

More evacuations expected near dangerous Southwest wildfires

April 30 2022, by Morgan Lee and Cedar Attanasio



A Cochiti Fire Department vehicle heads towards a plume of smoke from the Cerro Pelado Fire burning in the Jemez Mountains on Friday, April 29, 2022 in Cochiti, N.M.. Credit: Robert Browman//The Albuquerque Journal via AP

Thousands of firefighters battled destructive wildfires in the Southwest

as more residents prepared to evacuate Friday into the weekend in northern New Mexico where strong winds and dangerously dry conditions have made the blazes hard to contain.

The biggest [fire](#) in the U.S. grew to more than 117 square miles (303 square kilometers) through the afternoon northeast of Santa Fe. Gusty winds prevented any aerial attacks by midmorning and crews lost some of the containment they had established in previous days.

The rapid rate of the spread of the fire was exceeding dire predictions in some areas, incident commander Carl Schwope said Friday night.

"We're in a very dangerous situation. Evacuation statuses are changing as we speak," he warned at a briefing in Las Vegas, New Mexico, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Santa Fe.

More air and ground forces were on the way, he said, to fortify the nearly 1,000 firefighters on the [fire lines](#) there and winds that gusted up to 65 mph were beginning to subside as nightfall approached.

There were no immediate reports of any new structures have been lost since the local sheriff confirmed Thursday night at least 166 homes have been destroyed in northeast New Mexico's rural San Miguel County.

But erratic wind shifts in some of the driest conditions the region has seen in years were forecast again Saturday, and authorities were making preparations to evacuate some residents as far north as Taos.



A vehicle heads away from a plume of smoke from the Cerro Pelado Fire burning in the Jemez Mountains on Friday, April 29, 2022 in Cochiti, N.M.. Credit: Robert Browman//The Albuquerque Journal via AP

"Just getting people out of the way, that's been the mission today," Sheriff Chris Lopez said at the briefing in Las Vegas. Some of the most active fire was heading in the direction of that town but he said the town itself was not in immediate danger.

Fire lines were bolstered outside the rural New Mexico community of Ledoux in efforts to save structures, and they appeared to be holding.

More than 2,000 firefighters were battling fires in Arizona and New Mexico on Friday—about half of those in northeast New Mexico, where

a total of more than 187 square miles (484 square kilometers) of mostly timber and brush have been charred.

Red flag warnings for extreme fire danger were in place Friday for nearly all of New Mexico and parts of Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

The fires are burning unusually hot and fast for this time of year, especially in the Southwest, where experts said some timber in the region is drier than kiln-dried wood.



This image provided by the Nebraska State Patrol shows smoke from a wildfire, Saturday, April 23, 2022 near Cambridge, Neb. Several small towns, including Cambridge, Bartley, Indianola and Wilsonville, in Nebraska's southwest and Macy in its northeast, were forced to temporarily evacuate because of the wind-driven wildfires. Credit: Nebraska State Patrol via AP

"We still have some fire weather to get through tonight, tomorrow and

several days afterwards," fire behavior specialist Stewart Turner said at Friday night's briefing in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

"It's very important that everybody pays attention to the evacuation orders because this is a very, very serious fire—very dangerous fire behavior out there."

Matthew Probst, Las Vegas-based medical director for the health clinic network El Centro Family Health, said the nearby fire has swept through impoverished communities already frayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Here, you're losing meager homes, but it's everything. It's all they had," said Probst, a coordinator of county health services for wildfire evacuees.

Rural families in the area were caught off guard after heading home from an early evacuation—only to be ambushed by a fast-moving fire last week.



The Cerro Pelado Fire burns in the Jemez Mountains on Friday, April 29, 2022 in Cochiti, N.M.. Credit: Robert Browman//The Albuquerque Journal via AP

A 79-year-old widow from the tiny community of Sapello left her house and a blue heeler cattle dog for a doctor's appointment, with boxes packed for possible evacuation with jewelry and her 1964 wedding photos. Winds kicked up, and police said it was too late to go back for anything.

"They said, 'No ma'am, it's far too dangerous,'" said Sonya Berg in a phone interview Friday from an emergency shelter at a nearby middle school.

A close friend says the house burned, but Berg doesn't want to believe it.

A neighbor rescued the dog.

"I'm in denial until I go and see it," said Berg, whose husband passed away in 2019 and was buried outside the home. "He's up there, he's been through the whole thing. I'm hoping the gravestone we put up is still there."

In the Jemez Mountains east of Los Alamos, another wildfire spanning 12 square miles (30 square kilometers) crept in the direction of [Bandelier National Monument](#), which closed its backcountry hiking trails as a precaution while central visiting areas remained open.



The Cerro Pelado Fire burns in the Jemez Mountains on Friday, April 29, 2022 in Cochiti, N.M.. Credit: Robert Browman//The Albuquerque Journal via AP



In this photo released by the U.S. Forest Service, a firefighter gathers hose and fittings to assemble sprinkler protection systems in the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico on Thursday, April 28, 2022. Thousands of firefighters continued to slow the advance of destructive wildfires in the Southwestern U.S., but officials warned they were bracing for the return Friday of the same dangerous conditions that quickly spread the wind-fueled blazes a week ago. Credit: J. Michael Johnson/U.S. Forest Service via AP



The Calf Canyon Fire burning near Mineral Hill in the Gallinas Canyon, Friday, April 29, 2022. Credit: Eddie Moore/The Albuquerque Journal via AP



An American Flag on a fence blows in the wind along NM 22 as The Cerro Pelado Fire burns in the Jemez Mountains on Friday, April 29, 2022 in Cochiti, N.M.. Credit: Robert Browman//The Albuquerque Journal via AP



In this photo released by the U.S. Forest Service, aircraft known as "super scoopers" battle the Hermits Peak and Calf Canyon Fires in the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. Firefighters have been making significant progress on the biggest wildfires burning unusually hot and fast for this time of year in the western U.S. But forecasters from the Southwest to the southern High Plains are warning of the return the next two days of the same gusty winds and critical fire conditions that sent wildland blazes racing across the landscape last week. Credit: J. Michael Johnson/U.S. Forest Service via AP



The burned and twisted frame of a bicycle that once belonged to Trisha Peralta lies in the rubble of a burned shed on her family's property Monday, April 25, 2022 after the Tunnel Fire destroyed the property, including the house, the week before. Credit: Rachel Gibbons/Arizona Daily Sun via AP



In this photo released by the U.S. Forest Service, an aircraft known as a "super scooper" battles the Hermits Peak and Calf Canyon Fires in the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico on Thursday, April 28, 2022. Firefighters have been making significant progress on the biggest wildfires burning unusually hot and fast for this time of year in the western U.S. But forecasters from the Southwest to the southern High Plains are warning of the return the next two days of the same gusty winds and critical fire conditions that sent wildland blazes racing across the landscape last week. Credit: J. Michael Johnson/U.S. Forest Service via AP



The Calf Canyon Fire burns north of Las Vegas near the San Miguel and Mora County line Monday April 25, 2022. Credit: Eddie Moore//The Albuquerque Journal via AP



The Calf Canyon Fire burns north of Las Vegas near the San Miguel and Mora County line Monday April 25, 2022. Credit: Eddie Moore/The Albuquerque Journal via AP



Plumes of smoke rise from a pair of growing wildfires in northeast New Mexico on Friday, April 22, 2022 outside Las Vegas, N.M.. Southwest fires have burned dozens of homes in northern Arizona and put numerous small villages in New Mexico in the path of danger. Credit: AP Photo/Cedar Attanasio



New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, right, talks with Floyd Trujillo, from Upper Rociada, at the emergency evacuation center in Las Vegas, Monday April 25, 2022. The Calf Canyon Fire has forced the evacuation of many residents of San Miguel and Mora County. Credit: Eddie Moore/The Albuquerque Journal via AP

In northern Arizona, authorities are nearing full containment of a 30 square-mile (77 square-kilometer) blaze that destroyed at least 30 homes near Flagstaff and forced hundreds to evacuate. A top-level national management team turned it back over to the local forest Friday.

"It's pretty stable for the most part," said Coconino National Forest spokeswoman Randi Shaffer. "We're not seeing any forecasted crazy weather patterns. We have fire crews monitoring, all of our suppression efforts have been holding."

Some residents near another fire 10 miles (16 kilometers) south of Prescott haven't been allowed back home. Firefighters have about one-third of the 14 square-mile (37-square-kilometer) fire's perimeter contained. Lighter winds were expected into the weekend, but low humidity will be a concern, fire officials said.

© 2022 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: More evacuations expected near dangerous Southwest wildfires (2022, April 30) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-04-evacuations-dangerous-southwest-wildfires.html>

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.