

California's deadliest wildfire finally tamed

November 25 2018



A burnt car at a gas station on November 11, 2018 after the "Camp" fire tore through the region near Pulga, east of Paradise, California

The deadliest and most destructive fire in California's history was finally brought totally under control by firefighters, more than two weeks after it erupted, authorities said on Sunday.

The so-called Camp Fire, which broke out on November 8, is so far known to have killed 85 people.

The Butte County Sheriff's department said that they had mistakenly added two people to an earlier death toll of 87.

However late Sunday they increased the number of missing people to 296 from 249—still considerably lower than the 474 reported missing on Friday.

"#CampFire ... is now 100% contained," Cal Fire, the state fire authority, said in a bulletin on Twitter.

Only 54 of the fatalities have been identified, according to the local sheriff's office in Butte County, a rural area north of the state capital Sacramento.

A total of 153,336 acres were affected by the fire, with nearly 14,000 homes and hundreds of other structures destroyed.

Heavy downfalls that have soaked the fire zone in the past days helped douse the remaining flames, but also made it more difficult for crews searching for bodies.

The Camp Fire was the second major blaze to hit California in recent weeks with a fire in the Malibu area near Los Angeles also killing three people.



A home is overshadowed by towering smoke plumes on November 8, 2018 as the Camp fire races through town in Paradise, California

The smoke from the Camp Fire was so intense that schools in San Francisco had to close at one point earlier this month as did the city's famed cable car and Alcatraz Island.

California's governor, Jerry Brown, has warned that the state can expect a growing number of major fires as a result of global warming.

US President Donald Trump, who visited one of the worst-hit towns called Paradise last weekend, caused some consternation by saying that the fires were due in part to forestry mismanagement.

Ahead of the announcement that the fire has been totally tamed, authorities had already begun letting residents return to some of the worst hit areas to inspect the damage to their homes.

In a joint bulletin posted on Saturday, the police and fire service said evacuation orders that had in place for some areas over the last fortnight were being lifted for both residents and non-residents, while warning that essential services were still "very limited."



Firefighters battle flames at a burning apartment complex in Paradise, California on November 9, 2018

"Prior to returning home, residents are encouraged to take steps to

ensure they have food, water and fuel for their vehicles," said the statement.

While Brown has warned that mega fires such as those in Butte and Malibu will cease to be "abnormal" events, the state has allocated about \$1 billion over the next five years for fire prevention.

Much of the cash will go on education and suppression activities such as clearing grasses and other vegetation, according to officials.

But many experts are calling for more restrictions on housing being built in forests as a means of eliminating danger before the blazes even break out. "I think people are thinking about if there is a way we can design the new Paradise that can look like more of a European village or a ski town, and not have houses out in the forests," Bill Stewart, co-director of the Center for Forestry at the University of California, Berkeley told AFP.

A recent study found that one third of all US houses now are located in what researchers refer to as the wildland-urban interface, where houses and forest vegetation intermingle.

While Trump has repeatedly expressed skepticism about global warming, a new report by his administration warned Friday that climate change will cost the US hundreds of billions of dollars annually by century's end unless drastic action is taken to cut carbon emissions.



Noah Fisher (R) and Dusty Cope (L) look through the remains of their home that was destroyed by the Camp Fire in Paradise, California, in a photo taken on November 22, 2018

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