

Fire scars big nature reserve in Ecuador's capital

September 23 2013



A plane lands at the Mariscal Sucre international airport in Quito on February 19, 2013.

Fire blamed on arson has charred vast areas of a nature reserve in Ecuador's capital, officials said Monday as they declared the blaze under control.

It broke out Sunday in a huge expanse of Quito known as the Parque Metropolitano and it took 800 [firefighters](#), police and soldiers backed by water-dumping planes nearly 24 hours to bring it under control.

A community of some 400 indigenous people live in the park in northern

Quito.

No one was hurt, but animals died and large areas of tropical forest burned, mainly [eucalyptus trees](#), in the city's largest [nature reserve](#).

Smoke from the fire covered a large area of Quito.

Firefighters continued Monday to hose down the park to cool it off and extinguish the last spots still burning, said fire department spokesman Jose Luis Garces.

On Sunday alone, the fire charred 557 hectares (1,400 acres) of the park, which draws thousands of visitors every weekend.

"It is the first time I have seen such a thing in the 46 years I have lived here. It makes you want to cry. I saw rabbits, birds and lots of vegetation all blackened," said Ramiro Guala, leader of the [indigenous people](#) who live in the reserve.

They came out of their homes with machetes and sticks to try to beat the flames out.

"The smoke was thick. The flames spread because of the wind and came to within just a few meters of the homes," he told AFP.

Quito's mayor Augusto Barrera said there was evidence of arson. He showed photos of the remains of what appear to be fireworks.

The government offered a reward of up to \$100,000 for information leading to arrests in the case.

Barrera said this and three other, smaller fires on the outskirts of the city were started by "demented hands and minds."

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