

Air quality alert extended until Monday

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District extended an ongoing air quality alert until Monday.

Smoke from the Windy Fire and KNP Complex continues to impact the San Joaquin Valley. A trough will pass through the region to help disperse the smoke by Monday, according to the air district.

Originally, the alert was to last until Thursday.

Poor air quality from wildfires expected to last through weekend

By Sam Morgen

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept 24, 2021

Bakersfield residents woke up Friday morning to an eerie yellow glow cast by sunlight filtered through layers of wildfire smoke. It was a telltale sign that poor air quality had returned to the area.

But those hoping for a quick improvement in conditions stand to be disappointed. The National Weather Service forecasts smoky air in Bakersfield through the weekend, although a dramatic improvement is expected on Tuesday.

A wind flowing from the northeast is pushing smoke primarily from the Windy Fire in Tulare County toward Bakersfield. The fire has burned 58,802 acres and was only 5 percent contained as of Friday. The KNP Complex Fire in Sequoia National Park is also contributing to the smoky atmosphere.

“Unfortunately, with those major fires going on it’s just directing the smoke right into the populated parts of the valley,” weather service meteorologist David Spector said. “Bakersfield and Porterville have felt the brunt of it.”

The poor air quality has prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue an alert warning residents to stay inside until Monday. The alert says particulate matter from smoke can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Much of Bakersfield wavered between levels 2 and 3 of the air district’s outdoor activity risk guideline, indicating sensitive individuals should first reconsider, then reduce vigorous outdoor activities, respectively.

“If anybody has a respiratory condition, they are feeling it. They can’t really be outside at all,” air district representative Heather Heinks said.

For those needing to work outside, the hot air during the day tends to push particulate matter higher into the atmosphere. That means nighttime brings air quality to its worst point. Earlier this week, Bakersfield air quality rose to Level 4 — unhealthy for all prolonged outside activity — beginning in the evening.

“You often find in the cool hours of the morning it’s really stinky,” Heinks said. “We’re expecting poor conditions throughout the weekend, but there will be potential times of reprieve as those smoke plumes travel.”

Although Bakersfield may be shrouded underneath a plume of smoke, the areas near Isabella Lake are much worse. On Friday, Kernville and Lake Isabella hovered between an air quality index of 150 and 200, classified as unhealthy and very unhealthy, respectively.

Those areas are near the Windy Fire, and are experiencing the worst of the smoke.

Relief is expected to come in the form of a wind from the northwest.

“That’s going to clear everything out and bring much cooler temperatures,” Spector said.

Until then, air quality authorities urge residents to check conditions before participating in outdoor activities.

To learn more, visit valleyair.org/wildfires.

Weather alert: Smoke from Sequoia wildfires will push into these California counties

By Brianna Calix

Sacramento Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021

The National Weather Service is projecting heavy smoke from fires in Sequoia National Park and Sequoia National Forest will continue to have serious effects in Fresno and many other central California counties through the weekend.

The high resolution smoke projection shows surface and higher-level smoke will linger across counties as far south as Kern and as far north as San Joaquin. The smoke also will affect coastal counties such as Monterey, San Luis Obispo and even Santa Clara County in the Bay Area.

The KNP Complex in the national park and Windy in the national forest are producing the smoke, and little relief from the poor air quality is immediately in sight, said Colin McKellar, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The Weather Service projection shows the smoke moving through the central part of the state starting Saturday morning and into Sunday evening.

Light winds in the San Joaquin Valley aren't doing much to disperse the smoke, McKellar said. Instead, the smoke is settling here, and we likely won't see relief until it rains. No rain is projected in the seven- or 10-day forecasts.

The smoke behavior from these fires likely will be similar to what we saw last year with the Creek Fire, McKellar said.

"I'm pretty certain the two fires we have in Tulare County are going to be burning until we get snow and rain," he said. "They're going to be there. And with the air, we're just going to be dealing with the smoke until then, like last year with the Creek Fire."

The heavy smoke settling low into the atmosphere means the air quality will be hazardous. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on Saturday recommended residents in areas including Fresno, Tulare and Kings counties avoid outdoor activity due to high particulate matter pollution.

"Particulate matter can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke," the air district cautioned in a release issued earlier this week but updated to extend the alert through 11 a.m. Monday.

"Individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of PM exposure. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible to the health effects from this form of pollution."

Those affected should move to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with the windows closed, the air district stated, while noting "common cloth and paper masks being used as protection from COVID-19 may not be sufficient protection from wildfire smoke inhalation."

KNP, WINDY FIRES STILL RAGING

By Saturday morning, the KNP Complex fire burned over 42,000 acres and spread from the national park into Sequoia National Forest. Over 1,700 firefighters are assigned to the fire, according to fire officials.

The Windy Fire had burned more than 71,000 acres near many giant sequoia groves, including the Giant Sequoia National Monument, in the national forest and Tule River Indian Reservation. Nearly 1,800 firefighters are working to contain that wildfire. Several Tulare County communities have been evacuated due to the fire, with a temporary evacuation center established at Porterville College.

Amid Growing KNP, Windy Fires, Newsom OKs \$1B for Wildfire Prevention

By Bill McEwen

GV Wire, Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021

During a Thursday morning stop to survey the damage caused by the KNP Complex in Sequoia National Park, Gov. Gavin Newsom touted his \$15 billion package to corral California's climate change impacts.

Newsom also approved nearly \$1 billion in new spending to prevent wildfires. This marks a shift from the state's policy of trying to extinguish fires instead of stopping them before they start.

"California is doubling down on our nation-leading policies to confront the climate crisis head-on while protecting the hardest-hit communities," said Newsom. "We're deploying a comprehensive approach to meet the sobering challenges of the extreme weather patterns that imperil our way of life and the Golden State as we know it."

Meanwhile, Tulare County's intense KNP and Windy fires keep expanding.

As of Thursday afternoon, more than 1,500 firefighters were trying to wrestle the 33,046-acre KNP Complex under control. The fire has grown by 4,718 acres during the last 24 hours, officials said.

A new evacuation warning was issued Wednesday for the communities of Eshom and Heartland Camp. There is a map of evacuation orders and warnings at this link.

Tulare County officials followed on Thursday with an evacuation warning for the California Hot Springs and Pine Flat areas. The evacuation warning included M-504 at Tyler Creek, southeast to Pine Flat, west to M-56 and Fire Control Road, and north up Tyler Creek Road.

The Woodlake Community Center, 145 Magnolia St., is serving as a Red Cross evacuation center.

Windy Fire Update

The Windy Fire is 43,745 acres with 6% containment. It is burning on the Tule River Indian Reservation and in the Sequoia National Forest, including the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

Crews are in place in threatened communities with structure protection as their top priority, officials said early Thursday afternoon.

The fire has impacted several giant sequoia groves. On Wednesday, an expert on the effect of fire on giant sequoias from Yosemite National Park visited the Trail of 100 Giants to assess the situation, officials said.

A new mandatory evacuation order was given for Camp Nelson and surrounding communities. No private structures have been lost at Camp Nelson, Ponderosa, and the Tule River Indian Reservation.

However, officials reported that the Sequoia National Forest lost its Mule Peak Lookout and radio repeater — even though they were wrapped in fire-resistant material.

Air Alert Extended

The Valley Air District and the National Weather Service have continued the air quality alert to 11 a.m. Monday, Sept. 27, or until the fire smoke dissipates.

You can access RAAN to check air quality at any Valley location at myRAAN.com, view the EPA AirNow Fire and Smoke map (<https://fire.airnow.gov/>) and find links to temporary foothill monitors.

Wildfire Protection in California

California spent \$3.4 billion on wildfire protection last year, more than quadruple the level 15 years ago. Driving the increased costs is climate change, which is causing fires to get bigger and more destructive. Six of the state's 10 largest wildfires have come in the past two years.

Funds for Clearing Brush and Hiring Home Inspectors

Most of the wildfire prevention money will pay for things like clearing brush and dead trees that act as kindling when fires start, causing them to quickly burn out of control before firefighters can contain them.

There's money to hire inspectors to make sure newer homes built in the state's wildfire-prone areas comply with building codes requiring fire-resistant materials. And there's money for the state to intentionally set fires when conditions are right to burn away fuel that would otherwise help larger fires burn during the dry season.

No Reservoir Funding Included

The money Newsom approved is the final piece of the state's \$262.5 billion operating budget. The spending Newsom approved Thursday also includes \$1.2 billion for water recycling projects, cleaning up contaminated water sources, and grants to help communities plan for climate change.

Republicans have criticized the spending because it does not include money for water storage projects, like building new reservoirs. California voters approved about \$2.7 billion in 2014 for water storage projects. None have been built.

Where do Windy, KNP wildfires rank in California's worst blazes? Here are the top 10

By James Ward

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Sept. 27, 2021

While the Windy and KNP Complex fires are battering Tulare County, none of those blazes have ranked in the top 10 largest wildfires on record in the state by acreage.

The 2021 fire season in California, though has already included four blazes — the Dixie, Caldor, and Monument fires and the River Complex — that ranked in the top 20 largest wildfires on record in the state by acreage.

Already this year, more than 2.1 million acres have been scorched by wildfire.

Currently the Windy fire is nearly 75,000 acres and the KNP Complex fire is 45,000 acres.

In terms of loss of life and property damage, the 2018 Camp fire in Butte County was California's worst blaze. It killed 85 people, burned 153,336 acres, and destroyed 18,804 structures.

Here's a look at California's biggest wildfires by acres:

- 1. August Complex:** A series of August 2020 lightning-sparked blazes killed one person, destroyed 935 structures, and burned 1,032,648 acres in Mendocino, Humboldt, Trinity, Tehama, Glenn, Lake, and Colusa counties. It
- 2. Dixie fire:** The July 2021 fire has burned 960,583 acres in Butte, Plumas, Lassen and Tehama counties. It has destroyed 1,329 structures and one person has died.
- 3. Mendocino Complex:** The July 2018 series of blazes burned 459,123 acres, destroyed 280 structures, and caused one death in Colusa, Lake, Mendocino, and Glenn counties.
- 4. SCU Lightning Complex:** The August 2020 blaze burned 396,624 acres and destroyed 222 structures.
- 5. Creek fire:** The Fresno and Madera counties September 2020 blaze burned 378,895 acres and destroyed 853 structures.
- 6. LNU Lightning Complex:** The August 2020 blaze burned 363,220 acres, killed six people, and destroyed 1,491 structures in Napa, Solano, Sonoma, Yolo, Lake, and Colusa counties. It was caused by arson.
- 7. North Complex:** The lightning-caused blaze in August 2020 burned 318,935 acres, killed 15, and destroyed 2,352 structures in Butte, Plumas, and Yuba counties.
- 8. Thomas fire:** The 2017 fire caused by power lines burned 281,893 acres in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.
- 9. Cedar fire:** The 2003 fire burned 273,246 acres, killed 15 people, and destroyed 2,820 structures in San Diego County. It was caused by a campfire.
- 10. Rush fire:** The 2012 lightning-caused fire burned 271,911 acres in California.

Windy Fire destroys more than 85,000 acres, containment drops to 2%

By Sheyanne N Romero
Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Sept. 27, 2021

The Windy Fire grew considerably over the weekend and is now more than 85,000 acres.

Although cooler weather is in the forecast this week, gusty winds could create issues for crews assigned to the Windy and KNP Complex fires.

Windy Fire

The Windy Fire is 85,383 acres, an increase of 36,330 acres since Friday morning. The fire has also decreased in containment and is now just 2% contained.

Many Tulare County mountain communities have been evacuated due to the blaze, which hasn't shown signs of slowing down.

"I understand the evacuations are not easy. It's difficult not to be in your home," Forest Supervisor Teresa Benson said. "We're going to do everything we can to get you to your homes when we can."

On Monday, a new evacuation warning was issued for both sides of the Kern River from the Gold Ledge Campground south to River Kern, at the Tulare/Kern counties border.

The warning includes all private properties, businesses, homes, structures, campsites, campgrounds, forest service roads, access roads, attached roads, and trails, deputies said.

The fire is actively moving downslope toward the Kern River and is expected to get "pretty close" to the river in the coming days, forest service officials warned.

Firefighters and engines tried to get to Tobias Peak on Sunday to check the lookout tower but the fire was still too active and hot. Crews had to turn around.

In the Sugarloaf Village area, firefighters are working to protect structures from the fire. A fire behavior analyst is in the area observing fire behavior. He reported the fire was moving downslope "very aggressively."

"It was loud like fire moving uphill sounds, but it was moving downhill, which is usually more moderate," U.S. Forest Service officials stated. "The fuel loading is immense in places."

However, the fire analyst is confident that the Cedar Fire burn scar will create a barrier to prevent the fire from spreading there.

In the Pine Flat area, the fire continues to move downslope toward lines created by bulldozers. Crews are mopping up hotspots along the lines that extend into California Hot Springs.

Gusty winds are expected Monday and Tuesday and are a concern for firefighters.

KNP Complex

The fire is 46,976 acres, with 8% containment.

The majority of growth over the weekend was in the Paradise Ridge area, where a burning operation took place. The 8% containment includes an area near Paradise Ridge and Lodgepole.

Cal Fire bulldozers and hand crews completed the line construction on the west side of the fire above Three Rivers and North Fork Road. National Guard troops continue to work in the northern portion of the fire to protect park infrastructure. Preparations are being made to apply fire retardant to the sequoia trees in the Muir Grove using helicopters.

Additionally, a structure protection group has been established in the Hartland area and crews are preparing to defend the structures, if the fire reaches that area.

There have been no new evacuation warnings or orders. Areas currently under an evacuation warning are urged to be ready to leave should the warning escalate to an order.

Suspected arson wildfire forces evacuations in California

By the Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Modesto Bee and other papers, Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021

Thousands of people were under evacuation orders Friday and many others were on notice to be ready to flee as a destructive wildfire raged in a drought-stricken forest in California's far north.

A woman suspected of starting the Fawn Fire was under arrest, authorities said.

The fire in the Mountain Gate area north of the city of Redding covered more than 9 square miles (23 square kilometers) and was 10% contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire.

"Approximately 4,000 Shasta County residents are evacuated at this time with 30,000 residents affected," the Shasta County Sheriff's Office said in a statement Thursday night.

Cal Fire said at least 25 structures had burned. Photos and video showed some homes blazing but the number of residences lost was not known. Damage inspection teams were conducting assessments, Cal Fire said.

The fire erupted at 4:45 p.m. Wednesday and grew explosively in hot and gusty weather Thursday in the region about 200 miles (322 kilometers) north of San Francisco. Weather on Friday was expected to remain hot but with light winds.

Alexandra Souverneva, 30, of Palo Alto was under arrest on suspicion of starting the fire, Cal Fire said.

Workers at a quarry reported seeing a woman acting strangely and trespassing on Wednesday. Cal Fire said Souverneva later walked out of the brush near the fire line, approached firefighters and told them she was dehydrated and needed medical help.

During an interview with Cal Fire and law enforcement, officers came to believe Souverneva was responsible for setting the fire, officials said. She was booked into the Shasta County Jail. It wasn't immediately known if she has an attorney.

Souverneva, who had a lighter in her pocket when she approached firefighters, was charged Friday with felony arson to wildland with an enhancement due to the declared state of emergency California is under, said Shasta County District Attorney Stephanie Bridgett.

Souverneva is also being investigated for starting other fires in Shasta County and throughout the state, Bridgett said.

The Fawn Fire is the latest destructive fire to send Californians fleeing this year. Fires have burned more than 3,600 square miles (9,324 square kilometers) so far in 2021, destroying more than 3,200 homes, commercial properties and other structures.

Those fires include two big forest blazes growing in the heart of California's giant sequoia country on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.

Smoke from those fires raised air quality concerns in the San Joaquin Valley below the Sierra and also darkened skies over greater Los Angeles on Thursday. South coast air regulators issued a smoke advisory but said the heaviest smoke would remain in the upper atmosphere and impacts on surface air quality would be in local mountain ranges.

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.

Crews scramble to make progress against California wildfires

By Alex Wigglesworth – Los Angeles Times

In the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021

Crews were hoping a shift in the weather would help them get the upper hand against several wildfires burning in Northern California and the southern Sierra. But forecasters warned Saturday the window of opportunity could be short-lived, as a cooling trend was expected to be followed by warmer temperatures and dry winds.

The Fawn fire north of Redding had burned 7,544 acres and was 10% contained as of Saturday morning. At least 100 structures were believed to have been destroyed based on a survey by fire crews, but damage assessment teams were out Saturday conducting a more detailed review, said Scott Ross, public information officer with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The fire started Wednesday and quickly spread amid gusty winds, forcing evacuations, Ross said.

Alexandra Souverneva, 30, of Palo Alto, was charged with arson for allegedly sparking the fire. Authorities did not disclose a potential motive but said she may be linked to other fires in the county and state.

The fire was burning in steep terrain through heavy brush, oak and pine, Ross said. Some evacuations were lifted Saturday as its growth slowed.

Conditions had already started to cool off, helping to boost relative humidity levels. The trend was expected to continue, with temperatures at least 10 degrees below average by Tuesday, said Sierra Littlefield, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

A storm system moving into the Pacific Northwest on Monday night into Tuesday could also bring a small amount of precipitation to the area, potentially less than a 10th of an inch, Littlefield said.

"Most of the brunt will be well to our north," she said. "We'll be getting the tail end in Northern California."

But as the system moves out mid to late week, it's possible that drier, breezier conditions will develop behind it, Littlefield said.

"We'll also see temperatures trending up toward next weekend as high pressure builds in behind that passage of the low-pressure system," she said.

Firefighters were scrambling to contain the Fawn fire ahead of the potential wind event, Ross said.

"We're going to try and get this wrapped up before then so that doesn't impact us," he said.

The fire was one of 11 active wildfires burning in California that had drawn more than 9,800 personnel, according to Cal Fire. So far this year, 7,641 fires have scorched more than 2.4 million acres in the state, outpacing every other year except last year, when nearly 3.7 million acres had burned by this date.

Authorities say these fires are also becoming more intense and harder to fight. Experts attribute the shift to drought and heat waves exacerbated by climate change, as well as overgrown forests that are helping to fuel high-severity fires with buildups of dry, dead vegetation.

Nearly 350 miles southeast of the Fawn fire, the 42,048-acre KNP Complex fire continued to grow in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park. Authorities reported zero percent containment as of Saturday morning.

Friday was one of the most active days for the fire since it was sparked by a Sept. 9 lightning storm, said Mark Garrett, public information officer with the National Park Service.

That's in part because it moved down into the foothills closer to the visitors center, picking up speed as it moved from mixed-conifer forests to grass and oak woodlands, Garrett said. Crews were able to meet the fire there using backfiring operations, as well as helicopters that were able to get up earlier in the day and assist before the smoke set in, he said.

Along the southern tip of the fire, flames slopped over control lines along Paradise Ridge and were continuing to move uphill on the slope, which is overgrown and has no recent history of fire, Garrett said.

A finger of the fire was coming down to Mineral King Road, a couple miles west of cabin communities in the area, and crews were trying to stop it from moving closer to homes, he said.

"We pulled some resources from other divisions and are getting eyes on that down there and seeing where we're able to hold it or not," Garrett said, adding that crews are hoping to take advantage of the fact that the fire is moving downhill, rather than racing uphill, in that area.

"It is also encountering lighter fuels like grasses, which makes it much easier to contain down there," he said.

Fire crews have largely been able to save the Giant Forest, the park's largest concentration of giant sequoias that is home to the famed General Sherman tree, believed to be the world's largest by volume. The fire did burn sequoias on the perimeter of the forest when it scorched the western edges, Garrett said,

"Some bigger trees have big holes or caves under them so the fire gets under there and cooks and cooks," he said.

A giant sequoia believed to have been killed by the fire fell across Generals Highway right before the Four Guardsmen trees on Friday, for a time blocking crews from being able to travel from the northern portion of the fire to the southern portion, he said.

A hotshot crew was able to cut out a large section of the tree and a road grader pushed the material away so that people could drive through it, he said.

"If you drive up there on either side of the road, there's just a huge sequoia cutout that's even taller than me," he said. "That's going to be there forever now."

A high-pressure system was helping to hold thick smoke over the area, which was suppressing fire behavior by keeping temperatures lower and humidity levels higher, but also preventing aircraft from flying, Garrett said.

"So it's a double-edged sword, as they say," he said. "Either way, we're going to use what we can to our advantage."

In some areas, crews were spraying retardant from trucks near fire lines to help create buffers, similar to how aircraft would do it but slower, Jon Wallace, operations sections chief, said in a morning briefing.

The fire's rapid growth was being fed by beetle-killed trees, Garrett said, estimating there are more than a million of them in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park alone.

"That is helping fuel this fire with a lot of extra dead and dry vegetation that is available and ready to burn," Garrett said. "It also creates a lot of fire-weakened trees falling all over the highway and endangering people's lives."

Similar dynamics were in place around the nearby Windy fire burning in the Tule River Reservation and Sequoia National Forest, which had destroyed two commercial structures and forced 430 people from their homes.

The fire was also sparked by lightning Sept. 9. It had grown to 71,349 acres and was 5% contained as of Saturday morning.

Specialists have been checking on giant sequoia groves, including the Long Meadow Grove where the Trail of 100 Giants is located, with drones flying over other areas that are hard to reach, to see how intensely the fire burned through. So far, most of the trees appear to have escaped major damage, said Nathan Judy, public information officer for California Incident Management Team 5.

The fire has been growing in all directions, with winds pushing embers and firebrands in front of the main firefront during windy conditions Thursday night, he said. Some of those turned into spot fires that made runs on Friday, when the heat of the day kicked up and humidity dropped, he said.

The fire was not that active overnight into Saturday, as relative humidity recoveries improved, Judy said. Still, the activity was expected to pick up as the day progressed, and crews were toiling to catch spot fires in steep, inaccessible terrain, he said.

Weather trends were similar to those over the Fawn fire, with temperatures expected to drop a couple degrees each day through Tuesday, when they were forecast to be about 10 degrees below average, said Brian Ochs, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Temperatures are expected to then increase to near average or slightly warmer than average by Thursday or Friday, he said.

Wind gusts could also increase Tuesday as the cold front moves in with the storm system to the north, which is not expected to drop precipitation as far south as the Windy or KNP Complex fires, Ochs said.

The fires were compromising air quality and resulting in smoky skies throughout Central California and as far south as Los Angeles.

Wildfire updates: Sequoia fires still growing. Here are latest acreage, containment totals

By Anthony Galaviz,

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021

The KNP Complex fire has burned more than 42,000 acres, spreading as of Saturday from Sequoia National Park into the neighboring national forest, officials said.

Several fires were sparked in the park by lightning Sept. 9 and are now being fought as one “complex” set of blazes, growing by about 9,000 acres in 24 hours. Containment remained at 0%.

Officials said the majority of the new growth was in the Ash Mountain and Mineral King Road areas, where a burning operation took place to protect private residences and national park buildings and infrastructure.

More than 1,700 firefighters are assigned to the fire, according to fire officials.

Winds remain light, officials said. Areas where smoke clears will see more active fire behavior in the afternoon.

Air operations continue to support ground-crew efforts when smoky skies allow across the fire area.

No new evacuation warnings had been ordered for the KNP Complex.

WINDY FIRE TOPS 70,000 ACRES

The Windy Fire, meanwhile, had burned 71,349 acres, threatening giant sequoia groves, including the Giant Sequoia National Monument, and in some cases reaching the ancient trees in the Sequoia National Forest while also burning on Tule River Indian Reservation land.

Nearly 1,800 firefighters are working to contain that wildfire, which is 5% contained.

‘It was a firefight’

How a vulnerable Tahoe neighborhood was saved from the Caldor Fire

Officials said the fire was “very active Friday.”

“The fire is exhibiting high resistance to control and is active in all vegetation types. Fire spread today was primarily a function of aggressive surface fire, short uphill runs, group tree torching, short- and long-range spotting, and roll-outs due to steep, complex terrain,” officials posted on the incident page.

The fire moved north toward Ponderosa, east toward Johnsondale, and south beyond California Hot Springs and Sugarloaf.

North of the reservation boundary, Camp Nelson remains threatened as fire continues to make uphill runs in terrain along the 2017 Pier Fire scar.

Several Tulare County communities have been evacuated, with a temporary evacuation center established at Porterville College.

Officials issued the latest evacuation orders for the Windy Fire early Friday.

After issuing a warning Thursday, Tulare County officials ordered evacuations for the communities of California Hot Springs and Pine Flat areas, which includes M-504 at Tyler Creek, southeast to Pine Flat, west to M-56, Fire Control Road, north to Tyler Creek Road, Sugar Loaf, Sugarloaf Mountain Park, Sugarloaf Saw Mill, White River, Idlewild, Posey, Panorama Heights, Poso, Balance Rock, Spear Creek, from the existing Hot Spring Evacuation Order west to King George Peak, south to County M56, including Oak Flat, Twin Peak, to Vincent Ranch at the Tulare-Kern Counties Border, east to Portuguese Peak, and back north to Dunlap Meadow.

An evacuation order is mandatory and indicates an immediate threat to life, safety and property and all residents and visitors must leave before the fire reaches the affected area, the Tulare County Sheriff's Office stated.

For those unable to evacuate domestic animals, call Tulare County Animal Shelter Manager Cassandra Heffington at 559-679-6222.

WILDFIRE SMOKE STILL HURTING VALLEY AIR

In addition to national park and forest closures spoiling travel plans for those on the Valley floor, people throughout much of the middle of California continue to deal with smoky skies caused by the Sequoia fires.

Fresno and counties throughout the central San Joaquin Valley as well as some on the coast and in the Bay Area likely still will be dealing with poor air quality in the coming days.

The National Weather Service projected heavy smoke and hazardous conditions from the fires will last at least through the weekend.

High resolution smoke projections show surface and higher-level smoke will linger across Central Valley counties as far south as Kern and as far north as San Joaquin. The smoke also will affect coastal counties such as Monterey, San Luis Obispo and even Santa Clara County in the Bay Area.

Companies, activists push to speed zero-emission truck sales

By Steve Leblanc, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, The Business Journal and other papers, Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021

Officials from companies with fleets of trucks are urging governors across the country to embrace a rule meant to speed the adoption of zero-emission trucks and reduce a potent source of greenhouse gases spewed from the large commercial vehicles.

In a letter released Friday, representatives of companies including IKEA, Nestle, Siemens, Etsy, eBay, Ben & Jerry's and Unilever joined with environmental activists and investors to call for the wide adoption of the Advanced Clean Trucks rule. Transportation is a leading cause of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., with trucks being one of the top culprits, activists said.

The rule requires manufacturers of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles to increase sales of zero-emission models over time in states where the policy is put in place. As production ramps up, the cost to manufacturers and buyers should come down, advocates said.

Supporters of the rule say companies increasingly are demanding clean trucks and vans to help meet climate and pollution goals and to save on the costs of fuel and maintenance. Approval of the rule by state governments could help give an added nudge to truck makers, backers said.

"The ACT rule will help bring down costs for zero-emission medium- and heavy-duty vehicles by requiring manufacturers to increase model availability to meet the needs of fleet operators and driving investment in clean transportation research and development," the companies and advocacy groups said in the letter.

"This will enable cost-effective electrification of commercial vehicles at the pace and scale needed to meet climate and air quality goals," they added.

The switch to zero-emission trucks also will help reduce pollution in lower-income neighborhoods, many of which border highways, major roads and shipping centers, and where residents often have health problems like asthma, advocates said.

The rule has already been adopted in California and is being considered in several other states, including Oregon, Washington, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York and Colorado.

"Medium- and heavy-duty vehicles are an essential part of the logistics networks that millions of Etsy sellers rely upon to deliver items to their buyers around the world, but these vehicles contribute disproportionately to air pollution and global warming emissions," Chelsey Evans, senior manager of

sustainability for Etsy, said in a statement. “Widespread adoption of zero-emission vehicles, including through the Advanced Clean Trucks Rule, is key to combating climate change.”

The letter was organized by the nonprofit group Ceres.

States have begun to acknowledge the pollution linked to cars and trucks and its effect on the climate.

The governors of three New England states and the mayor of Washington last year signed a regional pact aimed at dramatically reducing transportation pollution, an agreement they hope other states will eventually join.

The Transportation and Climate Initiative Program is designed to reduce motor vehicle emissions by at least 26% by 2032 by requiring large gasoline and diesel fuel suppliers to purchase “allowances” for the pollution caused by the use of the fuels they sell in the region. Opponents say that could drive up gas prices.

In New England, transportation is responsible for over 40% of greenhouse gas emissions.

More Tulare County evacuations as Windy Fire burns Sequoia forest. KNP Complex wildfire grows

By Thaddeus Miller

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Friday, Sept. 24, 2021

UPDATE: National Park Service provided updates on the size of the Windy Fire and KNP Complex Friday at 9 p.m. Friday. The Windy Fire grew to 62,702 acres burned with 5% containment and the KNP Complex grew to 40,112 acres.

ORIGINAL STORY: Officials issued new evacuation orders early Friday for the Windy Fire, which has now burned 49,053 acres in the Sequoia National Forest.

The wildfire on the Tule River Indian Reservation is 6% contained.

After issuing a warning Thursday, Tulare County officials on Friday ordered evacuations for the communities of California Hot Springs and Pine Flat areas, which includes M-504 at Tyler Creek, southeast to Pine Flat, west to M-56, Fire Control Road, north to Tyler Creek Road, Sugar Loaf, Sugarloaf Mountain Park, Sugarloaf Saw Mill, White River, Idlewild, Posey, Panorama Heights, Poso, Balance Rock, Spear Creek, from the existing Hot Spring Evacuation Order west to King George Peak, south to County M56, including Oak Flat, Twin Peak, to Vincent Ranch at the Tulare-Kern Counties Border, east to Portuguese Peak, and back north to Dunlap Meadow.

The Tulare County Sheriff's Office says that an evacuation order means an immediate threat to life, safety, and property and all residents and visitors must leave before the fire reaches the community.

Anyone in need of assistance in the evacuation may call 911.

If you are unable to evacuate your domestic animals, call Tulare County Animal Shelter Manager Cassandra Heffington at 559-679-6222.

The temporary evacuation point is at Porterville College, 100 E. College Ave. Individuals with RVs or Trailers may find information about where they can park at the College, or go to the International Agri-Center 4500 W. Laspina in Tulare, Gate D, where dry camping is allowed.

Road closures are in effect at Jack Ranch Road and Old Stage Road; Highway 190 and Rio Vista; MT99 at Gold Ledge Campground; and MT56 at Fountain Springs.

KNP COMPLEX

The KNP Complex Fire has scorched 36,850 acres since lightning sparked the blaze on Sept. 9, and has drawn more than 1,500 firefighters and other personnel to the Sequoia National Forest, the National Park Service said Friday.

It grew about 8,522 acres over the last 24 hours, mostly in the Ash Mountain area, where a burning operation took place to protect park buildings and infrastructure.

Seventeen dozers are operating in the Hartland/Wilsonia area to open old roads for better fire access and improve control operations. Burnout operations have happening in the Crystal Cave area to reduce fuels between the fire and the Hidden Fire burn scar. Crews are also preparing for burnout operations in the Park Headquarters area near Ash Mountain and Paradise Ridge, and north of the Mineral King Road. Those should happen in the next few days as conditions permit.

Sequoia National Park is closed to the public and large portions of Kings Canyon National Park have also been closed. Communities further from the parks are feeling air quality impacts, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Officials say if you can see or smell smoke or ash, then you can assume the air quality is bad.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom was in Sequoia National Park on Thursday to visit the site of the KNP Complex Fire. He signed a \$15 billion-plus climate package.

Hazardous air quality leads to uptick in patients with respiratory issues

By Ishani Desai

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 24, 2021

The noxious smoke that descended upon the Bakersfield area Friday brought a noticeable increase in the already elevated rate of people showing up at Clinica Sierra Vista locations lately with respiratory problems.

The organization's medical director of special populations, Dr. Matthew Beare, reported seeing multiple patients with respiratory flares by noon Friday amid extraordinarily hazy vistas and reports of ash falling from the sky.

"The chronic effects of the poor quality are seen in every primary care clinic throughout Kern County," Beare said. "Even in the past several weeks, we've seen a big pickup in those acute flares."

Patients with respiratory issues such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease have difficulty breathing because their lungs suffered damage. Individuals with COPD have inflamed lungs, which can trap secretions and lead to pneumonia.

Airways within asthmatics tighten, Beare said, often triggering an asthma attack. Deadly particulate matter clogs the lungs, which creates problems for those with already-damaged airways.

He said that often these conditions lead to hospital visits because normal medicine, like an inhaler, cannot clear the airways.

Vulnerable populations are not the only affected individuals, however. Residents without chronic respiratory problems can suffer lung damage. Beare said exposure to particulate matter over an extended period can risk developing lung disease.

"These are not healthy, long-term living conditions in terms of air quality," he said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District recommends installing air filters to achieve cleaner air.

A makeshift filter can be created with an air filter, a box fan and duct tape, it says: Attach the air filter to the fan's back and replace as needed.

If possible, Beare recommends wearing an N95 mask when outside. This type of mask contains a higher filtering capacity rather than a cloth mask.

He recommends individuals exercise indoors. Increased activity outside causes more oxygen to flow into the lungs, leading to more harmful material inhaled.

"That air you're breathing in was polluted with all of this junk," Beare said. "It's like a higher dose with higher intensity than your normal stroll outside."

He emphasized people with respiratory issues should continue taking their medicine.

Beare warned the public not to downplay acute symptoms such as coughing, which might not be related to poor air quality. People with symptoms similar to COVID-19 should take correct precautions and get tested, he added.

Two Sequoia wildfires have each passed 30,000 acres. New Windy Fire evacuation warnings

By Thaddeus Miller

Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021

The KNP Complex Fire grew by almost 5,000 acres overnight as it spreads in a difficult area for fire crews to reach, according to officials.

The fire has scorched 33,046 acres since lightning sparked the blaze on Sept. 9, and has drawn more than 1,500 firefighters and other personnel to the Sequoia National Forest, the National Park Service said Thursday.

Sequoia National Park is closed to the public and large portions of Kings Canyon National Park have also been closed. Communities further from the parks are feeling air quality impacts, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The fire teams have prioritized life and property in the communities near the park, but also are working to protect the giant sequoias, infrastructure and other facilities in the park.

Some flames have been allowed to burn in areas with vegetation that is away from protected areas, fire officials said. Crews and bulldozers are working to create a barrier to protect Three Rivers, Silver City, Hartland and surrounding communities.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom was in Sequoia National Park on Thursday to visit the site of the KNP Complex Fire. He signed a \$15 billion-plus climate package.

WINDY FIRE

The Windy Fire, which is also in the Sequoia National Forest, has burned 36,249 acres on the Tule River Indian Reservation, officials said. It's 6% contained.

Evacuation orders remain in place, and Tulare County officials added new warnings on Thursday. Evacuation warnings are voluntary.

The new evacuation warnings issued were for California Hot Springs and Pine Flat areas, which includes M-504 at Tyler Creek, southeast to Pine Flat, west to M-56 and Fire Control Road, and north to Tyler Creek Road.

Community members in the warning areas are strongly encouraged to prepare to evacuate in case an order becomes mandatory, officials said.

Officials sent out a new evacuation order Thursday afternoon for the area of McNallys from Sherman Pass Road to Corral Creek. Officials warned an evacuation order means an immediate threat to life, safety, and property and all residents and visitors must leave now before the fire reaches the community.

A roadblock will be in effect at M99 and Gold Ledge Campground.

Anyone in need of assistance for the evacuation can call 911. If you can not evacuate your domestic animals you can call Tulare County Animal Shelter Manager Cassandra Heffington at 559-679-6222. A temporary evacuation point is at Porterville College, 100 E. College Avenue.

Nearly 1,500 personnel are working towards containment of the Windy Fire.

The fire has affected several giant sequoia groves, and a Yosemite National Park adviser is on hand to assess the trees in question, including Bench Tree from the Trail of 100 Giants.

No privately owned structures have been damaged or lost to the blaze, officials said. The Sequoia National Forest did lose the Mule Peak Lookout and its radio repeater early on during the wildfire. Despite being wrapped in fire-resistant material, they faced "extreme burning conditions and strong winds."

Crews are working along the Trail of 100 Giants, spraying hot spots around the giant sequoias and bringing down smaller hazard trees in that area that have already burned, crews said.

CAMPING RESTRICTIONS

The Sierra National Forest tightened temporary fire restrictions on Thursday because of the extreme fire dangers, officials said. Some restriction have already been in place since June 24.

Campfires are prohibited temporarily in developed recreation sites and wilderness areas Thursday through Nov. 15, forest officials said. Visitors with a valid California Campfire permit may still use a portable stove or lantern as long as the device has a shut-off valve.

Campfires that got out of control have been a problem in the past, according to Forest Supervisor Dean Gould.

“We share a responsibility to do what we reasonably can on the SNF to reduce the risk of wildfire, while being mindful that first responder resources are stretched very thin state-wide as well as nationally,” he said in a news release.

A number of other fire, fireworks and smoking restrictions are also in place. For the full list, email SM.FS.Sierraninfo@usda.gov. Or call a ranger station local to the campsite: High Sierra Ranger District, 559-855-5355; Bass Lake Ranger District, 559-877-2218; Supervisor’s Office, 559-297-0706.