

Windy Fire is more than 31,000 acres, evacuation orders remain in place

By Sheyanne N Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, September 22, 2021

Kings Canyon National Park and a large portion of Sequoia National Forest are now closed due to the Windy and KNP Complex fires.

These wildfires have been burning in the mountain communities of Tulare County for nearly two weeks. Containment for both is weeks out, according to fire officials.

Windy Fire

The fire has burned 31,388 acres on the Tule River Indian Reservation and in the Sequoia National Forest. The Windy Fire is 7% contained as of Wednesday morning.

More than 1,200 firefighters from seven states continue to work around the clock to stop this blaze.

"It's been a very challenging incident with the smoke. Visibility hasn't allowed us to work aircraft most days," Operation Section Chief Seth Mitchell said. "When the smoke does clear, we have a whole fleet of aircraft at Porterville and Kernville."

Despite these challenges, Mitchell said the public can expect containment of the Windy Fire to increase in the coming days.

Firefighters are digging hand-line around trees and spraying water to carefully protect the Giant Sequoias along the Trail of 1,000 Giants.

"Firefighters have fought hard to protect these Iconic Giants that some reach 200 feet into the sky and are over 1,000 years old," Forest service officials stated. "The firefight continues to protect homes, the Giant Sequoias, and stop the forward progression of the fire."

On Tuesday, fire officials confirmed the Mule Peak Lookout was destroyed, despite being wrapped with fire-resistant material.

The Johnsondale, Camp Whitsitt, Ponderosa and Quaking Aspen communities remain under an evacuation order. Camp Nelson remains under an evacuation warning.

KNP Complex

The fire is 28,41 acres, with 0% containment.

Park officials said the highest priority for operations is the protection of life and park infrastructure, the Sequoia National Forest, and the surrounding communities including Three Rivers.

The second highest priority is the protection of the giant Sequoia trees and some areas that may be impacted by the fire include Lost Grove and Muir Grove.

Kings Canyon National Park is now closed due to fire danger. An updated closure order was issued for Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, which added Cedar Grove and Grant Grove. All visitor services and attractions for all of Sequoia and Kings Canyon are now closed.

The following areas are temporarily closed:

- All lands within the boundaries of Sequoia National Park west of the Pacific Crest Trail
- All lands of Kings Canyon National Park west of the Pacific Crest Trail and south of the ridgeline which lies north of Ionian Basin

Travel directly through Grant Grove along the Highway 180 corridor will continue to be permitted, stopping along Highway 180 is prohibited.

There will be a community meeting on Wednesday at the Three Rivers Memorial Building, located at 43490 Sierra Dr.

Sequoia National Park's giant forest unscathed by wildfire

By Associated Press

The Business Journal, Tuesday, September 21, 2021

(AP) — The ancient massive trees of Sequoia National Park's famed Giant Forest were unscathed Tuesday even though a wildfire has been burning near them on the western side of California's Sierra Nevada for nearly two weeks.

"As of right now we don't have any damage to any of our trees," said fire information officer Mark Garrett.

The KNP Complex, two lightning-sparked fires that merged, has spread over more than 39 square miles (101 square kilometers), feeding on other types of trees that also live on the high-elevation slopes of the mountain range.

Giant Forest is home to about 2,000 sequoias, including the General Sherman Tree, which is considered the world's largest by volume and is a must-see for visitors to the national park.

The fire recently entered the perimeter of Giant Forest near a cluster of huge trees called the Four Guardsmen but their bases had been wrapped in fire-resistant material and crews had raked and cleared vegetation that could help spread the fire, Garrett said.

Firefighting crews monitored as what was described as a "low-intensity fire" passed through and made sure it did not affect the sequoias, he said.

For decades, Giant Forest has been subjected to prescribed fires that are carefully set and controlled to burn away vegetation that could otherwise become fuel for a fire like the KNP Complex and allow it to become established.

The next-closest sequoia grove is Redwood Canyon, but it is at least 6 miles (9.6 kilometers) away and the fire would have to travel up and down terrain to get there, Garrett said.

"But like Giant Forest, that one has also seen prescribed burn treatments for several decades since the late '60s so that grove is also well-equipped to transform a high-intensity fire into low-intensity fire," he said.

To the south, another forest fire in sequoia country was showing minimal movement.

The Windy Fire in the Giant Sequoia National Monument area of Sequoia National Forest and on the Tule River Indian Reservation covered more than 42 square miles (108 square kilometers) and was 5% contained.

"The fire behavior is not as extreme as it was a couple of days ago," said Thanh Nguyen, a fire information officer.

On the Trail of 100 Giants, one tree known as the "natural bench" sequoia because of the shape of its base was confirmed to have sustained some burning.

Several sequoia groves have been impacted by the Windy Fire but it's not clear whether any other sequoia trees have been burned.

Nguyen said fire can move through a grove by burning other types of trees and vegetation rather than sequoias and assessments will come later.

The largest trees on the Trail of 100 Giants are on average 220 feet (67 meters) tall, 20 feet (6.1 meters) in diameter and 1,500 years old, Nguyen said.

"Those trees are beloved," he said.

Firefighters have been hand-digging control lines and spraying water to protect the trees and have worked to protect several evacuated communities. The only structure lost so far was the Mule Peak fire lookout structure, which burned in the early stages of the fire even though it was wrapped in fire-resistant material.

More than 7,500 wildfires have scorched about 3,600 square miles (9,324 square kilometers) in California so far this year.

Nearly half of that land — 1,505 square miles (3,898 square kilometers) — was burned by the Dixie Fire across five counties in the northern Sierra and southern Cascades region. It is the second-largest fire on record in California and was 90% contained after destroying 1,329 homes, businesses and other structures since July 13.

South of Lake Tahoe, the 342-square-mile (886-square-kilometer) Caldor Fire is three-quarters contained after destroying 800 homes and commercial properties. Highway 50, the main route between the San Francisco Bay Area and the south end of the alpine resort lake, reopened to the public on Tuesday for the first time in weeks.

Historic drought tied to climate change is making wildfires harder to fight. It has killed millions of trees in California alone. Scientists say 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.

Wildfire smoke in valley prompts air quality warning

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air quality alert Tuesday that will remain in effect until smoke from the Windy Fire and KNP Complex Fire in Tulare County dissipates.

People with respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young and elderly individuals are more susceptible to the smoke and should stay inside.

The district said the smoke might disperse by Thursday morning, leading to better air quality.

For more information about the smoke exposure and to see the air quality in your area, visit myRAAN.com.

Fall starts on Wednesday, and just in time for the fair, temps should begin to moderate a bit

By Steven Mayer

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021

They say it always gets hot during the Kern County Fair.

Not true. Sometimes it gets hot and sometimes it doesn't. And sometimes it depends on your definition of "hot."

Jeffrey Barlow, senior forecaster at the National Weather Service in Hanford, said it looks like Wednesday, the first day of fall, and opening day at the fair, will be the warmest before things begin to moderate.

"We're looking at a high in the upper 90s to 100," Barlow said. "That's our warmest day. Then we'll see a little bit of a cool-down."

That "cool-down" will likely be preceded by some gusty winds Wednesday evening, winds that could pick up some dust — so be prepared.

"On Thursday, we're going to see a drop of five degrees, to a high of 93," Barlow said.

Contrary to popular perception, normal high temperatures during the fair range at about 89 degrees or lower, with average overnight lows dropping into the mid- to low 60s, according to Weather Service records.

So, not bad, actually.

Of course in Bakersfield, we're never sure when we'll experience the occasional torturous spike in temperature — the kind that leaves us wondering whether summer will ever truly die.

So far this September, the signs have been pretty favorable.

Friday at the fair is Senior Day, when gates open at 9 a.m. for seniors age 62 and older, and seniors get free admission and parking until 4 p.m. High temps on Senior Day are going to hold in the mid-90s, Barlow said.

Those mid-90-degree temperatures are expected to maintain through Saturday, with a slight easing to a high of 92 on Sunday.

The fair will be closed on Monday and Tuesday, both nice days with forecast highs of 90 and 86, respectively.

Again, Barlow warned of late afternoon or early evening breezes.

"There's going to be dust," he said.

Weather and air quality are intimately linked in the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley. This fall is no different.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued an Air Quality Alert due to potential smoke impacts from wildfires.

The Windy Fire and KNP Complex in Tulare County continue to cause smoke impacts across the San Joaquin Valley, the air district said in a news release Tuesday.

Issued with the National Weather Service, the alert is expected to remain in place while smoke impacts linger, or until Thursday morning, when a low-pressure trough is expected to pass through the region and assist with smoke dispersion.

The air district warns residents who are affected by smoke to remain indoors to reduce their exposure to particulate matter in the air.

The tiny particles are known to trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, the district said in the release.

Individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate-matter exposure. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution. Young children and the elderly may also be at elevated risk.

Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed. Common cloth and paper masks being used as protection from COVID-19 may not be sufficient protection from wildfire smoke inhalation, the news release said.

For details on current and past wildfires affecting the valley, as well as resources for protecting yourself from exposure to wildfire smoke, visit the district's Wildfire Information page at valleyair.org/wildfires. In addition, you can view the AirNow Fire and Smoke map fire.airnow.gov and find links to temporary foothill monitors.

Latest: KNP, Windy Wildfires Consume Nearly 60,000 Acres

By Bill McEwen

GV Wire, Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021

The effort to bring the KNP Complex Fire in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park under control has grown to nearly 1,000 personnel, officials said Tuesday afternoon.

And, crews are working around the clock to contain the Windy Fire, which is also burning in Tulare County.

Together, the fires have expanded to nearly 60,000 acres as of Wednesday morning.

KNP Complex Community Meeting Moves to Pinehurst

Officials managing the KNP Complex suppression effort say that 33 crews of firefighters — backed by 24 engines, 17 water tenders, and 8 helicopters — are battling drier conditions and warmer temperatures that typically fuel wildfire growth.

Incident commander Mark Morales said in a news release that the “highest priority for operations is the protection of life and infrastructure of the park, the Sequoia National Forest, and the surrounding communities including Three Rivers.”

Fire managers said they are moving tonight’s 7 o’clock community meeting from Three Rivers to the Central Sierra Chamber of Commerce, 54120 Highway 245, in Pinehurst.

The meeting will be live-streamed on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SequoiaKingsNPS.

KNP Fire Grows to 28,421 Acres

The fire grew by 3,274 acres from Tuesday to Wednesday. It now totals 28,421 acres, with no containment.

Preparation to protect the giant Sequoias in Lost Grove and Muir Grove is underway, officials said.

Meanwhile, the ancient massive trees of Giant Forest remained unscathed Tuesday.

“As of right now we don’t have any damage to any of our trees,” said fire information officer Mark Garrett.

In addition, the California Army National Guard is helping with mop-up to ensure there is no further threat to the lodges and infrastructure in the Wuksachi Village area.

Fire behavior and intensity have been reduced in the Giant Forest area, where prescribed fire treatments were previously completed. Cal Fire has also been working on direct and indirect fire line (with aircraft reinforcement) along Paradise Ridge to keep the fire in check near Ash Mountain, officials said.

Sequoia National Park is closed to the public and large portions of Kings Canyon National Park are closed, as well. Windy Fire: 31,388 Acres, 7% Contained

Windy Fire: 31,388 Acres, 7% Contained

Firefighters are working “around the clock” to protecting structures in this Tulare County wildfire, officials said.

The Windy Fire is burning on the Tule River Indian Reservation and in the Giant Sequoia National Monument and Sequoia National Forest.

When possible, firefighting resources go directly to the fire’s perimeter, strengthening bulldozer lines and improving roads to create an opportunity to hold fire, officials said.

“The fire behavior is not as extreme as it was a couple of days ago,” said Thanh Nguyen, a fire information officer.

On the Trail of 100 Giants, one tree known as the “natural bench” sequoia because of the shape of its base was confirmed to have sustained some burning.

Several sequoia groves have been impacted by the Windy Fire but it’s not clear whether any other sequoia trees have been burned.

Road Closures

- Western Divide Highway (M107) is closed at North Road (21S50) intersection near Quaking Aspen Campground to M50 above California Hot Springs.
- M99 is closed above Kernville at Sherman Pass (22S05) intersection.
- M99 is closed north of McNally’s Fairview Lodge at 7300 Kern River Highway going north towards Sherman Pass.

Evacuations Warnings

The Tulare County Sheriff’s Office has issued an evacuation warning for:

- Camp Nelson and surrounding communities

Evacuation Orders

- Johnsondale and Camp Whitsett, including M107 at Dome Rock, east to Lloyd Meadow Road (22S82), south to M99 at Sherman Pass Road, west to M107 and M50.
- Ponderosa and Quaking Aspen. The area of warning includes M107 at Dome Rock, north to Highway 190/M90 at North Road (21S50), east to Route 21S05, at Needles Trail, south to Lloyd Meadow at Lower Peppermint Road (22S82). Avoid all road closures and use Highway 190 to Porterville.

How to Get Help

The temporary evacuation point, where you may find information and assistance, is at Porterville College, 100 E. College Ave.

Individuals needing assistance are asked to call 2-1-1. Older individuals (60+) who need assistance with evacuation or information may call the senior hotline at 1-800-321-2462.

Large animals can be sheltered at the International Agri-Center located at 4500 S. Laspina Street, Tulare, CA 93274.

Tulare County residents can sign up to receive county emergency notifications by registering at AlertTC.com.

Air Quality Alert

The Windy Fire and KNP Complex are causing cause smoke impacts throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

On Tuesday the Valley Air District and National Weather Service issued an Air Quality Alert that will continue until at least Thursday morning.

Residents impacted by smoke should remain indoors to reduce their exposure to particulate matter emissions.

Officials advise that cloth and paper masks used as protection from COVID-19 may provide insufficient safeguards from wildfire smoke inhalation.

You can access RAAN to check air quality at any Valley location at myRAAN.com.

No Drone Zone

Fire managers remind the public that when a drone is spotted near a wildfire, all aircraft must return to the ground.

They ask drone owners to check this link before launching.