

Under hot and dry conditions, crews make progress on McKinney Fire

By Damon Arthur

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Under crackling dry conditions and temperatures still reaching near 100 degrees in northern Siskiyou County, containment around the largest fire in California this year reached 40% Sunday.

At 60,271 acres, the McKinney Fire 15 miles west of Yreka grew only 127 acres from Saturday to Sunday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

During the same period, containment line around the fire increased from 30% to 40%.

While firefighters appear to be getting the upper hand on the McKinney Fire, several other fires continue to burn around the North State.

The largest of those were the Yeti and Alex fires west of the McKinney Fire. As of Sunday, those two fires were just over 8,000 acres and were 19% contained, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Five other fires, which made up the Six Rivers Lightning Complex, burned in the area of Willow Creek in eastern Humboldt County. Those fires had torched about 1,100 acres as of Sunday.

The four largest fires and fire complexes in the North State have cost federal and state agencies about \$26.3 million in suppression costs, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. The McKinney Fire alone has cost \$21 million.

The McKinney Fire broke out July 29 near the community of Klamath River. Driven by strong winds that came up in the evening during the first day of the blaze, the fire destroyed an estimated 132 buildings, including 87 homes, and killed four people.

Thunderstorms following the fire caused flash flooding in the area, choking streams with mud and debris and killing thousands of fish in an important salmon fishery.

Along with temperatures over 100 degrees, firefighters have contended with very dry conditions due to the third year of a drought.

The hot and dry conditions that make it easier for wildfires to start and spread are expected to continue throughout August and into September, according to the interagency fire center.

"Critical weather conditions with very hot temperatures and dry fuels continue in many states. Red flag warnings are in effect for parts of Oregon, Washington and northern California," the agency said in a report issued Sunday.

Across the country, 72 large fires and complexes of fires had burned 1.7 million acres in 15 states, NIFC said.

The National Drought Monitor continues to classify the North State, including Shasta, Siskiyou and Trinity counties, in an extreme drought.

Even as the drought continues through its third year in California, there is some good news. The number of fires — and the amount of acres burned — is down significantly in the from 2021, according to Cal Fire.

By this time last year, there were 5,945 fires that burned 517,530 acres. This year, there have been 4,927 blazes that have burned 147,034 acres, Cal Fire reported.

Valley air quality is improving, but more federal support is needed to achieve clean air

By Vito Chiesa and Tania Pacheco-Werner

In the Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 8, 2022

This year, the Valley Air District commemorates its 30th year as a public health agency working to improve the health and quality of life for San Joaquin Valley residents. That goal is of the utmost importance.

Over the past 30 years, the San Joaquin Valley has made remarkable progress in cleaning the air through the implementation of innovative strategies, reducing harmful smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions from locally regulated sources by over 93%. From collaborative public/private investments of over \$4.5 billion in new, cleaner passenger vehicles, agricultural equipment, heavy-duty trucks and other technologies, to the most stringent control strategies for industrial, agricultural and other sources, the Valley has served as a national model of clean air innovation.

Through this collective effort, the Valley now meets a number of federal health-based air quality standards, and Valley residents are breathing much cleaner air than ever. As compared to even just a few years ago, it is gratifying and exciting to see so much conversation about how frequently the mountains surrounding the Valley can now clearly be seen.

While considerable and undeniable progress has been made, it is clear that more must be done. Due to our region's unique geographical and meteorological challenges, and, increasingly, changing climate conditions that exacerbate our challenges, the Valley continues to face major difficulties in meeting the latest air quality standards, and we are at an important juncture in our clean air journey.

The Valley Air District is committed to ongoing local clean air efforts, including fighting for, and making available, hundreds of millions of dollars in clean air grants, and continually enhancing strategies for reducing emissions from sources under local jurisdiction.

As one example of this ongoing work, just last year, the governing board adopted the only-of-its-kind strategy for the virtual elimination of agricultural burning by the end of 2024, supported by \$180 million in state funding to help offset the high cost of new alternatives such as chipping and soil incorporation.

However, to meet our region's clean air goals and federal requirements, it is clear that more must be done to address air pollution from mobile sources that now make up the majority of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in the region. Scaled-up investment is needed at the state and federal level to support an accelerated, transformational transition to new clean air and low-carbon vehicle and equipment technologies and mode shifts in the goods movement, transportation, agricultural, energy production, building, and other sectors.

In planning these transitions, community input and perspective will be critical to ensure equitable policies are pursued that assist, and do not leave behind, the Valley's many disadvantaged communities.

At the state level, the governor and Legislature are committed to unprecedented clean air investments, and we urge strong allocation of these funds for investment in Valley communities and other regions with significant air quality challenges. With federal mobile source emissions soon surpassing those under state jurisdiction, it will be imperative that the federal government partner with the Valley to equitably address sources of air pollution under its jurisdiction. This includes moving forward with new low-emission federal heavy-duty strategies, and prioritizing billions of dollars in new climate funding for clean vehicles/infrastructure, sustainable agriculture, and other new clean air and low carbon investment opportunities to regions facing the most difficult air quality challenges.

These focused federal investments and partnerships in the San Joaquin Valley will be essential to helping the Valley meet its clean air and public health goals, while also helping to improve the economic resilience of our region in a rapidly changing global economy.

We invite the public to learn about and support the Valley's clean air journey by visiting the Valley Air District's website at www.valleyair.org, signing up for email updates on activities, reading our latest annual report, and taking advantage of available clean air grant opportunities.

Vito Chiesa is the Valley Air District governing board chair. Dr. Tania Pacheco-Werner is the governor appointee to both the Valley Air District Governing Board and the California Air Resources Board.