

More fires and evacuations in weary California

November 1 2019, by Jocelyne Zablit



A firefighter douses a smoldering home during the Hillside Fire in the North Park neighborhood of San Bernardino, California on October 31

Californian firefighters tackled fresh and fast-moving wildfires overnight Thursday, making headway against a number of major blazes

that have forced mass evacuations and power cuts.

Three rapidly moving infernos broke out Thursday in the southern part of the state, burning several homes and forcing people to flee.

One—the Hillside Fire—was in San Bernardino, some 60 miles (100 kilometers) east of Los Angeles, while the other—the 46 Fire—was in neighboring Riverside County.

The third—dubbed the Maria Fire—broke out late Thursday in Ventura County, threatening two small agricultural towns nearby, and forcing the evacuation of more than 7,000 people as it raged across 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares), according to Ventura County fire department.

Hundreds of firefighters backed by water-dropping helicopters were attacking blazes driven by record so-called Santa Ana winds that have prompted unprecedented warnings of "extremely critical" fire risk—the most severe category.

"I was asleep and woke up at 2:00 am to a strong smell of smoke," said Matthew Valdivia, 35, as he stood in front of the remains of his home destroyed by the blaze in San Bernardino.

Valdivia told AFP he and his wife quickly woke their four kids up and alerted neighbors as the flames closed in.



An air tanker drops fire retardant over power lines while helping to fight the Hillside Fire in the North Park neighborhood of San Bernardino, California on October 31

"It's devastating," he said. "This was our first home ... I worked 72 hours a week just to live the American dream."

The National Weather Service said although the red flag warnings would remain in effect through Thursday for much of Los Angeles and Ventura counties, conditions had improved.

"Winds are somewhat lighter today over most areas, which is good news for our firefighters," it said.

In northern California, firefighters reported making significant progress against the massive Kincadee Fire, which erupted October 23 and has ravaged the Sonoma County wine region.

The blaze, the biggest this season, has destroyed nearly 300 homes and other properties, including several wineries, and burned nearly 77,000 acres. It was 60 percent contained Thursday.

A mandatory evacuation order was lifted allowing tens of thousands of residents to return to their homes.



A car burns in a garage as a home goes up in flames during the Hillside fire in the North Park neighborhood of San Bernardino, California on October 31

'A lot of threats'

Fire crews meanwhile continued to battle a blaze in the Simi Valley, northwest of Los Angeles, where a fire broke out on Wednesday and came dangerously close to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

About 30,000 people were forced to evacuate as the flames raged into the night, fueled by wind gusts of up to 70 miles (110 kilometers) per hour.

The winds were powerful enough to overturn some trucks on a nearby highway.

More than 700 firefighters were battling the blaze known as the Easy Fire, backed by helicopters and aircraft dumping water and fire retardant.

It was unclear what started the fire but Southern California Edison said it began near one of its power lines which had not been cut off.

The utility, as well as other power companies throughout the state, has been shutting off power to hundreds of thousands of customers in a bid to lower the fire risk.



Smoke rises from the Kincadee Fire (R) in Sonoma County, northern California, in this undated handout image provided by NASA and taken by astronaut Andrew Morgan aboard the International Space Station

The Ventura County Fire Department said the Easy Fire has burned 1,723 acres and has been 10 percent contained as of Thursday morning.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a statewide emergency because of the fires and secured federal funding to assist agencies responding to the fires.

The blazes come as California is still reeling from the aftermath of the most destructive wildfire in state history—the Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 86 people last year.

Similar blazes in northern California, including in the Napa and Sonoma wine regions, killed 44 people in 2017 and destroyed thousands of structures.

There have been no fatalities linked to this year's fires.

© 2019 AFP

Citation: More fires and evacuations in weary California (2019, November 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-11-evacuations-weary-california.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.