

Thousands evacuate season's biggest wildfire in northern California

July 27 2024, by Paula RAMON, Josh EDELSON



Fueled by a crushing heat wave, the so-called Park Fire -- the most intense wildfire to hit the state this summer -- has rapidly devoured nearly 240,000 acres (97,000 hectares).

A huge, fast-moving and rapidly growing wildfire in northern California

has forced more than 4,000 people to evacuate as firefighters battle gusty winds and perilously dry conditions, authorities said Friday.

Fueled by a crushing heat wave, the so-called Park Fire—the most intense wildfire to hit the state this summer—has rapidly devoured nearly 240,000 acres (97,000 hectares) as of Friday night and is continuing to gain strength.

"This fire has been rapidly expanding 4,000 to 5,000 acres an hour," incident commander Billy See said at a press conference Friday evening.

For now it is "zero percent" controlled, despite the efforts of about 1,700 firefighters, according to state agency Cal Fire, with hundreds of additional resources ordered en route.

A total of 4,000 people have evacuated the towns of Cohasset and Forest Ranch, plus an additional 400 from the small city of Chico.

The blaze so far has destroyed 134 structures, authorities said.

Despite the structure losses, Butte County Fire Chief Garrett Sjolund said "many more have been saved."

"It is a fire that is challenging our strategies, but we are finding opportunities to deploy our resources in successful ways," Sjolund told reporters.

The fire started Wednesday near Chico, in Butte County, and within hours had devastated a wide area there and in neighboring Tehama County.

In just two days, the Park Fire has already become the 20th largest fire in California history by [land area](#).



This aerial photo, taken above the town of Chico, California on July 25, 2024, shows smoke rising from the huge Park Fire.

The blaze has generated an enormous column of dense gray smoke, with gritty clouds akin to those of a violent storm now visible in nearby US states.

Fire departments from across the state have sent crews to lend a hand.

The National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning for the region through Friday night, predicting "critical" fire weather conditions.

On Thursday, police detained a 42-year-old man on suspicion of having started the fire by pushing a burning car into a ravine.

Butte County prosecutor Mike Ramsey identified the man as Ronnie Dean Stout II and said he would be held without bail until a court appearance next week.

'Prepared to go'

"You have to be prepared to go," Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea warned area residents.

"This county has seen time and time again where people have waited too long and they have lost their lives," he added.

Some area residents, such as Julia Yarbough, have already seen their homes reduced to ashes.

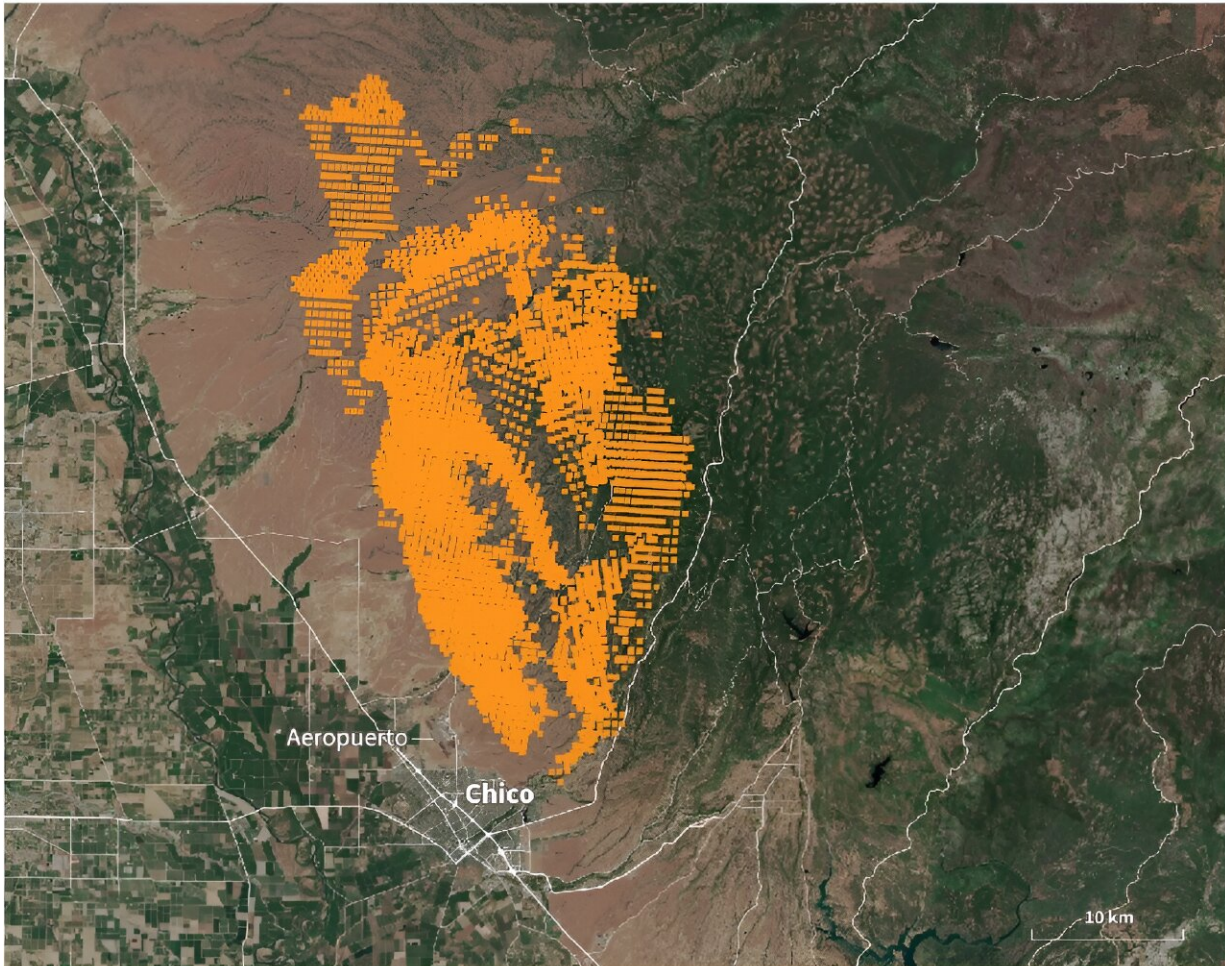
"This is what's left of my house," she told CBS, showing the blackened and still smoking debris.

Primer «megaincendio» del año en California, Estados Unidos

El fuego se había extendido por más de 50.000 hectáreas a la 01H00 GMT del viernes, según CalFire



■ Focos activos en las últimas 48 horas, al 26 de julio a las 09H30 GMT



Datos cartográficos: Sentinel-2 (imagen satelital del 7 de julio de 2021), OSM
Fuentes: Nasa-Viirs, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



This map shows the location of active fires burning near Chico, California on July 26, 2024.

"I must be in shock."

Butte County is about 70 miles north of state capital Sacramento and just 25 miles from Paradise, the city that was devastated by a 2018 [fire](#) that ranked as California's most deadly ever, claiming 85 lives.

The explosive growth of the Park Fire has again placed Paradise under evacuation warning, unleashing painful memories for its residents.

"I would call its behavior extraordinary," said UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain, adding, "that's not a good thing."

The only silver lining, he said, is that it is not headed toward any large cities.

California is experiencing an early start to what appears to be an intense wildfire season, with 20 currently active incidents.

An additional 40 blazes are threatening communities to the north, in the states of Washington and Oregon.

A pilot of a small firefighting plane was killed while working near the Falls Fire in eastern Oregon, a statement from US authorities said Friday.

Canada has also seen a spate of wildfires, including a huge blaze that has consumed much of the tourist town of Jasper in western Alberta province.

Experts say climate change, accelerated by human action, is leading to more extreme weather events.

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