

Smoke hampers rescue as California fires burn record 2 million acres

September 8 2020



A firefighter douses flames as they push towards homes during the Creek Fire in the Cascadel Woods area of unincorporated Madera County, California on September 7, 2020

Wildfires in California have torched a record more than two million acres, the state fire department said Monday, as smoke hampered efforts

to airlift dozens of people trapped by an uncontrolled blaze.

The Creek Fire in northern California has so far spread to 135,525 acres, destroyed 65 structures and is out of control, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) said in an update.

Several communities in the area northeast of Fresno have been ordered to evacuate due to immediate threat to life.

Dozens of people have been trapped by the rapidly-expanding fire and Fresno Fire Battalion chief Tony Escobedo said smoke was hampering efforts by military choppers to rescue them.

"The difficulty of the helicopters trying to get through the smoke has proven a challenge during the day," he told reporters Monday night.

"They weren't able to land several times, several attempts throughout the day," he said.

"We are going to try to do it again this evening with their night vision capability. We have reports in excess of 50 people or more," (trapped in several locations) he said.

Fresno Fire Department tweeted that "military pilots tried valiantly to land but heavy smoke conditions prevented a safe approach, another effort will be made shortly to evacuate the trapped people in Lake Edison and China Peak using night vision."



Map of California showing active wildfires as of Sep 7.

People trapped were currently safe in temporary areas of refuge, said Lieutenant Brandon Purcell from Fresno Sheriff's Office, calling the fire

"an unprecedented disaster for Fresno County."

Over the weekend, military helicopters rescued more than 200 people trapped by the fire near Mammoth Pool Reservoir.

The region has seen many major fires in recent years but Sierra National Forest forest supervisor Dean Gould said at the briefing Monday night that Creek Fire was likely the most aggressive and "is in a class by itself."

The fire department said 976 personnel were battling the blaze, which had continued to grow "under extreme conditions."

'Record-breaking'

The record two million acres destroyed was hit as the wildfire season still has roughly two months to go in the most populous US state and as thousands of firefighters were battling flames during a scorching heatwave.



The rapidly-expanding Creek Fire in northern California has so far spread to 135,525 acres, destroyed 65 structures

"In the past 33 years we have not seen a single year go over two million acres until this year," said Cal Fire spokeswoman Lynne Tolmachoff.

"This is definitely record-breaking and we have not even come close to the end of fire season yet."

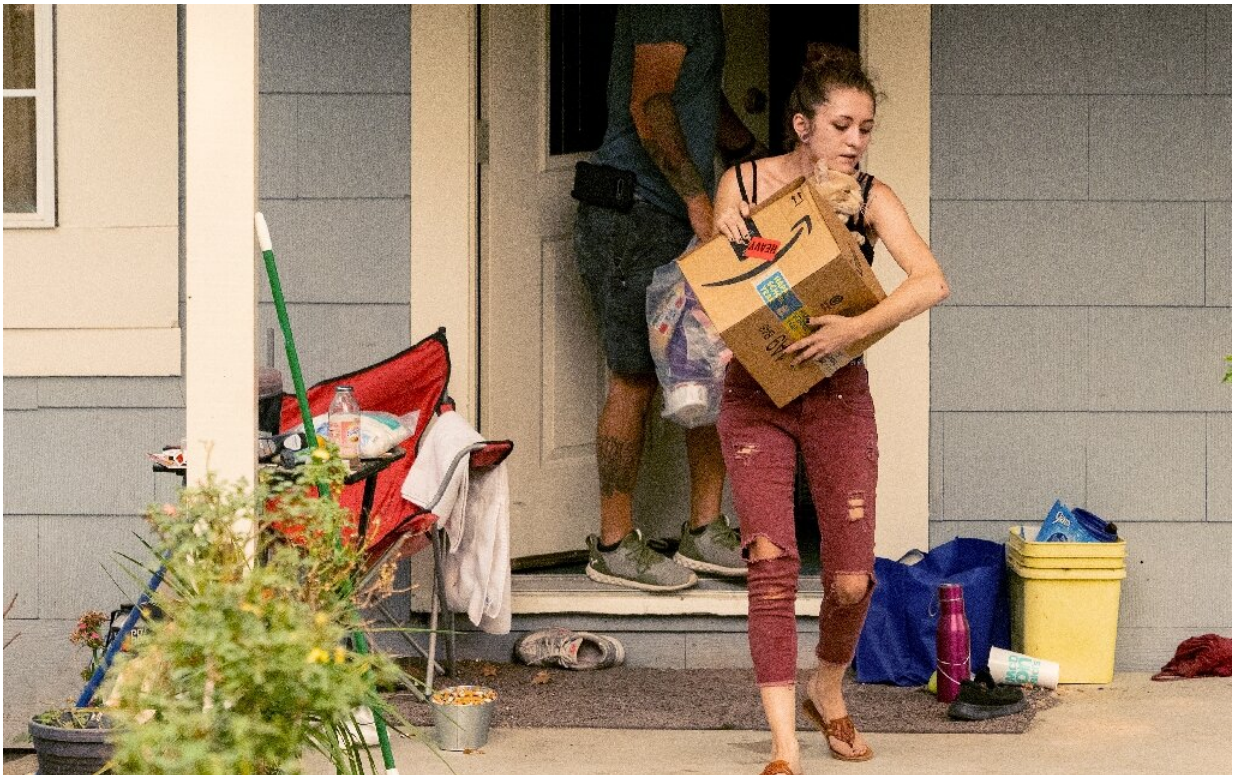
At least seven people have died as a result of this year's fires and some 3,800 structures have been damaged or destroyed, according to Cal Fire figures.

The last time the number of acres burned got close to two million was in

2018, the same year as the devastating Camp Fire, when a little more than 1.9 million acres (769,000 hectares) went up in flames.

More than 14,100 firefighters were battling 24 different wildfires as of Monday afternoon, the fire department said in a tweet.

Another rapidly growing blaze, the Oak Fire, began Sunday in Mendocino county and has already grown to 1,000 acres.



Residents evacuate with their pets during the Creek Fire in the North Fork area of unincorporated Madera County, California on September 7, 2020



Evacuee Clay Brazil waits to be picked up during the Creek Fire in the North Fork area of unincorporated Madera County, California on September 7, 2020

Cal Fire said that 83 personnel were on hand to battle the blaze, which was uncontained.

Evacuation orders were in effect throughout southern California on Monday afternoon.

Record temperatures over the three-day Labor Day weekend have aggravated already dangerous fire conditions and further stressed exhausted California firefighters.

The state has been baking under scorching conditions with temperatures

reaching a record 121 degrees Fahrenheit (49 Celsius) on Sunday in Woodland Hills, an all-time high for Los Angeles county, the National Weather Service said.

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Citation: Smoke hampers rescue as California fires burn record 2 million acres (2020, September 8) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-09-california-million-acres.html>

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