

# Forest Service maxed out as wildfires break across US West

August 14 2021, by Eugene Garcia and Daisy Nguyen

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After walking down a gravel road to do recon on a fire cresting into the trees, a wildland firefighter grimaces as he walks back to his crew on Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021, at the Bedrock Fire north of Lenore, Idaho. Lenore is about 30 miles east of Lewiston, Idaho. Credit: Pete Caster/Lewiston Tribune via AP

The U.S. Forest Service said Friday it's operating in crisis mode, fully

deploying firefighters and maxing out its support system as wildfires continue to break out across the U.S. West, threatening thousands of homes and entire towns.

The roughly 21,000 federal firefighters working on the ground is more than double the number of firefighters sent to contain forest fires at this time a year ago, and the agency is facing "critical resources limitations," said Anthony Scardina, a deputy forester for the agency's Pacific Southwest region.

An estimated 6,170 firefighters alone are battling the Dixie Fire in Northern California, the largest of 100 [large fires](#) burning in 14 states, with dozens more burning in western Canada.

The [fire](#) began a month ago and has destroyed more than 1,000 homes, businesses and other structures, much of it in the small town of Greenville in the northern Sierra Nevada.

The fire had ravaged more than 800 square miles (well over 2,000 square kilometers)—an area larger than the city of London—and continued to threaten more than a dozen rural and forest communities.

Containment lines for the fire held overnight, but it was just 31% surrounded. Gusty and erratic winds were threatening to spread the fire to Westwood, a lumber town of 1,700. Lightning could spark new blazes even as crews try to surround a number of other [forest fires](#) ignited by lightning last month.



A sign for The Rock on the Ridge Church is seen in Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfires Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia

"Mother nature just kind of keeps throwing us obstacles our way," said Edwin Zuniga, a spokesman with the California Department of Forestry

and Fire Protection, working together with the Forest Service to tamp out the blaze.

Meanwhile, firefighters and residents were scrambling to save hundreds of homes as flames advance across the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana.

The blaze was still burning near the tribal headquarters town of Lame Deer, where a mandatory evacuation remained in place and a second fire was threatening from the opposite direction.

Smoke from the blazes grew so thick Friday morning that the health clinic in Lame Deer was shut down after its air filters could not keep up with the pollution, Northern Cheyenne Tribe spokesperson Angel Becker said.

Smoke [drove air pollution levels to unhealthy or very unhealthy levels](#) in portions of Montana, Idaho, Oregon Washington and Northern California, according to Environmental Protection Agency air quality monitoring.



Burnt vehicles are seen in Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfire Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia

**An air quality alert covering seven Montana counties warned of extremely high levels of small pollution particles found in smoke, which can cause lung issues and other health problems if inhaled.**

The fires near Lane Deer combined have burned 275 square miles (710 square kilometers) this week, so far sparing homes but causing extensive damage to pasture lands that ranchers depend on to feed their cows and horses.

Gusts and low humidity were creating extremely dangerous conditions as flames devoured brush, short grass and timber, fire officials said.

Hot, dry weather with strong afternoon winds also propelled several fires in Washington state, and similar weather was expected into the weekend, fire officials said.

In southeastern Oregon, two new wildfires started by lightning Thursday near the California border were spreading through juniper trees, sagebrush and evergreen trees.



A metal bench stands in front of a burned structure in Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfire Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia

Gov. Kate Brown declared an emergency for one of the fires to mobilize crews and other resources to the area of ranches, rural subdivisions and

RV parks about 14 miles (23 kilometers) from the small town of Lakeview.

The blaze grew from a lightning strike to 11 square miles (28 square kilometers) in less than 24 hours, said Tamara Schmidt, a U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman.

Authorities Thursday evening ordered the evacuation of an RV park that stood in the path of the Oregon's Patton Meadow Fire.

The fires are near the area torched Oregon's Bootleg Fire which started July 6 and burned an area more than half the size of Rhode Island before crews gained the upper hand. The fire is not yet fully contained and was the nation's largest until being eclipsed by the Dixie Fire.

Triple-digit temperatures and bone-dry conditions in Oregon, enduring a third day of extreme heat, could increase fire risks through the weekend.





A church sign is seen partially melted in Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfire Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia



The remains of a burned U.S Postal truck is seen in Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfires Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia



Smoke from a wildfire obscure the empty streets of Greenville, Calif., after the Dixie Wildfires Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history is running through forestlands as fire crews try to protect rural communities from flames that have destroyed hundreds of homes. The Dixie Fire is the largest single fire in California history and the largest currently burning in the U.S. It is about half the size of the August Complex, a series of lightning-caused 2020 fires across seven counties that were fought together and that state officials consider California's largest wildfire overall. Credit: AP Photo/Eugene Garcia



Charred metal and ash are all that remain of "Pete" Reyna's Chicago Park home which burned Wednesday night due to the River Fire, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Charred metal and ash are all that remain of "Pete" Reyna's Chicago Park home which burned Wednesday night due to the River Fire, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



The burned vehicles of "Pete" Reyna await cleanup and removal from this Chicago Park neighborhood, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP





A classic Chevrolet El Camino valued at \$35,000 was lost along with the home of "Pete" Reyna Wednesday evening in Chicago Park, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Charred remnants of vehicles sit in the driveway of Porfirio "Pete" Reyna's Rumford Court home in Chicago Park where everything, including his home were a total loss due to the River Fire. Reyna, like others have already begun looking at rebuilding, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



PG&E has completed their damage assessment of the River Fire and has begun repairing the damaged infrastructure, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



Smoke from a wildfire obscures a stand of trees on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021, near Ashland, Mont. In southeastern Montana, communities in and around the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation were ordered to evacuate as the Richard Spring Fire grew amid erratic winds. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Brown



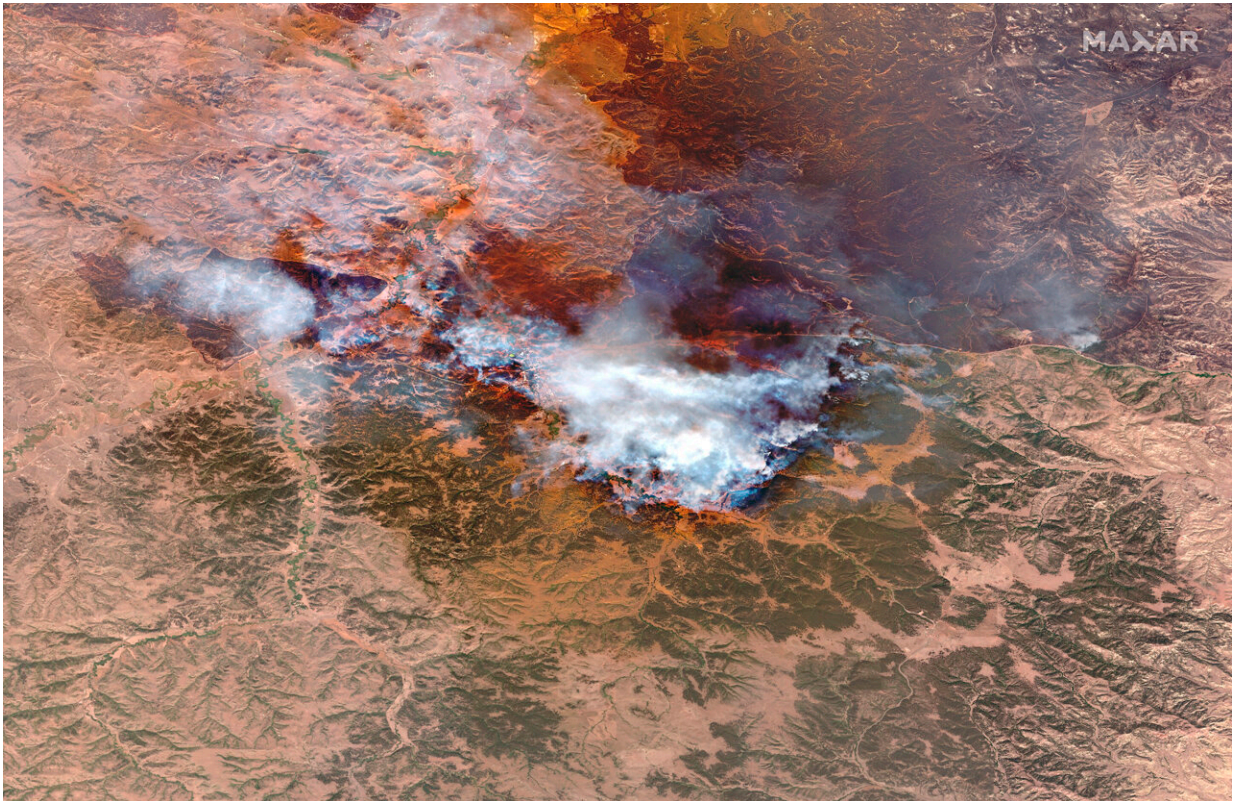
The fire map of the River Fire, which started Wednesday Aug. 4, shows the 2,600 acre footprint which straddles the Nevada County and Placer County borders, Aug. 7, 2021. Credit: Elias Funez/The Union via AP



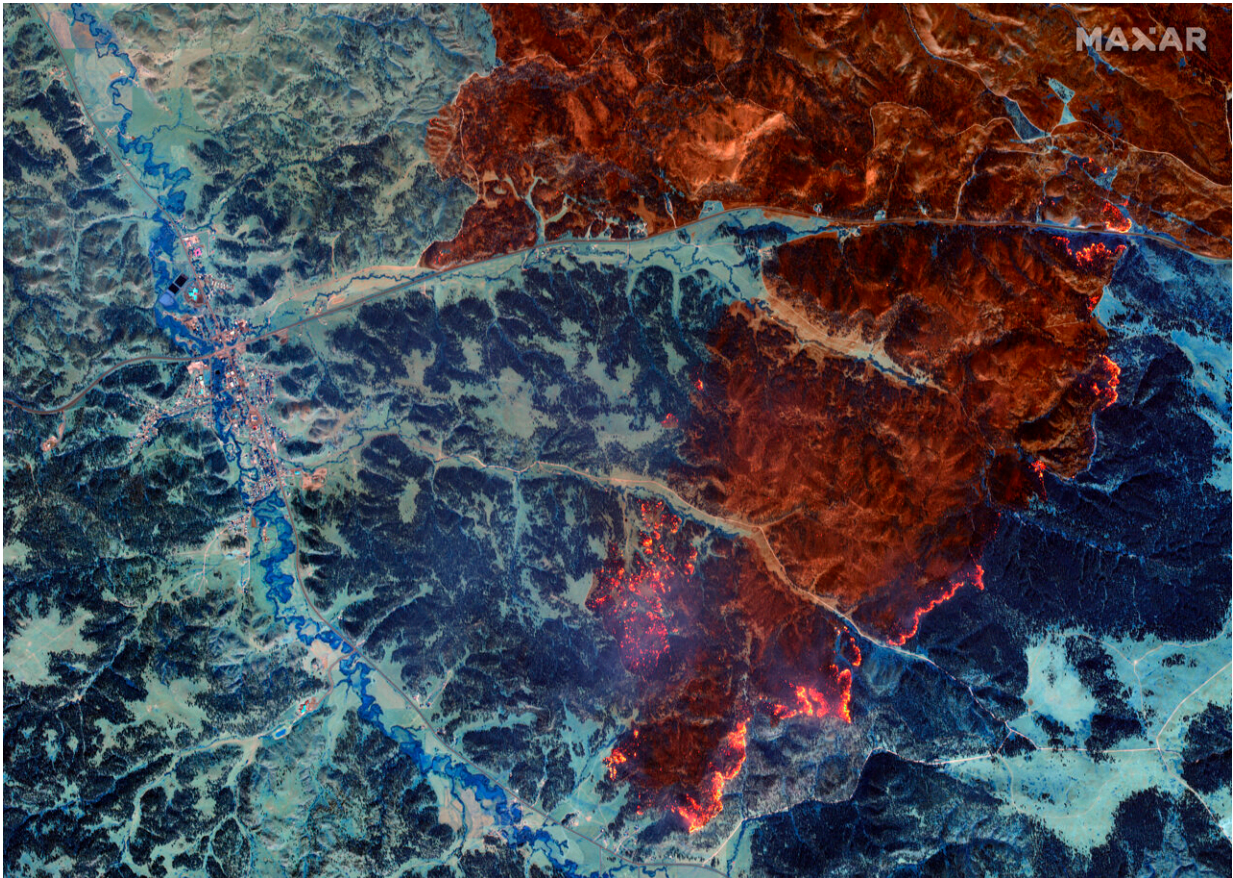
Firefighters watch a hillside burn on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, Wednesday, Aug 11, 2021, near Lame Deer, Mont. The Richard Spring fire was threatening hundreds of homes as it burned across the reservation. Credit: AP Photo/Matthew Brown



A plume of smoke rises from the Richard Spring wildfire on Wednesday, Aug. 11, 2021, north of Lame Deer, Mont. The fire spread quickly Wednesday as strong winds pushed the flames across rough, forested terrain. Credit: AP photo/Matthew Brown



This satellite image provided courtesy of Maxar Technologies shows the natural color overview of the Lame Deer and Richard Spring wildfire in Montana on Friday, Aug. 13, 2021. Maxar collected new high-resolution satellite imagery Aug. 13th of the two wildfires burning in southeastern Montana near the evacuated town of Lame Deer. Credit: Satellite Image ©2021 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows a shortwave infrared (SWIR) satellite imagery overview of the Lame Deer and Richard Spring wildfire in Montana on Friday, Aug. 13, 2021. Maxar SWIR satellite imagery is able to penetrate the wildfire smoke and clearly detects the hot spots and active fires. Burned trees and vegetation appears in shades of orange/rust, healthy (not burned) vegetation appears in shades of blue. Credit: Satellite Image ©2021 Maxar Technologies via AP

Climate change has made the U.S. 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.

More than 6,000 square miles (almost 16,000 square kilometers) have



been burned in the U.S. so far this year. That's well ahead of the amount burned by this point last year, but below the 10-year average, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Parts of Europe also are burning, including in Greece, where where a massive wildfire has decimated forests and torched homes, and was still smoldering 10 days after it started.

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