

California wildfire torches forest, forces new evacuations

December 11 2017, by Veronique Dupont



A car drives past as the Thomas Fire burns a hillside south of Casitas Springs, California

One of the most destructive fires in California's history was raging in a sprawling national forest on Monday and creeping up the Pacific coast, forcing new evacuations.

As a wildfire near Los Angeles was brought under control, firefighters

were being redeployed to battle the Thomas Fire northwest of America's second-largest city.

The Thomas Fire has burned 230,500 acres (93,300 hectares) since it erupted a week ago and has been only 15 percent contained, the California Fire Department (Cal Fire) said.

The blaze spread over the weekend in the mostly uninhabited Los Padres National Forest, Cal Fire said, and was threatening the coastal towns of Montecito, Summerland and Carpinteria, south of the historic city of Santa Barbara, population 91,000.

The Thomas Fire has forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of Californians and actor Rob Lowe and comedian and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres were among those preparing to flee.

"Our house is under threat of being burned," DeGeneres said of her Montecito home.

"We just had to evacuate our pets," she said on Twitter. "I'm praying for everyone in our community and thankful to all the incredible firefighters."

"Praying for my town," Santa Barbara resident Lowe wrote on Twitter. "Fires closing in. Firefighters making brave stands. Could go either way. Packing to evacuate now."



A picture taken from the International Space Station of California's wildfires

May Osher, a 66-year-old retired schoolteacher in Carpinteria, told the Los Angeles Times she had put photo albums and pet supplies in her car and was ready to evacuate if told to do so.

"I'm staying until it's time to go," Osher told the newspaper.

With over 230,000 acres of land scorched, the Thomas Fire is the fifth-largest in the history of California, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Cal Fire said 800 buildings have been destroyed by the fire, which is being fueled by dry brush and strong and unpredictable Santa Ana winds.

"Gusty northeast winds will cause the fire to threaten areas of the city of Santa Barbara," Cal Fire said early Monday.

'New normal'

Despite the intensity of the fires stretching from north of Los Angeles down to San Diego—authorities have reported only one fatality—a 70-year-old woman who died in a car crash while fleeing a blaze.



Members of the Reinhardt family sort through the remains of their family home after the Thomas wildfire swept through Ventura, California

California Governor Jerry Brown warned Saturday that climate change meant that the state was becoming increasingly vulnerable and wildfires were becoming the "new normal."

"The [fire](#) season used to be a few months in the summer," Brown said.

"Now it's almost year-long. We've never seen anything like it."

Brown has been one of the most vocal critics of President Donald Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the Paris accord on global warming and he renewed his attacks on the administration over its attitude towards [climate change](#).

"Nature is not a political game. Nature is the ground on which we stand, it's the air which we breathe," he said.

"The truth of the case is that there's too much carbon being emitted, that heat-trapping gasses are building up, the planet is warming and all hell is breaking loose," Brown said.

This has been California's deadliest year ever for wildfires. More than 40 people died in October when fires swept through the state's wine-producing counties north of San Francisco.

Trump has issued a state of emergency for California, authorizing the release of federal funds.

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