

# Wildfires ravage Spanish region twice in a month

July 19 2022, by Marie GIFFARD

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A firefighter battles a wildfire near the village of Pumarejo de Tera in northwestern Spain.

Just a month after a huge wildfire ravaged Spain's northwestern province of Zamora, flames are once again consuming swathes of the region as

locals helplessly watch their land being destroyed.

A column of smoke can be seen some 30 kilometres (18 miles) away as it billows into the sky, obscuring the landscape.

Antonio Puga cried as he observed the desolate scene, saying he felt "desperate and helpless" as flames surrounded his village of Pumarejo de Tera.

"We could have avoided all this," said Puga, who is in his sixties.

In front of him fires devour the fields, making them crackle. A relentless wind revives embers and ignites [pine trees](#).

A helicopter ferried water from a nearby river and dumped it on the smouldering fields.

Some 6,000 people from around 30 localities in this rural region have been evacuated from their homes since Sunday.

The wildfires have claimed two lives—that of a firefighter near the village of Losacio and a shepherd whose body was found in a nearby town.

They are by far the largest of the dozens of blazes raging across Spain amid a scorching heatwave affecting much of Western Europe.

## **'Already too late'**

In June, a wildfire ravaged nearly 30,000 hectares (75,000 acres) in Sierra de la Culebra, a wooded mountain range near the border with Portugal that is known for its population of wolves.



Smoke rises above the Tera river.

It was the biggest fire in Spain since 2004.

Desperate locals try to help firefighters stamp out the flames by carrying hoses or transporting water with their tractors. But they are furious with the authorities.

"Firefighters arrived late, the helicopters were there this morning, then they left at 3 pm and now we only have one," said Puga.

Alberto Escade, a 48-year-old technician, was upset to see three fire

trucks leave the area.

"They keep saying they are overwhelmed," he said.

"They arrive and then they say: It's already too late, it's lost.' They are ordered to take care of inhabited areas," he added.

Local authorities respond to the criticism by saying the priority is saving [human lives](#).

The former mayor of the village, Isabel Blanco, is also upset.

A month ago a wildfire ravaged one side of the road, she said as she pointed to the charred vegetation on the right. And now its ravaged the land on the other side.

Firefighters were "a little late in coming," the 52-year-old said.



Locals complain firefighters were slow to arrive.



A fire raging in Spain's northwestern province of Zamora has so far claimed two lives -- that of a firefighter and a shepherd.

### **'Forgotten Spain'**

She sees this as a symptom of the neglect which rural depopulated regions like Zamora—often referred to as "forgotten Spain"—suffer, a recurring political theme in the country.

In Zamora, thousands of people spent the night on cots at a reception centre set up for evacuees.

Many declined to speak to the media, their minds consumed by fear that their homes won't survive the flames.

Daniel Santamaria, 21, said he was on vacation at his grandparents' house when the approaching flames forced him to flee in a hurry with only a backpack.

He recalls how ash-filled raindrops "left black spots as they fell".

Sitting just a few metres (feet) away, Luis Rivero, 76, said he will not forget "the strong wind which carried everything away in its path" and fanned the [flames](#).

Laura Gago, a 36-year-old beekeeper from the village of Escobar de Tabara, said between sobs that she has "not yet had the strength" to check on her 700 hives but estimates that "90 percent of her production is burnt".

"We can't do anything against nature, the wind, the temperatures, the drought. Climate change is here. It's not going to go away," she added.

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