

Rain offers slight reprieve from largest wildfire in history of Texas

March 1 2024, by Moisés ÁVILA



A firefighter battling the Smokehouse Creek Fire, near Amarillo, in the Texas Panhandle.

Rainfall offered some reprieve from the largest wildfire in the history of Texas, officials said Friday, though dry, gusty conditions were expected to return this weekend for a blaze that has killed two people and scorched a million acres.

Four major fires are actively burning across the state's northern area, known as the Texas panhandle, as well as neighboring Oklahoma, fueled by an unseasonably hot winter and ferocious winds.

"Most of the fire received some precipitation yesterday and there was no fire growth," the Texas A&M Forest Service posted on X about the Smokehouse Creek Fire, the largest of the five.

It started Monday and now covers an estimated 1,075,000 acres (435,000 hectares), and is 15 percent contained.

But the reprieve could be short lived, as "Critical fire weather conditions are expected to return midday Saturday and once again after sunrise Sunday," tweeted the National Weather Service in Amarillo.

It cited very dry grass, [wind gusts](#) of 40 miles (64 kilometers) per hour and minimum relative humidity of 5-10 percent.

With Smokehouse Creek merging with another blaze, it has now become the state's largest-ever wildfire, surpassing the East Amarillo Complex disaster that torched 907,000 acres in 2006.

Texas A&M Forest Service Fire Chief Wes Moorehead urged Texans to be cautious over the weekend, when many celebrate Texas Independence Day on March 2, in light of the expected conditions.

"As firefighters continue to suppress active fires, we urge Texans to be cautious with any outdoor activity that may cause a spark," he said in a

statement.

A 44-year-old truck driver died in an Oklahoma City hospital on Thursday, having been rescued near her smoke-engulfed truck in Smokehouse Creek on Tuesday, according to several local media.

While preventive evacuations were ordered in some places, the body of an 83-year-old woman was found in the city of Stinnett, a Hutchinson County emergency services spokesperson told ABC News.

She also said about 20 structures in Stinnett had been razed by the fire.

A 120-year-old Texas ranch said it lost 80 percent of its 32,000-acre property near the area of the largest fire.

"The loss of livestock, crops, and wildlife, as well as ranch fencing and other infrastructure throughout our property as well as other ranches and homes across the region is, we believe, unparalleled in our history," the managers of Turkey Track Ranch said in a statement posted on its website.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, [climate change](#) has been a key driver in increased wildfire activity across the western United States over the past two decades, through increased heat, extended drought, and heightened atmospheric thirst.

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Citation: Rain offers slight reprieve from largest wildfire in history of Texas (2024, March 1) retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-03-slight-reprieve-largest-wildfire-history.html>

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