

Fierce wildfire halted in southern France

August 15 2019



A fire fanned by a strong wind raged early Thursday in the Aude department of southern France but firefighters said they had the upper hand late in the day

One of France's biggest wildfires this year has been stopped after more than 500 firefighters battled for two days to protect homes and lives, emergency services said Thursday.

"The fire has been stopped, we hope to be completely on top of it overnight" Colonel Eric Felten of the Aude department's fire and rescue services told AFP late Thursday.

"Some flare-ups will have to be dealt with, but nothing major," Felten said, adding that the number of firefighters had been drawn down to 200 to keep watch over a ravaged pine forest.

Firefighters said they had been helped by light rain as well as winds that were milder than forecast.

Aude prefect Alain Thirion underscored the "judicious and massive participation" of five firefighting aircraft that had resumed water and chemical drops early in the day.

Around 900 hectares (2,200 acres) were destroyed after the fire broke out Wednesday in the rugged hills of the Aude department, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) southeast of Toulouse.

No injuries were reported and no homes were destroyed, though 22 people were evacuated in the village of Val-de-Dagne.

"Firefighters were able to stop the flames from reaching the houses but all the surrounding vegetation was destroyed. We had to evacuate the horses and donkeys," said Christian Lacube, the local mayor.



Five water bombers backed up around 500 firefighters on the ground. No homes were lost and no injuries were reported

The cause of the blaze is not yet known, but paramilitary gendarmes have launched an investigation.

Authorities had warned of extremely dry conditions across much of southern France after weeks of drought and record high temperatures.

The fire was hard to battle "because the areas are very difficult to access, there aren't any passable roads," Thirion's cabinet chief Anne Laybourne told AFP.

"In the middle of the blaze there were vineyards and olive groves that

didn't burn, which helped us by serving as firebreaks," Colonel Felten noted.

Around 450 firefighters were also tackling a wildfire near Beziers along the Mediterranean coast that began Wednesday, though officials said it was under control Thursday after burning 250 hectares.



Map of fire sweeping through a pine forest in Aude department in southern France.

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