

California wildfire near Lake Tahoe nearly half contained

September 7 2021



In this Sept. 1, 2021, file photo, a firefighter lights a backfire to stop the Caldor Fire from spreading near South Lake Tahoe, Calif. An unidentified firefighter has died of an illness while assigned to one of California's largest wildfires, authorities said Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021, marking the first death in a season that has seen blazes destroy thousands of buildings and force entire towns to flee. Edwin Zuniga with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said he couldn't provide other details on the death. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File

The huge wildfire near the Lake Tahoe resort region was about half contained Tuesday, with the head of California's firefighting agency saying crews largely have been able to keep flames away from populated areas.

"We've been able to herd these fires around and outside of the main community corridors," California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Chief Thom Porter said.

That includes the city of South Lake Tahoe and nearby Meyers that were threatened by the Caldor Fire as it churned east, and the communities of Pollock Pines and nearby Sly Park near where the fire ignited 3 1/2 weeks ago.

"Unfortunately, that hasn't happened in every case," Porter said at a briefing. "But by and large, we've been able to do a great job in protecting lives, property."

Nearly 1,000 structures have been destroyed in the fire near Lake Tahoe on the California-Nevada border, including 776 homes. Many were in the community of Grizzly Flats near where the fire started and was able to burn before officials could divert significant resources from other blazes scorching California.

Others include the Dixie Fire, the second-largest in the state's recorded history, which also has burned through rural, forested communities that firefighters were unable to protect.



South Lake Tahoe Council member John Friedrich waves to passing cars as they honk their horns along Highway 50 near Stateline, Nev., in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., on Monday, Sept. 6, 2021. Friedrich was one of many residents who evacuated due to the Caldor Fire and just returned the day before. Credit: Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group via AP

The perimeter of that fire, which is farther north in the Sierra Nevada, has grown to 800 miles (1,300 kilometers), said Tony Scardina, the U.S. Forest Service's deputy regional forester for California.

That's the equivalent of "driving the I-5 from the southern border of California to the northern border of California," he said of the major north-south interstate.

The Dixie Fire was 59% contained. It began in mid-July and has destroyed more than 1,200 buildings, including 688 homes.

Hot, dry, windy conditions across Northern California this week could spread existing or new fires, Scardina warned.

About 3,125 square miles (8,094 square kilometers) have burned so far this year, similar to the record 2020 fire season, Porter said.

"We are on par with where we were last year. That's sobering, and that is the new reality," the Cal Fire chief said.



Traffic flows along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021. Cal Fire officials downgraded some evacuation orders near Lake Tahoe

and allowed thousands of South Lake Tahoe residents who fled the Caldor Fire last week to return home Sunday. Credit: Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group via AP

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the U.S. West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable.

The entire state showing the potential for extreme fire danger in the next three months, Porter said.

"We're right smack in the middle of wildfire peak season," he said. "And so everybody needs to remain vigilant."

The Caldor Fire grew by just a few hundred acres over 24 hours, to just over 338 square miles (875 square kilometers), and containment lines were holding well, officials said at a briefing.

"We had very little challenging of the line anyplace on the fire," said Tim Ernst, a Cal Fire operations section chief.



Smoke shrouds parts of Lake Tahoe visible from Ski Run Marina in downtown South Lake Tahoe, Calif., Monday, Sept. 6, 2021. Officials lifted the evacuation order on Sunday after firefighters successfully stalled the Caldor Fire from entering the resort town but warned residents that wildfires continued to cloak the city in smoke. Credit: AP Photo/Samuel Metz

Some sections of the perimeter were a concern, but on much of the blaze, the work turned to mopping up, pulling miles of fire hose out of the forest and knocking down dangerously weakened trees.

The fire, which has grown explosively at times, was tamed enough to allow authorities to lift mandatory evacuation orders for the 22,000 residents of South Lake Tahoe on Sunday.

But Ryan Okashima, the California Highway Patrol's assistant

commissioner, urged residents to be cautious both in heeding evacuation warnings and when returning home.

"Please be patient, take your time as you're trying to get back to your homes," he said. "Please don't go to your homes until you're actually told that is clear to go to your homes."

The firefight was so intense that all eight available firefighting aircraft from the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve were called into service Sunday for the first time since 2012, said Maj. Gen. David Baldwin, who heads the California National Guard.



Traffic flows along Highway 50 near Stateline, Nev., as residents begin to return to South Lake Tahoe, Calif., on Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021. Cal Fire officials

downgraded some evacuation orders near Lake Tahoe and allowed thousands of South Lake Tahoe residents who fled the Caldor Fire last week to return home Sunday. Credit: Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group via AP



A sign outside a South Lake Tahoe Fire Station welcomes residents back to town after the lifting of the evacuation order Monday, Sept. 6, 2021. The resort town of some 22,000 was cleared last week due to the Caldor Fire. Credit: AP Photo/Samuel Metz



In this Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021, file photo, an empty beach is seen after a mandatory evacuation was ordered due to the Caldor Fire in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. State fire officials say evacuation orders for the area were reduced to warnings as of 3 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 5. Some 22,000 people had been forced to flee the popular resort and nearby areas last week as the Caldor Fire roared toward it. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File



In this Sept. 2, 2021, file photo, a firefighter carries a water hose toward a spot fire from the Caldor Fire burning along Highway 89 near South Lake Tahoe, Calif. An unidentified firefighter has died of an illness while assigned to one of California's largest wildfires, authorities said Sunday, marking the first death in a season that has seen blazes destroy thousands of buildings and force entire towns to flee. Edwin Zuniga with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said he couldn't provide other details on the death. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File



In this Sept. 3, 2021, file photo, the Caldor Fire consumes trees in Eldorado National Forest, Calif. An unidentified firefighter has died of an illness while assigned to one of California's largest wildfires, authorities said Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021, marking the first death in a season that has seen blazes destroy thousands of buildings and force entire towns to flee. Edwin Zuniga with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said he couldn't provide other details on the death. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Lela Hill sits in her family's moving truck after returning to South Lake Tahoe, Calif., on Monday, Sept. 6, 2021. Mid-move, her family was among thousands of people who were evacuated from the resort town due to the Caldor Fire last week. Credit: AP Photo/Samuel Metz



South Lake Tahoe resident Connor Jones sits with his dog on a smoke-cloaked empty beach in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., Monday Sept. 6, 2021. Residents who fled South Lake Tahoe under threat of a wildfire were allowed to return as crews stalled the flames from advancing. Credit: AP Photo/Samuel Metz



Clearly Tahoe employee Ludovic Fekete checks on transparent kayaks aboard the company's new boat, the "Clearly Tahoe," at the Tahoe Keys Marina in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., Monday, Sept. 6, 2021. Fekete was one of many residents who evacuated due to the Caldor Fire and just returned the day before. Credit: Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group via AP

But with improving conditions, Baldwin said a couple hundred troops, four Guard helicopters and other equipment were pulled back.

The Caldor Fire broke out Aug. 14 on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada and gutted the community of Grizzly Flats as it roared up and over the crest of the mountain range to the eastern side, burning more homes and cabins along the way until it was prevented from reaching Lake Tahoe's south shore.

The [fire](#) has been "one of the most impactful events that I think we've ever seen here," said Mike Blankenheim, chief of the Amador-El Dorado unit of Cal Fire.

"The road back to some sense of normalcy for us is no doubt going to be long and no doubt going to have some challenges with it, but because of the efforts of this group here ... that path has a solid anchor point and we have a direction to go with that right now," Blankenheim told firefighters.

On Tuesday, more than 15,500 personnel were working on 14 active large wildfires in California.

© 2021 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: California wildfire near Lake Tahoe nearly half contained (2021, September 7) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-california-wildfire-lake-tahoe.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--