

California's Park Fire could burn for weeks or months

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The Park Fire, which has been burning for a week in the northern region of California, is now the fifth-largest wildfire in the Golden State's history.

According to information published by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), the Park Fire has burned 386,764 acres in Butte, Plumas, Shasta and Tehama Counties and is 14 percent contained. This area is 12 times the size of San Francisco.

This level of containment means that just 14 percent of the perimeter of the fire has been enclosed by a control line. In other words, most of the fire is burning out of control.

On Monday, CalFire Incident Commander Billy See told a news conference, "This region, both Butte and Tehama, over the course of time in California, has had four of the largest 10 fires known in history." As of Tuesday morning, 192 structures had been destroyed and 19 damaged with 4,200 more threatened by the fire.

CalFire reported that around 5,500 fire-fighting personnel have been assigned to suppress the Park Fire. Jay Tracy, a deputy fire marshal for Fresno Fire, who is serving as the CalFire spokesman, said that the crews are fighting the fire, "aggressively, and with all hands on deck," including firefighters from throughout California and some from Texas, Arizona and Oregon.

More than 8,000 residents in the affected area are under evacuation orders. The speed and intensity of the flames, which is sending massive clouds of orange-gray smoke into the air, has "turned tree-lined roads and wooden homes into barren patches of dirt coated with ash," according to a report in the *New York Times* on Monday.

Resident Paul Mozzino, who has gone through previous wildfire evacuation, told the *Times*, "Oh God, not again." After leaving home and turning back to

look at the fire a mile from his house, Mozzino said, "It looked like a volcano, like something out of 'Hellraiser.'"

CNN affiliate KHSL spoke with Butte County resident Rick Pero who said the Park Fire was the second California wildfire to destroy his home. He moved to Forest Ranch after losing another property in the deadly Camp Fire in 2018. Pero and his wife were away this time when they got the evacuation warning. They told their house sitter to pack the car and leave, "We said don't wait for the order stage, go ahead and load up." He said they might remain in Butte County but after two fire experiences, they are also looking further afield.

The evacuees are compelled to either stay in temporary shelters or with friends and family. They do not know how long it will be before they can return home, assuming that their homes will be there when it is safe to go back.

Experts are warning that the Park Fire could continue to spread for weeks, if not months and has the potential to become the biggest California wildfire ever. Extreme conditions made possible by capitalist-induced climate change, primarily heat waves in June and July, have produced an exceptionally dry and flammable environment that is fueling the blaze.

Two days before the fire started, July 22, was Earth's hottest day on record. June was the 13th consecutive month to break a global heat record. Some areas of the burn had their single-hottest 30-day periods on record just before the Park Fire broke out.

Speaking to the *Times*, Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the National Center for Atmospheric Research, explained, "It was an exceptional heat wave, and an exceptional drying of the vegetation." He said

another heat wave is forecast in the area this week, which would likely make it more difficult for firefighters to contain the blaze.

The forecast in the region is for temperatures to hit the upper 90s Fahrenheit (32 Celsius plus) on Wednesday and, from Thursday to Monday, temperatures are expected to range between 100 and 103 degrees F (38-39C).

There has been significant corporate media attention given to the charging of 42-year-old Ronnie Dean Stout II with felony arson for allegedly starting the Park Fire. Stout is accused of pushing a burning car into a gully near the Alligator Hole in upper Bidwell Park shortly before 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday where it rolled 60 feet down an embankment. He is scheduled to enter a plea on Thursday and, if he is convicted, Stout could face life in prison.

However, the destructive and deadly force of the Park Fire is the product of circumstances that extend far beyond the actions of any individual. UCLA's Swain described the "whiplash" between very wet and then very dry conditions which are the dual impacts of climate change in California. A warmer atmosphere holds more water vapor which, when it rains, results in massive downpours.

When the record-breaking heat comes, high evaporation levels occur which causes "a yo-yo effect between seasons of extreme precipitation and flood risk, and extreme dryness and wildfire risk," according to the *Times*.

Meanwhile, erratic atmospheric conditions have created powerful winds above the fire which can produce massive storm systems with hail, high winds, lightning and tornadoes. David Peterson, a meteorologist at the United States Naval Research Laboratory in Monterey, California told the *Times* that fire-generated storms will impede fire-fighting. He said such storms were recently produced by wildfires in Canada that destroyed a third of the town of Jasper, Alberta.

The exceptionally hot and dry conditions are making for a record wildfire season on the West Coast. According to *Inside Climate News*, "Over the past two weeks, infernos have been tearing through parts of California, Oregon and Canada, leaving scorched trails in their wake."

Fire experts are saying the pace at which some of the

blazes have intensified is shocking. *Inside Climate News* said that scenes like that of the Park Fire are playing out in Oregon and Canada, "Experts say a 'flash drought' triggered by heat waves transformed trees, shrubs and greenery throughout eastern and central Oregon into kindling for lightning-ignited wildfires. More than 1 million acres have burned so far across the state—quadruple the amount of charred land compared to last year."



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