

Huge California fire grows; Montana blaze threatens towns

The Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021

GREENVILLE, Calif. (AP) — California's largest single wildfire in recorded history continued to grow after destroying nearly 550 homes while authorities in Montana ordered evacuations as a wind-driven blaze roared toward several remote communities.

The dangerous fires are among some 100 large blazes burning Wednesday across 15 states, mostly in the West, where historic drought conditions have left lands parched and ripe for ignition.

The east end of Northern California's massive Dixie Fire flared up Tuesday as afternoon winds increased, fire officials said.

Burning through bone-dry trees, brush and grass, the fire has destroyed at least 1,045 buildings, more than half of them homes in the northern Sierra Nevada. Newly released satellite imagery showed the scale of the destruction in the small community of Greenville that was incinerated last week during an explosive run of flames.

The Dixie Fire named after the road where it started on July 14 by Wednesday morning covered 783 square miles (2,027 square kilometers) and was 30% contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. At least 14,000 remote homes were still threatened.

The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall.

In southeastern Montana, communities in and around the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation were ordered to evacuate as the uncontrolled Richard Spring Fire grew amid erratic winds.

The order included Lame Deer, where people who fled the fire early Tuesday had sought shelter, only to be displaced again that night when the fire got within several miles. The town of about 2,000 people is home to the tribal headquarters and several subdivisions is surrounded by rugged, forested terrain.

Also ordered to leave were about 600 people in around Ashland, a small town just outside the reservation with a knot of businesses along its main street and surrounded by grasslands and patchy forest.

No homes were reported lost, Rosebud County Sheriff Allen Fulton said. Two homes caught fire Tuesday but were saved, including one near Lame Deer. Sheriff's deputies used fire extinguishers on the flames and a passing fire helicopter dropped a bucket of water to put it out, Fulton said.

Heavy winds were forecast to return Wednesday, and authorities were concerned that the fire would again advance toward Ashland and Lame Deer.

The flames came right up to a subdivision outside Ashland along the Tongue River and were within several miles of the town by Wednesday morning. Powerful gusts Tuesday caused the blaze to explode across more than 230 square miles (600 square kilometers) as the fire jumped roads, creeks and fire lines created in an attempt to prevent it from growing. It was 0% contained Wednesday morning.

Heat waves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists have said climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. The fires across the West come as parts of Europe are also enduring large blazes spurred by tinder-dry conditions.

Dixie Fire now among state's most destructive wildfires: More than 500 homes destroyed

By Lauren Hernandez, Omar Shaikh Rashad
San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, August 10, 2021

The Dixie Fire has destroyed more than 500 homes, making it among the most destructive fires in California's history.

Firefighters provided the information on property destruction on Tuesday night, saying the fire had destroyed 1,027 structures, including 547 single residences, eight multiple-residences, 131 non-residential commercial, eight mixed-use commercial and residential structures, and 333 "minor structures,"

That ranks the Dixie Fire as the 15th most destructive fire in state history. It already was ranked as the second largest wildfire in state history, having burned 490,205 acres by Tuesday night.

Firefighters also extended the containment lines around the massive fire to 27% on Tuesday night, up from 25% earlier in the day. The fire, which began July 14, is burning in Butte, Plumas, Lassen and Tehama counties.

Cal Fire officials said hotter and drier conditions are expected this week, including the potential for "isolated" thunderstorms late in the week, and there is still potential for the fire to grow.

Firefighters saw "increased fire behavior" Tuesday when temperatures increased and southwesterly winds returned in the fire zone's northeast perimeter near Coyote Peak, China Gulch and Dyer Mountain. This weather pattern is expected to continue in the upcoming days, and temperatures are expected to reach triple-digits with "erratic winds."

"The ongoing drought experienced has contributed to tree and vegetation mortality, and increasing fire behavior," Cal Fire officials said in a Tuesday evening incident report.

The fire has no fatalities or injuries among civilians but it has injured three firefighters.

Nearly 900 buildings destroyed by massive California fire

The Business Journal, Tuesday, August 10, 2021
By Associated Press

(AP) — California's largest single wildfire in recorded history kept pushing through forestlands on Tuesday as fire crews tried to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes.

Clear skies over parts of the month-old Dixie Fire have allowed aircraft to rejoin nearly 6,000 firefighters in the attack this week.

"Whether or not we can fly depends very much on where the smoke is. There's still some areas where it's just too smoky," fire spokesman Edwin Zuniga said.

Burning through bone-dry trees, brush and grass, the fire by Tuesday had destroyed nearly 900 homes and other buildings.

Much of the small community of Greenville was incinerated during an explosive run of flames last week.

But the reports are "definitely subject to change" because assessment teams still can't get into many areas to count what burned, Zuniga said.

The Dixie Fire, named for the road where it started, also threatened 14,000 buildings in more than a dozen small mountain and rural communities in the northern Sierra Nevada.

Crews have cut thousands of acres of new fire lines aimed at preventing the fire from spreading. Officials believe the fire lines created on the blaze's southern side will hold the fire at bay there, but the fire's future is unknown, authorities said.

“We don’t know where this fire is going to end and where it’s going to land. It continues to challenge us,” said Chris Carlton, supervisor for Plumas National Forest.

Temperatures are expected to rise and the humidity is expected to fall over the next few days, with triple-digit high temperatures possible later in the week along with a return of strong afternoon winds, fire meteorologist Rich Thompson warned Monday evening.

The fire that broke out July 14 had grown to an area of 762 square miles (1,973 square kilometers) and was just 25% contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

The Dixie Fire is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California’s largest wildfire overall.

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Tuesday declared a state of emergency for northern Shasta, Trinity and Tehama counties. The declaration frees up state resources to help fight fires in those counties and give assistance to residents affected by the blazes.

California’s raging wildfires are among some 100 large blazes burning across 15 states, mostly in the West, where historic drought conditions have left lands parched and ripe for ignition.

The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. Nearly a quarter of all firefighters assigned to Western fires are fighting California blazes, said Rocky Oplinger, an incident commander.

Heat waves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists have said climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. The fires across the West come as parts of Europe are also fighting large blazes spurred by tinder-dry conditions.

Northwest of the Dixie Fire in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, hundreds of homes remained threatened by two fires that continued to grow. About a third of the McFarland Fire was contained. New evacuation orders were issued Monday for residents near the Monument Fire, which was only about 3% contained.

South of the Dixie Fire, firefighters prevented further growth of the River Fire, which broke out last Wednesday near the community of Colfax and destroyed 68 homes. It was nearly 80% contained.