

California crews scramble to keep flames from reaching homes

August 10 2018, by Marcio Sanchez And Amanda Lee Myers



King Bass, 6, left, sits and watches the Holy Fire burn from on top of his parents' car as his sister Princess, 5, rests her head on his shoulder Thursday night, Aug. 9, 2018 in Lake Elsinore, Calif. More than a thousand firefighters battled to keep a raging Southern California forest fire from reaching foothill neighborhoods Friday before the expected return of blustery winds that drove the flames to new ferocity a day earlier. (AP Photo/Patrick Record)

Firefighters worked Friday to keep a growing Southern California forest

fire that is feeding on dry brush and trees from reaching foothill neighborhoods a day after flames roared to new ferocity and came within yards of homes.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for Orange and Riverside counties as the [fire](#) carved its way along ridges in the Cleveland National Forest.

Some hillsides were allowed to burn under the watchful eyes of firefighters as a way to reduce fuel and make it harder for [flames](#) to jump roadways into communities if winds pick up again.

Aircraft dropped liquid that suppresses flames as people sprayed their houses with water from garden hoses when the blaze south of Los Angeles flared again Thursday evening, propelled by 20-mph (30-kph) gusts.

Shannon Hicks, 59, defied an evacuation order and watched in awe as firefighters faced down a storm of flames that descended toward her street in the city of Lake Elsinore.

"It looked like a tornado. The flames were just twirling and twirling," she said. "I thought, there's no way they're saving my house. But somehow they did."

Hundreds more firefighters joined the battle, bringing the total to 1,200. The so-called Holy Fire has chewed through 28 square miles (72 square kilometers) of dense chaparral and is only partially contained.



A firefighter lights a back burn while battling the Hat Fire, Thursday, Aug. 9, 2018, near Fall River Mills, Calif. (AP Photo/John Locher)

It's one of nearly 20 blazes across the state, which is seeing earlier, longer and more destructive wildfire seasons because of drought, warmer weather attributed to climate change and home construction deeper into forests.

Firefighters aided by cooler weather have made good progress against a blaze burning for nearly a month near Yosemite National Park in the northern part of the state. The park was set to reopen Tuesday after a two-week closure, park spokesman Scott Gediman said Friday.

Visitors should expect limited hours and visitor services next week as the park returns to normal, he said. The blaze didn't reach the heart of the park and instead burned in remote areas, making roads inaccessible and

polluting the area with smoke.

The closure dealt a financial blow to Yosemite at the height of the summer season and caused upheaval for thousands of tourists whose summer trips were canceled.

Officials also gained more control over two other major Northern California wildfires, including the largest in recorded state history.



The Holy Fire burns near homes in the Cleveland National Forest in Lake Elsinore, Calif., Thursday, Aug. 9, 2018. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

In the south, Cleveland National Forest officials tweeted that the flames outside Los Angeles were growing as fast as crews can build lines to contain them.

"We continue to actively engage, but cannot get ahead of the fire," the statement said.

Teresita Reyes was among some 20,000 people forced to evacuate, saying she was attending a wedding Wednesday when she received the order. The 51-year-old state health inspector congratulated the couple and left quietly for her house in the city of Lake Elsinore to grab important documents.

Since then, Reyes and her husband have been staying at a hotel with a faulty air conditioner while their three dogs and cat are holed up at the family's plumbing business.

"It is nerve-wracking and unreal," she said. "We were on pins and needles for a little while there because it got real close."



A family sits along the shore of Lake Elsinore as they watch the Holy Fire burn

in the distance on Thursday night, Aug. 9, 2018 in Lake Elsinore, Calif. More than a thousand firefighters battled to keep a raging Southern California forest fire from reaching foothill neighborhoods Friday before the expected return of blustery winds that drove the flames to new ferocity a day earlier. (AP Photo/Patrick Record)

The fire was deliberately set. A resident of the small community of Holy Jim Canyon in the national forest has been charged with arson and other crimes and appeared in a jailhouse courtroom Friday.

Forrest Clark, 51, made several outbursts, claiming his life was being threatened. A court commissioner postponed his arraignment until Aug. 17 and ordered bail to remain at \$1 million.

"May I pay for that immediately?" asked Clark, who could face life in prison if convicted.

At one point, Clark covered his face with his long hair and later stared directly at a camera providing a video feed to reporters outside the courtroom.

Michael Milligan, chief of the Holy Jim Volunteer Fire Department, has told the Orange County Register that Clark had a decade-long feud with neighbors and had sent him threatening emails last week, including one that said, "This place will burn."



The Holy Fire burns in the Cleveland National Forest at a hillside near homes in Lake Elsinore, Calif., Thursday, Aug. 9, 2018. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

The fire—named for the canyon where it started—destroyed a dozen cabins after it broke out Monday. Firefighters were trying to keep flames away from Santiago Peak, where critical communication infrastructure is located.

Crews turned a corner in their battle against Northern California's Mendocino Complex Fire, the largest-ever in California, getting it halfway contained. The fire more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of Sacramento has destroyed more than 100 homes and blackened an area about the size of Los Angeles.

Near the Northern California city of Redding, the year's deadliest fire was nearly half-surrounded and was burning into remote and rugged

forest land.



Traffic makes their way south on I-15 as ash from the Holy Fire fills the air on Aug. 9, 2018 in Lake Elsinore, Calif. More than a thousand firefighters battled to keep a raging Southern California forest fire from reaching foothill neighborhoods Friday before the expected return of blustery winds that drove the flames to new ferocity a day earlier. (AP Photo/Patrick Record)

The fires all grew explosively in the past two weeks as winds whipped the flames through forest and rural areas full of timber and brush that is bone-dry from years of drought and a summer of record-breaking heat.

Air quality has been another problem. A smoky haze stretches from the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range to Sacramento and hovers over the San Francisco Bay Area, with most major population centers in between enduring air quality that's considered dangerous for many residents.

The sheer size of the fires brings new horror as the state still reels from enormous blazes last year and has yet to hit its most dangerous months historically.



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