

Fires menace US West, tornado touches Colorado wildfire site

July 6 2018, by Colleen Slevin



Smoke from a wildfire rises from Basalt Mountain Thursday, July 5, 2018, in Basalt, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse/The Aspen Times via AP)

An erratic wildfire charging through extremely dry land in the heart of Colorado ski country destroyed three homes and forced people to flee, authorities said Thursday.

Elsewhere in Colorado, a rare high-elevation tornado touched down at

the site of another wildfire Thursday but apparently caused little damage and had no effect on the [fire](#).

They were among more than 60 large blazes burning across the United States, mostly in the West, where whipping winds and increasing heat have made it easy for flames to spread.

Fires exploded in Northern California, Utah and other areas, where a prolonged and severe drought has desiccated forests.

In Colorado, residents of multimillion-dollar properties, modest condos and mobile homes were ordered to evacuate early Thursday because of an unpredictable wildfire reported the night before near the town of Basalt. More than 500 homes were affected.

The Eagle County Sheriff's Department said no other homes had been lost besides the three reported earlier.

Smoke from the fire temporarily halted flights into the resort town of Aspen, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) away.

Authorities believe the flames started after people at a shooting range used tracer bullets, which illuminate the path of fired bullets.



Smoke from a wildfire rises from Basalt Mountain Thursday, July 5, 2018, in Basalt, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse/The Aspen Times via AP)

A tornado was reported Thursday south of Fairplay, a central Colorado town about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) above sea level. It appeared to touch down at or near the edge of a wildfire that has burned about 17 square miles (43 square kilometers), National Weather Service meteorologist Russell Danielson.

Tornadoes are rare at that elevation and are seldom seen at any wildfire, Daniels said.

Another Colorado wildfire about 205 miles (330 kilometers) southwest of Denver destroyed more than 130 homes and forced more than 2,000 people in three counties to evacuate. It grew to about 160 square miles (nearly 420 square kilometers) Thursday.

Rain was expected in parts of Colorado, which could dampen fires but trigger flash flooding in areas left bare by wildfires.

Hotter, drier weather was forecast in Northern California, where thousands of firefighters were battling a wildfire that was already about three times the size of San Francisco.



A helicopter fills up with water to make a drop on Basalt Mountain to fight a wildfire on Thursday, July 5, 2018, near the town of Basalt, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse /The Aspen Times via AP)

By Thursday night, the fire northwest of Sacramento had burned nine buildings and 137.5 square miles (356 square kilometers). However, authorities didn't immediately indicate whether any homes had been destroyed in the rural area, although about 110 structures remained

threatened, according to state fire officials.

The blaze was 33 percent contained.

"The cool weather on Wednesday helped firefighters, but it will become hotter and drier starting Friday and into the weekend, and that will be a challenge," said Anthony Brown, a spokesman with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Some of the 2,500 people who were under mandatory evacuations orders were allowed to return home.

Authorities say a fire that jumped across Interstate 5 south of the Oregon border in California has closed the southbound lanes in that area.



A helicopter fills up with water to make a drop on Basalt Mountain to fight a wildfire on Thursday, July 5, 2018, in Basalt, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse/The

Aspen Times via AP)

The Oregon Department of Transportation said Thursday evening the southbound lanes would remain closed at Ashland, Oregon. Motorists were advised to take an alternate route toward California.

California Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for Siskiyou County, citing "extreme peril" to people and property. There were some evacuation in the tiny town of Hornbrook.

The fire called Klamathon started Thursday afternoon.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said Thursday night that the blaze had burned nearly 8 square miles (20 square kilometers). Multiple structures are threatened, damaged or destroyed, the department said.

In northern New Mexico, a wildfire closed a ranch where novelist D.H. Lawrence once sought spiritual renewal. Officials said a fire in drought-stricken Carson National Forest has scorched nearly 4 square miles (10 square kilometers) since June 24 and is only partially contained.



A poster-sized thank you card for their efforts awaits firefighters inside the American Red Cross shelter at the Fort Garland Community Center Thursday, July 5, 2018, in Fort Garland, Colo. An erratic wildfire charging through extremely dry land in the heart of Colorado ski country destroyed multiple homes and forced people to flee in the middle of the night, authorities said Thursday. (Andy Cross /The Denver Post via AP)

Forest restrictions imposed last week closed the University of New Mexico's D.H. Lawrence Ranch, which hosted the writer in the summers of 1924 and 1925 as well as Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, author Willa Cather and artist Georgia O'Keeffe after Lawrence's 1930 death.

In Utah, scorching summer temperatures and winds quickly pushed flames through bone-dry vegetation near a popular fishing lake about two hours southeast of Salt Lake City. The 66-square-mile (171-square-kilometer) fire near Strawberry Reservoir has burned about 90 structures.

Darren Lewis' family cabin is in the fire's path and he fears the A-frame structure built 46 years ago by his uncle and father has burned, though he's waiting for confirmation.

Lewis, 44, and his extended family planned to spend the Fourth of July at the property in a narrow canyon near a river but instead nervously watched social media for updates from the Salt Lake City suburb of Magna.

More than 1,100 people have been evacuated in the mountain area, and the family hasn't been able to go back since Monday, he said. It is a frequent family gathering spot and has special sentimental value because his father and uncle both died last year.

"That's our healing place," Lewis said.



South Metro Denver wildland firefighters Dustin Searle, left, and Wes Polk, right, unload gear after arriving back to camp at the Fort Garland Community Center after spending the day fighting a wildfire Thursday, July 5, 2018, in Fort Garland, Colo. (Andy Cross /The Denver Post via AP)



In this photo provided by the Wellington Fire Protection District (WFPD) shows a tornado south of Fairplay, Colo., Thursday, July 5, 2018. The National Weather Service says the twister touched down Thursday in Park County, south of Fairplay, a central Colorado town about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) above sea level. (Matt Morris/WFPD via AP)



In this Tuesday, July 3, 2018, photo provided by Cal Fire, an American flag flies as the County Fire burns in the background near Markley Cove in Lake Berryessa, Calif. Thousands of firefighters battling a massive wildfire in Northern California are bracing for upcoming hotter and drier weather that could help the blaze about three times the size of San Francisco spread even more. The fire burning northwest of Sacramento grew overnight Thursday, July 5, 2018, to 134 square miles after a day of cool weather that helped crew gain some ground. (Cal Fire via AP)



A fire crew from North Lake Tahoe walk across a burned hillside along Highway 128 in Solano County north of Winters, Calif., Thursday, July 5, 2018. Nearly 3,500 firefighters from around Northern California are battling the blaze both on the ground and in the air. The fire began last Saturday in Guinda has burned 86,000 acres and is 30 percent contained according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. (Joel Rosenbaum/The Vacaville Reporter via AP)



Smoke pours from a wildfire near Duchesne, Utah, Thursday, July 5, 2018.
(Ravell Call/The Deseret News via AP)



Smoke rises from a wildfire near Strawberry Reservoir in Utah, Thursday, July 5, 2018. (Ravell Call/The Deseret News via AP)



Flames of a wildfire rise near Duchesne, Utah, Thursday, July 5, 2018. (Ravell Call/The Deseret News via AP)



This photo shows burned structures caused by a wildfire near Duchesne, Utah, Thursday, July 5, 2018. (Ravell Call/The Deseret News via AP)



Celia Corona and her son Marco embrace as they sleep after evacuating from a wildfire in El Jebel, on Thursday, July 5, 2018, at the Basalt High School, in Basalt, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse /The Aspen Times via AP)



Volunteer Sara Fisher hands a meal from a Salvation Army truck to an evacuee of a wildfire Thursday, July 5, 2018, in El Jebel, Colo. (Anna Stonehouse/The Aspen Times via AP)

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