

Major wildfires threatening towns in Montana, California

August 13 2021, by Matthew Brown



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

Wildfires in Montana threatened rural towns and ranchland, and victims of a California blaze returned to their incinerated town even as the region faced another round of dangerous weather.

Firefighters and residents have scrambled to save hundreds of homes as flames advance across the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana.

An evacuation order was lifted Friday morning for about 600 people in and around the town of Ashland, just east of the reservation, signaling progress on the blaze that had burned out of control since Sunday.

But the [fire](#) 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.

The two fires 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.

As the blaze raged across rugged hills and narrow ravines, tribal member Darlene Small helped her grandson move about 100 head of cattle to a new pasture, only to relocate them twice more as the flames from the Richard Spring fire bore down. An [extreme drought](#) that's blanketing the West has made matters worse by stunting vegetation untouched by fire.



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

"They've got to have pasture where there's water. If there's no water,

there's no good pasture," Small said. Particularly hard hit were some ranchers already depending on surplus grass after a fire burned them off their normal pasture last year, she said.

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

The same conditions turned California's Dixie Fire into a furious blaze that last week burned down much of the small town of Greenville in the northern Sierra Nevada. The fire that began a month ago has destroyed some 550 homes.

Residents were trying to cope with the magnitude of the losses.

"Everything that I own is now ashes or twisted metal. That's just all it is," said Greenville resident Ken Donnell, who escaped with just the clothes on his back.



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

Donnell said he was heart-broken but "by God, I'm gonna smile. Because you know, it just makes things a little bit better and a little bit better right now is a lot."

Sam Prentice, a firefighter for the USDA Forest Service battled the flames in Greenville on Aug. 5, when the town was leveled. He was not optimistic on Greenville's ability to rebuild.

"Essentially it starts to become an archeology site—kind of a testament to the fire era that we're in right now," said Prentice. "It's daunting."

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.

Despite firefighting progress, it was 31% contained and fire officials warned that [hot weather](#) would continue and Northern California would see a red flag warning of critical fire weather beginning Friday afternoon. The weather would bring a chance of dry lightning that could spark new blazes even as crews continue trying to surround a number of other forest fires that were ignited by lightning last month.



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

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

weekend, fire officials said.

Unstable weather was forecast throughout the drought-stricken West, where more than 100 large fires were burning in more than a dozen states.

In Montana, days of swirling winds spread flames in all directions, torching trees and blowing embers that flew across a dry landscape.

The Richard Spring fire was within about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of the eastern edge of Lame Deer, while a smaller fire was about 5 miles (8 kilometers) to the west, said fire spokesperson Jeni Garcin.

Of most immediate concern were areas southeast of the town, where homes in a rural area were threatened. Fire engines were posted in that area to provide protection if flames threatened houses, Garcin said.



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



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 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



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



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

With 40-foot (12-meter) flames visible from parts of Lane Deer overnight Wednesday, firefighters worked urgently to keep the blaze from destroying houses.

After a brief break in the weather that brought cooler temperatures Thursday, it's expected to start heating up again, reaching the 90s by Saturday and staying hot through Monday. Officials say that will dry out grasses and other fuels and make them more susceptible to burning.

Climate change has made the Western United States 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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