

California wildfire dangers may be spreading to the south

August 26 2021, by Christopher Weber and John Antczak



A firefighter tries to extinguish the flames at a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

A wildfire that burned several homes near Los Angeles may signal that

the region is facing the same dangers that have scorched Northern California this summer.

The [fire](#) in San Bernardino County erupted Wednesday afternoon, quickly burned several hundred acres and damaged or destroyed at least a dozen homes and outbuildings in the foothills northeast of Los Angeles, fire officials said. Crews used shovels and bulldozers and mounted an air attack to keep the South Fire from the tiny communities of Lytle Creek and Scotland.

About 600 homes and other buildings were threatened by the blaze along with power transmission lines and 1,000 residents were under evacuation orders.

By nightfall, firefighters appeared to have gained the upper hand and few flames were seen. But the blaze was worrying because Southern California's high fire season typically comes later in the year when strong, dry Santa Ana winds blast out of the interior and flow toward the coast.

After a few cooler days, California's southern region was expected to experience a return of hot weather into the weekend that could boost wildfire risks. In addition to dangerously dry conditions, the region faces firefighting staffing that is increasingly stretched thin, said Lyn Sieliet, spokeswoman for the San Bernardino National Forest.



A firefighter works on a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

"Some of our firefighters that we normally have on our forests are working on fires in Northern California, or Idaho and Washington," she told KTLA-TV. "We don't have the full staff that we normally do."

The largest fires in the state and in the nation were in Northern California, where they have burned down small mountain towns and destroyed huge swaths of tinder-dry forest.

The Caldor Fire has destroyed 500 homes since Aug. 14 in the Sierra Nevada southwest of Lake Tahoe, including much of the tiny hamlet of

Grizzly Flats. It was 12% contained and threatened more than 17,000 structures.

Buck Minitch, a firefighter with the Pioneer Fire Protection District, was called to the fire lines last week while his wife fled their Grizzly Flats home with their two daughters, three dogs, a kitten and duffel bag of clothes, the San Jose Mercury News [reported](#).



A firefighter tries to extinguish the flames at a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

Hannah Minitch evacuated to her parents' property and the next morning

received a text from her husband showing only a chimney where their house once stood. The two wept briefly during a telephone call before he got back to work.

"We've got nothing left here," she recalled him saying. "I've got to go protect what's left for other people."

At times the wind-driven fire was burning 1,000 acres (405 hectares) of land per hour and on Wednesday it was less than two dozen miles (37 kilometers) from Lake Tahoe, an alpine vacation and tourist spot that straddles the California-Nevada state line.

There weren't any evacuations in Tahoe but the fire continued to cast a sickly yellow pall of smoke over the scenic region.

The communities of South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City on the lake's west shore had the nation's worst air pollution at midmorning Wednesday, according to AirNow, a partnership of federal, state and local air agencies.



Homeowners Jose Lamas, center, his wife, Maria Covarrubias, right, and his daughter Astrid Covarrubias walk through the smoke after visiting their burned-out home from the South Fire in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Vehicles are seen burning as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Homeowner Jose Lamas, right, and his daughter Astrid Covarrubias survey the charred debris left in his burned-out home from the South Fire in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021.
Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Homeowner Maria Covarrubias reacts after seeing her home burn down from the South Fire in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Firefighters watch as a helicopter drops water at the South Fire burning in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



A firefighter tries to extinguish the flames at a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



A firefighter tries to extinguish the flames at a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



A sculpture is seen at a burning house as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021.
Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Firefighters watch as the South Fire burns in Lytle Creek, San Bernardino County, north of Rialto, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



Firefighters conduct a firing operation to burn fuels Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



A tree torches along Centennial Drive Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Vehicles burn and explode in a bursts of flames Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



A utility pole and several outbuildings were damaged if not destroyed in the Idaho Maryland spot fire Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



A tree burns along Whispering Pines Lane in Grass Valley while the Bennett Fire approached Idaho Maryland Road, prompting evacuations Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Burning vegetation sends hot ash and smoke into the air along Whispering Pines and Centennial Drive that prompted evacuations Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Flames ignite in dry vegetation off of Idaho Maryland Road Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Trees burn while a Cal Fire Captain works near the intersection of Whispering Pines Lane and Centennial Drive, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021 in Grass Valley, Calif. Northern California wildfires that have burned hundreds of homes were joined by a blaze east of Los Angeles that also destroyed buildings and may signal that the south will face the same dangers. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Smoke rises from the mountains as the South fire burns in San Bernardino County north of Rialto, Calif., seen from Fontana, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. In Southern California, an unknown number of remote homes and outbuildings burned after a fire broke out Wednesday afternoon and quickly ran through tinder-dry brush in mountains northeast of Los Angeles. Evacuations were ordered, and crews mounted an air attack to keep the South Fire from the tiny communities of Lytle Creek and Scotland near the Cajon Pass in San Bernardino County. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo Chiu

Meanwhile, California's Dixie Fire, the second-largest in state history at 1,160 square miles (3,004 square kilometers), was burning only about 65 miles (104 kilometers) to the north. It was 45% contained. Some 700 homes were among nearly 1,300 buildings that have been destroyed.

In the southern Sierra Nevada, there was growing concern as the French Fire expanded near Lake Isabella, a popular fishing and boating destination. About 10 communities were under evacuation orders. The fire has blackened 32 square miles (83 square kilometers) since Aug. 18.

Smoke from the fires had fouled air farther south. The South Coast Air Quality Management District issued an advisory through Thursday morning for large portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Nationally, 92 large fires were burning in 13 mainly Western states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

Climate change has made the West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

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