

# Erratic Oregon wildfire destroys dozens of homes, expands

July 17 2021, by Gillian Flaccus

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In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, the Bootleg Fire burns at night near Highway 34 in southern Oregon on Thursday, July 15, 2021. Firefighters scrambled Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous wildfires across the U.S. West that are straining resources. The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S., has torched more than 377 square miles (976 square kilometers), and crews had little control of it. Credit: Jason Pettigrew/Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP

Firefighters scrambled Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous wildfires across the U.S. West that are straining resources.

Crews had to flee the fire lines late Thursday after a [dangerous "fire cloud"](#) started to collapse, threatening them with strong downdrafts and flying embers. An initial review Friday showed the Bootleg Fire destroyed 67 homes and 117 outbuildings overnight in one county. Authorities were still counting the losses in a second county where the flames are surging up to 4 miles (6 kilometers) a day.

The blaze has forced 2,000 people to evacuate and is threatening 5,000 buildings that include homes and smaller structures in a rural area just north of the California border, fire spokeswoman Holly Krake said. Active flames are surging along 200 miles (322 kilometers) of the fire's perimeter, she said, and it's expected to merge with a smaller, but equally explosive fire by nightfall.

The Bootleg Fire is now 377 square miles (976 square kilometers)—larger than the area of New York City—and mostly uncontained.

"We're likely going to continue to see fire growth over miles and miles of active fire line," Krake said. "We are continuing to add thousands of acres a day, and it has the potential each day, looking forward into the weekend, to continue those 3- to 4-mile runs."



In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, the Bootleg Fire burns at night near Highway 34 in southern Oregon on Thursday, July 15, 2021. Firefighters scrambled Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous wildfires across the U.S. West that are straining resources. The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S., has torched more than 377 square miles (976 square kilometers), and crews had little control of it. Credit: Jason Pettigrew/Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP

The inferno has stymied firefighters for a week with erratic winds and extremely dangerous fire behavior, including ominous fire clouds that form from superheated air rising to a height of up to 6 miles (10 kilometers) above the blaze.

"We're expecting those same exact conditions to continue and worsen into the weekend," Krake said of the fire-induced clouds.

Early on, the fire doubled in size almost daily, and strong winds Thursday again pushed the flames rapidly. Similar winds gusting up to 30 mph (48 kph) were expected Friday.

It's burning an area north of the California border that has been gripped by extreme drought, like most of the American West.

Extremely dry conditions and heat waves tied to climate change have swept the region, making wildfires harder to fight. Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.



In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, columns of smoke from the Bootleg Fire rise behind a water tender in southern Oregon on Friday, July 16, 2021. Firefighters scrambled Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous wildfires across the U.S. West that are straining resources. The

Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S., has torched more than 377 square miles (976 square kilometers), and crews had little control of it. Credit: Lisa Chambers/Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP

The blaze was most active on its northeastern flank, pushed by winds from the south toward the rural communities of Summer Lake and Silver Lake. Paisley, to the east of the fire, was also at risk. All the towns are in Lake County, a remote area of lakes and wildlife refuges with a total population of about 8,000.

The Bootleg Fire is one of at least a dozen major fires burning in Washington state, Oregon and California as a siege of wildfires takes hold across the drought-stricken West. There were 70 active large fires and complexes of multiple fires that have burned nearly 1,659 square miles (4,297 square kilometers) in the U.S., the National Interagency Fire Center said.

In the Pacific Northwest, firefighters say they are facing conditions more typical of late summer or fall than early July.



In this photo provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, smoke from the Bootleg Fire rises behind the town of Bonanza, Ore., on Thursday, July 15, 2021. Firefighters scrambled Friday to control a raging inferno in southeastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous wildfires across the U.S. West that are straining resources. The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S., has torched more than 377 square miles (976 square kilometers), and crews had little control of it. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP



In this photo taken with a drone provided by the Bootleg Fire Incident Command, a pyrocumulus cloud, also known as a fire cloud, is seen over the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon on Wednesday, July 14, 2021. Smoke and heat from a massive wildfire in southeastern Oregon are creating "fire clouds" over the blaze—dangerous columns of smoke and ash that can reach up to 30,000 feet (9,144 meters) and are visible for more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) away. Authorities have put these clouds at the top of the list of the extreme fire behavior they are seeing on the Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire burning in the U.S. Credit: Bootleg Fire Incident Command via AP





In this photo provided by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshall, flames and smoke rise from the Bootleg fire in southern Oregon on Wednesday, July 14, 2021. The largest fire in the U.S. on Wednesday was burning in southern Oregon, to the northeast of the wildfire that ravaged a tribal community less than a year ago. The lightning-caused Bootleg fire was encroaching on the traditional territory of the Klamath Tribes, which still have treaty rights to hunt and fish on the land, and sending huge, churning plumes of smoke into the sky visible for miles. Credit: John Hendricks/Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal via AP



Firefighters spray water from Union Pacific Railroad's fire train while battling the Dixie Fire in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021.

Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Firefighters spray water from Union Pacific Railroad's fire train while battling the Dixie Fire in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021.

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Firefighters spray water from Union Pacific Railroad's fire train while battling the Dixie Fire in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021.

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Benjamin Bell watches as the Dixie Fire burns along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Jessica and Benjamin Bell watch as the Dixie Fire burns along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Jessica Bell takes a video as the Dixie Fire burns along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Jessica Bell watches as the Dixie Fire burns along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger





Smoke envelops trees as the Sugar Fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex Fire, burns in Doyle, Calif., Friday, July 9, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Smoke billows behind power lines as the Dixie Fire burns along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger



Smoke rises from the Dixie Fire burning along Highway 70 in Plumas National Forest, Calif., on Friday, July 16, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Noah Berger

About 200 firefighters were battling but had little control over the 17-square-mile (44-square-kilometer) Red Apple Fire near the Washington city of Wenatchee renowned for its apples. The flames were threatening apple orchards and an electrical substation, but no buildings have been lost, officials said.

In California, the [Tamarack Fire](#) in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest quickly grew to 2.5 square miles (6.5 square kilometers) on Friday, prompting evacuations in the Markleeville area in Alpine County. The blaze prompted the cancelation of Saturday's ["Death Ride,"](#) a 103-mile (165.76-kilometer) bicycle ride in the so-called California

Alps over three Sierra Nevada mountain passes.

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