventure Mountain sledding area that is also home to a Pacific Crest Trail trailhead.

### **Evacuation warnings reach Nevada**

More than 52,000 residents of El Dorado County are now evacuated, according to the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, with mandatory orders stretching from the Pollock Pines area to the California-Nevada state line — essentially, the entire eastern half of the county.

Mandatory evacuation orders were issued Monday morning for the entire city of South Lake Tahoe and all of the Lake Tahoe Basin within El Dorado County lines, as well as communities along the west shore including Emerald Bay, Meeks Bay andTahoma.

Orders also extended into Amador and Alpine counties on the south side of the fire. Orders have not been issued in Placer County, north of El Dorado.

Evacuation warnings extended late Monday into Nevada for the first time, with several communities in Douglas County told to be on high alert, including Kingsbury and Lake Village. Those warnings did not include casinos in Stateline.

Evacuation centers have been established at the Truckee Veterans Hall, the Carson City Community Center and Carson High School in Carson City. A shelter at the Douglas County Community Center in Gardnerville, Nevada, was at capacity Monday evening.

### **Emergency operations team among evacuees**

Among those the Caldor Fire forced from South Lake Tahoe: the city’s entire emergency operations team.

They didn’t go far. The local officials who manage emergencies and monitor the fire’s advance day and night hopped the border and are holed up in a conference room at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe in Nevada, Lindsey Baker, a city public information officer, told The Bee on Tuesday.

“It happened very quickly, all yesterday morning,” she said.

The emergency operations center had been set up at the city’s airport, near Meyers, since Aug. 21, she said. On Sunday night, though, conditions on the ground suggested the city could be at risk, prompting officials to issue an evacuation warning.

That was upgraded to an order Monday morning.

“When you’re in an emergency situation, you throw all expectations out the window,” Baker said. “You know what would be nice to have, what would be nice to do. And then there’s the reality on the ground.”

Despite slow going Monday afternoon, almost the entire city was cleared out in five hours. By Tuesday morning, local law enforcement officers who went door to door reported only 20 people had stayed behind, Baker said.

“It was something tremendous to see and hopefully a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” Baker said.

### **Fire near 200,000 acres, burning in steep terrain**

The Caldor Fire has reached 191,607 acres (299 square miles), Cal Fire and the Forest Service wrote in a Tuesday morning update. It is 16% contained.

The fire ignited in mid-August near the community of Grizzly Flats, south of Pollock Pines. The blaze largely destroyed the town, destroying hundreds of homes, an elementary school, a post office, a church and other structures. At least two civilians were also airlifted to hospitals from Grizzly Flats with serious injuries.

After an explosive start, which prompted mandatory evacuations for the areas of Pollock Pines, Sly Park and Kyburz, the Caldor Fire has crept steadily along Highway 50 for the past two weeks.

Fire officials say the fire is burning in steep terrain with critically dry conditions, and that embers from the fire are creating spot fires ahead of the main fire, sometimes a mile ahead.

The fire started to flare in activity Sunday, when an inversion layer created by the fire’s smoke cleared out, according to Thom Porter, director of Cal Fire.

“When air clears, it’s taking the lid off your pot of boiling water; all of a sudden there’s that plume of heat and steam that comes out,” Porter said during a briefing Monday. “Same thing happens on a fire. Also sucks in oxygen from all directions, puts fire and spot fires in all directions. That’s what happened yesterday.”

About 3,900 fire personnel are assigned to the Caldor Fire, according to Cal Fire.

### **Barton hospital evacuated, services relocated**

All patients were safely evacuated from Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe.

Barton began evacuating patients Sunday night, about 12 hours before law enforcement upgraded the evacuation from a warning to an order.

“All patients have been transferred to regional partner facilities and their families have been notified,” Barton Health said in an update to its website.

The hospital’s emergency department moved its services to the Lake Tahoe Surgery Center in Zephyr Cove, Nevada. Barton Urgent Care, in Stateline, Nevada, remains open.

Barton Memorial has 63 patient beds and a skilled nursing facility with 48 resident beds.

### **Stanislaus firefighter badly injured**

A firefighter from West Stanislaus Fire deployed to assist with the Caldor Fire was severely burned over the weekend, and is expected to be hospitalized for at least a month.

Richard Gerety III of Patterson suffered the injury while assigned to the northeast side of the fire, near Tahoe, said his wife, Jennifer Gerety. He has burns on about 20% of his body.

“He’s in very good spirits but in a lot of pain,” Jennifer Gerety told The Modesto Bee in a phone interview Monday.

Another first responder, Officer Harminder Grewal of the Galt Police Department, was killed in a head-on vehicle collision on Highway 99 near Galt as he and a partner were driving to assist with Caldor Fire response.



## **Why top California fire expert is so worried about Caldor Fire as it approaches Tahoe**

By Ryan Sabalow

The Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Scott Stephens, a professor of fire science at UC Berkeley, has been watching the Caldor Fire with worry as it heads toward Lake Tahoe, one of California's most important natural landscapes and home to thousands of people.

Stephens, one of the top scientists in his field, spoke to The Sacramento Bee Monday about why he's concerned, what firefighters are likely to experience and what needs to be done to make California's fires safer and more manageable.

This interview has been condensed for length and clarity.

### **How concerned should we be that the fire is going to burn into the Tahoe Basin?**

Desolation Wilderness is just to the west. Desolation Wilderness is almost treeless in many, many areas, so a fire can't go there. But the two passes, like Echo Pass to the south, it really is a forest all the way up to the top. Unfortunately, that's where that fire has moved up.

### **What makes conditions so dangerous right now?**

The thing that's surprising this year is the spot fires. Almost 90% of embers that are dropping on unburned fuel have the potential to start a new fire this year because it's so dry after two years of drought. That's very extreme and just really enables these fires to move ahead of the fire lines. I'm afraid now that if the fire has reached Echo Summit, it's going to drop embers down into the Lake Tahoe Basin, especially with that Red Flag Warning that's pushing winds to the northeast.

### **Why are spot fires such a concern?**

There's no doubt that some of those embers will actually spot down that ridge and ignite. And then more might spot down that ridge again. So it'll probably take several jumps to get down to the bottom. But unfortunately, I think if it's throwing embers off the top of Echo Summit, there's no doubt it's going to move down into the southern part of the basin.

### **How well prepared is the region to withstand a fire?**

They've done a lot of work in Lake Tahoe Basin, especially on the western shore, to reduce tree density and reduce surface fuels. And I think that work will pay off in the sense that the fire is going to be lower flame length, lower intensity and make it easier to manage by the fire-suppression crews. But I'm afraid that the forest on the Highway 50 corridor to Echo Summit, much of that is completely untreated. That is actually what's propagating that fire toward the south end of the lake.

### **How much consensus is there among fire scientists that these treatments do help?**

I'd say at least 99%. I'll be honest with you, it's that strong; it's that strong. There's at least 99% certainty that treated areas do moderate fire behavior. You will always have the ignition potential, but the fires will be much easier to basically manage.

### **What are the impediments to doing more of these treatments?**

The infrastructure bill in Congress is still pending, and there is a lot of money in there for forest restoration work. But the way we organize responses to fight fires, you know — federal, state, local — we're bringing in resources from even out of state — I just wish that some day we could put that same type of energy and focus on doing that restoration work in the forests to get them in better condition. I also think that we need to do planning more efficiently. It can take four or five years of planning to get a single fuels treatment done.

### **Lake Tahoe is known for its clear blue water. Will this fire cause problems with clarity in the coming months and years?**

If that thing burns severely with high tree mortality over hundreds and hundreds or thousands of acres, there's no doubt it could create an erosion problem for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

## **WattEV to break ground on California's first solar-powered "electric truck stop" in late October**

Announces \$5 million CEC grant to supplement \$6 million in private funding  
StreetInsider.com, Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021

LONG BEACH, Calif., Aug. 31, 2021 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- WattEV Inc., a company dedicated to accelerating the heavy-duty trucking industry's transition to electric drive, announced it is set to receive a \$5 million grant from the California Energy Commission (CEC) to build the state's first solar-powered truck stop dedicated to heavy-duty electric trucks. Groundbreaking for the project is expected in late October.

The announcement was made at the Advanced Clean Transportation (ACT) Expo 2021 in Long Beach. WattEV, based in El Segundo, Calif., said the CEC is anticipated to approve the grant on Sept. 8 at its monthly business meeting.

"Our successful private-equity seed funding, in addition to the grant awarded for this project, are important milestones in our effort to deploy 12,000 electric heavy-duty trucks on the road by 2030," said Salim Youssefzadeh, chief executive officer of WattEV.

"The electric truck stop in Bakersfield is the first step toward our commitment to help build the charging infrastructure network necessary to accelerate the heavy-duty trucking sector's transition to electric drive," Youssefzadeh said, "and to get more heavy-duty electric trucks on the road in California as quickly as possible."

Partners joining WattEV and the CEC on the Bakersfield electric truck stop project include the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the Central California Asthma Collaborative, Greenlots, Power Electronics and several others.

In addition to the Bakersfield project, WattEV is in the planning stages for similar projects in San Bernardino and Gardena in Southern California. Both of these electric truck stops will serve the Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach and the warehouses fed by goods coming through the ports.

To enable these projects and support further expansion, WattEV has raised \$6 million in private equity seed funding led by Canon Equity.

WattEV also has secured purchase incentive vouchers through the California Air Resources Board's Hybrid and Zero-Emission Truck and Bus Voucher Incentive Project (HVIP), initially for six VNR Electric Class 8 trucks from Volvo Group, and has applied for 24 more electric truck HVIP vouchers.

All told, WattEV plans to run its own fleet of 30 heavy-duty electric trucks by the end of 2022 to deploy under contract with several Southern California fleet customers.

The first fleet partnership is with Total Transportation Services, Inc. (TTSI), one of the leading freight transporters making the transition to EV trucks serving the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and with a presence in Bakersfield. TTSI will be offering electric transport freight services to shippers in Southern California on routes served by WattEV's platform.

The partnership between WattEV and TTSI is an initial step toward reducing significant emissions of particulate matter, oxides of nitrogen and carbon produced by the thousands of mostly older, diesel Class 8 trucks registered to serve two of the busiest ports in the nation and the San Joaquin Valley.

To help accelerate the transition to electric goods movement, WattEV is developing an advanced software platform – trucks-as-a-service (TaaS) – designed specifically for the use of electric trucks within its network of charging stations on designated routes. The TaaS platform will help fleets and individual truckers meet requirements of shippers with sustainability goals while serving transporters with a viable economic model.

The TaaS platform will offer an all-inclusive, charge-per-mile formula that will enable a transporter to efficiently and cost-effectively use an electric truck to move goods normally handled with diesel trucks on the routes selected by shippers committed to clean air.

Said Youssefzadeh: "We're delighted to partner with TTSI in the design and rollout of our TaaS software platform and deployment of our expanding charging network. We anticipate benefitting from their vast transport experience."

## **Red Flag Warning Extended For The Stanislaus National Forest**

By Mark Truppner

MyMotherLode.com, Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021

The Red Flag Warning issued for the Stanislaus National Forest has been extended until 11 PM Wednesday evening. The Red Flag Warning issued for the Mother Lode remains in effect until 11 PM this evening.

Gusty west/southwest winds of twenty to thirty-five mph will continue, with the strongest winds expected this afternoon into the evening. The gusty winds will linger into Wednesday over portions of the Sierra Nevada, with the strongest winds expected over higher elevations and near favorably oriented canyons.

These winds combined with extremely dry fuels and low humidity will lead to critical fire weather conditions. Any active fires or new fires that develop will likely spread and grow rapidly.

Minimum humidity of eight to twenty percent is forecast with moderate to poor overnight recoveries.

Additionally, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is extending an Air Quality Alert for Mariposa County, due to smoke impacts from ongoing wildfires occurring throughout California.

Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

Residents are advised to use caution as conditions warrant. People with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctor's advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, as conditions dictate.

A Red Flag Warning means that critical fire weather conditions are either occurring now, or will shortly. A combination of strong winds, low relative humidity, and warm temperatures can contribute to extreme fire behavior. Have a plan ready if you are required to evacuate!

## **Appeals court rules against valley ozone plan**

By John Cox

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 30, 2021

Federal approval of a 2019 contingency measure for cutting ozone emissions in the Central Valley has been rejected by an appellate court, which called the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's acceptance of the provision "arbitrary and capricious."

In a lawsuit filed on behalf of Central Valley air-quality advocates, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Thursday that the approved backup plan — repealing permission to sell small cans of paint — did not meet the EPA's own standard for making sufficient progress toward cleaning up ozone pollution in the valley.

But the ruling did not go entirely in favor of plaintiffs at the Association of Irrigated Residents: The court also said the "enhanced enforcement activities program" approved by the federal EPA as part of the same clean-air plan was a "strengthening measure" rather than a loosening of air quality standards, as AIR had asserted.

The Ninth Circuit's decision forces state agencies and the federal government to revisit their official backup plan of action if other provisions don't achieve anticipated progress toward meeting a standard the region has long been unable to meet.

AIR representative Tom Frantz said by email the air district basically put forward an inadequate ozone cleanup plan.

"We called their bluff," he wrote. "The judge agreed and has told them to fix it."

A lawyer for one of the lawsuit's respondents, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, whose plan the U.S. EPA approved, said by email that next steps have not been defined.

"The district will closely review this recent ruling and engage with its state and federal partners to ensure that the ruling is addressed as needed," district Counsel Annette Ballatore wrote.

The U.S. EPA in 2001 found the valley had failed to attain the one-hour ozone standard in effect at the time. In 2012, the valley was classified as an "extreme non-attainment area" for the eight-hour ozone standard.

The ruling addresses a plan put forward jointly by the air district and the California Air Resources Board for bringing the whole Central Valley into compliance with the ozone standard.

The air district says the plan builds on efforts that have already cut by more than 90 percent the number of days in which valley residents have been exposed to elevated ozone levels. The agency says it is on track to achieve its EPA goal in or by 2023.

When the air district detailed its 2019 plan for the EPA it included a single contingency that would be put into effect if other provisions don't make enough progress toward meeting the ozone standard.

AIR argued the EPA made an unreasonable interpretation of the federal Clean Air Act when it decided that repealing permission to sell small cans of paint was a sufficient backup, even though the measure was estimated to result in emissions reductions of only about 1 ton of ozone per day.

Previously, plaintiffs said, the EPA had said the plan must provide for "reasonable further progress" of at least 3 percent of baseline emissions per year — in this case about 11.4 tons per day.

The EPA argued there is no binding requirement for a particular amount of emissions reduction. But the plaintiffs noted the federal agency previously held that contingency plans should demonstrate reasonable further progress for a year, meaning the 3 percent minimum cut in ozone emissions.

In Thursday's ruling, the court found the EPA could not change that previously established policy on a whim without acknowledging it and saying why the switch was appropriate.

"Because the (federal) agency did not provide a reasoned explanation for approving the state plan," the court ruling stated, "the rule is arbitrary and capricious."

## **Wildfire forces thousands from popular Lake Tahoe resort**

By Sam Metz and Janie Har Associated Press/Report For America  
The Business Journal, Monday, August 30, 2021

(AP) — Thousands of people rushed to leave South Lake Tahoe as the entire resort city came under evacuation orders and wildfire raced toward Lake Tahoe, a large freshwater lake straddling California and Nevada.

Evacuation warnings issued for the city of 22,000 on Sunday turned into orders Monday. Vehicles loaded with bikes and camping gear and hauling boats were stuck in traffic, stalled in hazy, brown air that smelled of campfire. Police and other emergency vehicles whizzed by.

"This is a systematic evacuation, one neighborhood at a time," South Lake Tahoe police Lt. Travis Cabral said on social media. "I am asking you as our community to please remain calm."

The new orders came a day after communities several miles south of the lake were abruptly ordered evacuated as the Caldor Fire raged nearby.

South Lake Tahoe's main medical facility, Barton Memorial Hospital, proactively evacuated 36 patients needing skilled nursing and 16 in acute care beds Sunday, sending them to regional facilities far from the fire, public information officer Mindi Befu said. The rest of the hospital was evacuating following Monday's expanded orders.

The Lake Tahoe area in the Sierra Nevada mountains is a recreational paradise for San Francisco Bay Area locals looking for a weekend getaway, as well as a national destination. The area offers beaches, water sports, hiking, ski resorts and golfing.

South Lake Tahoe, at the lake's southern end, bustles with outdoor activities, with casinos available in bordering Stateline, Nevada.

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Tamara Wallace prepared to leave with her husband, youngest child, dogs and items given to them from their deceased parent — objects that can't be replaced.

She thought the Caldor Fire would stay farther away. Fires in the past did not spread so rapidly near the tourist city.

"It's just yet another example of how wildfires have changed over the years," she said. "It's just a culmination of 14 to 18 more years of dead trees, the droughts we've had since then, those kinds of things."

The region faces a warning from the National Weather Service about critical fire weather Monday and Tuesday.

The fire destroyed multiple homes Sunday along Highway 50, one of the main routes to the lake's south end. It also roared through the Sierra-at-Tahoe ski resort, demolishing some buildings but leaving the main buildings at the base intact.

Fire churned through mountains just a few miles southwest of the Tahoe Basin, where thick smoke sent visitors packing at a time when summer vacations would usually be in full swing ahead of Labor Day weekend.

There were reports of cabins burned in the unincorporated community of Echo Lake, where Tom Fashinell has operated Echo Chalet with his wife since 1984. The summer-only resort offers cabin rentals, but was ordered to close early for the season by the U.S. Forest Service due to ongoing wildfires.

Fashinell said he was glued to the local TV news. "We're watching to see whether the building survives," he said.

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.

The Caldor Fire has scorched 277 square miles (717 square kilometers) since breaking out Aug. 14. After the weekend's fierce burning, containment dropped from 19% to 14%. More than 600 structures have been destroyed, and at least 20,000 more were threatened.

It's among nearly 90 large blazes in the U.S. Many are in the West, burning trees and brush sucked dry by drought. Climate change has made the region warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

In California alone, more than 15,200 firefighters are fighting more than a dozen large fires. Flames have destroyed about 2,000 buildings and forced thousands to evacuate this year while blanketing large swaths of the West in unhealthy smoke.

In Southern California, a section of Interstate 15 closed Sunday after winds pushed a new blaze, the Railroad Fire, across lanes in the Cajon Pass northeast of Los Angeles.

Farther south, evacuation orders and warnings were in place for remote communities after a wildfire ignited and spread quickly through the Cleveland National Forest on Saturday. A firefighter received minor injuries, and two structures were destroyed in the 2.3-square-mile (5.9-square-kilometer) Chaparral Fire burning along the border of San Diego and Riverside counties, according to Cal Fire. It was 13% contained Monday.

Meanwhile, the Dixie Fire, the second-largest in state history at 1,205 square miles (3,121 square kilometers), was nearly halfway contained about 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of the Lake Tahoe-area blaze. Nearly 700 homes were among almost 1,300 buildings that have been destroyed since the Dixie Fire began in early July.

Containment increased to 26% on the French Fire, which covered nearly 40 square miles (104 square kilometers) in the southern Sierra Nevada. Crews protected forest homes on the west side of Lake Isabella, a popular recreation area northeast of Bakersfield.

The U.S. Department of Defense is sending 200 Army soldiers from Washington state to help firefighters in Northern California, the U.S. Army North said in a statement Saturday.

Eight Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve C-130 aircraft capable of dropping thousands of gallons of fire retardant also have been sent to fight wildfires in the West.

### **UPDATED: Northwest flank of French Fire proves difficult to contain**

The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 30, 2021

The French Fire has grown to 25,411 acres and is 33 percent contained, according to the California incident management team overseeing the fire.

High temperatures and dry conditions Monday provided the fire fodder to continuously burn, according to the team. On Sunday, the flames' activity was very active and created spotting around the Evans Flat area. Crews successfully held the fire along the Basket Road Pass, according to the Sequoia National Forest.

The National Weather Service said fire weather conditions Tuesday afternoon through Wednesday afternoon can contribute to erratic fire behavior. These conditions include dry fuels, gusty winds and low relative humidity, the weather service said.

The north side of the wildfire saw very little growth, according to the Sequoia National Park's news release. However, the northwest portion of the area projected many spot fires, according to the news release.

Scorching flames did not destroy the fire's east flank, which allowed for some containment of the Alta Sierra region, according to the news release.

Evacuation warnings were lifted for the communities of Kernville, Riverkern, Glennville, Linns Valley, Pine Mountain, Badger Canyon and Poso Flat.

Pala Ranches, once under an evacuation order, is under an evacuation warning. Other areas in an evacuation warning include Wofford Heights, Achin Hills, French Gulch and Dutch Flat.

Evacuation orders include: Keysville, Shirley Meadows, Alta Sierra, Slick Rock, Waggy Flat and Black Gulch.