

Growing Dixie Fire incinerates entire town of Greenville, California

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The Dixie Fire in northern California exploded over the weekend to become the nation's largest current wildfire, the second largest in the state's history, and the single largest fire ever to hit the region. The blaze incinerated the town of Greenville over the weekend, nearly 150 miles north of Sacramento, the state's capital.

To date, the fire has scorched more than 463,000 acres across four counties. Containment dropped from Friday into Saturday from 35 percent to 21 percent, due to its rapid growth. So far, the fire has destroyed at least 100 homes, but that number is likely an undercount. In terms of size, the fire now covers an area larger than the city of Houston, Texas.

Adding to the intensity of the fire have been the tinder-box conditions created by climate change, inducing record-setting temperatures in the region, which include dry, arid air, the drying out of vegetation and the role played by the ongoing drought covering the vast majority of the state. Out of 58 counties statewide, 55 of them are considered to be in a state of a severe drought, or worse.

There are still 11 other fires burning in the state, including the McFarland Fire, the Antelope Fire, the Tamarack Fire, the Monument Fire, the McCash Fire, the River Complex 2021 Fire, the Tilltill Fire, the River Fire, the Lava Fire and the Beckwourth Complex Fire. Altogether, 579,614 acres have burned and 400 structures have been destroyed, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle's* California Fire Map and Tracker.

Approximately 18,000 people have had to flee their homes, and those who have already lost them will likely not be allowed back into town to survey the damage for days to come.

On Saturday, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom,

who is facing a recall election next month, went to tour Greenville, which had a number of historic buildings destroyed, including a pharmacy dating back to 1890 which was its oldest structure. The entire town now lays in ashes. Newsom tweeted, "Our hearts ache for this town," and promised residents, "though this moment may seem insurmountable, we'll be there to help you rebuild."

Newsom also expressed his "deep gratitude" for the 8,500 first responders who are "working 24-hour, no exaggeration, 24-hour shifts," adding that, "with even all that heroism, though, they couldn't save Greenville, this entire town completely destroyed, not dissimilar to what we saw a few years ago in Paradise, California."

"We recognize we have to do more in active forest management, vegetation management, prepositioning assets, and the state's doing an historic amount in all those areas," Newsom said. "At the end of the day, though, we have to acknowledge this—the dries are getting a lot drier, and the heat and hot weather is a lot hotter than it's ever been. The extreme weather conditions, the extreme droughts, are leading to extreme conditions and wildfire challenges, the likes of which we have never seen in our history. And as a consequence, we need to acknowledge, just straight up, these are climate-induced wildfires."

The empty words from Newsom and his lip service about forest management and climate change come too little, too late. Although human-induced climate change is creating "perfect storm" conditions for an increase in the size, number and intensity of wildfires all over the world, this fire in particular, indeed, did have something "not dissimilar" to that of the Camp (Paradise) wildfire of 2018: downed PG&E power lines, which the company says "might" be responsible for the current fire.

In November 2018, a faulty PG&E power line caused a fire to break out in the early hours of November 8 in the town of Paradise. It took roughly 24 hours for the town and surrounding area to be decimated. The fire claimed 85 lives and was the world's most costly natural disaster that year, with damage totaling more than \$16 billion.

Although PG&E pleaded guilty to 84 charges of felony manslaughter and one felony count of unlawfully causing a fire, not one executive was charged or imprisoned. The same day, another judge allowed the investor-owned utility to exit bankruptcy. A settlement of \$13.5 billion was promised to compensate wildfire victims across numerous fires for which PG&E equipment was responsible. This led Bill Smith, PG&E interim CEO, to announce on July 1, 2020, "Today's announcement is significant for PG&E and for the many wildfire victims who are now one step closer to getting paid."

However, a little over a year later only \$7 million has been paid out to victims from the Fire Victim Trust, while \$51 million has been paid in "overhead" costs for lawyers and consultants. Of the 70,000 wildfire victims awaiting claims, only 1,867 have been compensated—less than 3 percent.

Once again, PG&E is warning that it may incur a huge "material impact" (i.e., financial loss) if its insurance coverage is found insufficient to cover the costs of the wildfire.

In short, PG&E is entirely responsible for the decimation of another town, has refused to replace its dilapidated power grid in favor of paying out billions of dollars to itself and its shareholders, while hundreds of families have lost everything and will most likely never be made whole again.

Meanwhile, the fire is not predicted to be contained until August 20. Kesia Studebaker, a Greenville resident, told *USA Today*, "We knew we didn't get enough rainfall and fires could happen, but we didn't expect a monster like this."

ABC World News Tonight spoke to Theresa Hatch, a Greenville resident, who was evacuated with her family. She told them through tears, "How are you supposed to start over? Where do you even begin to start over? Look at all these people that are misplaced now. Where are they going to go?"

A Facebook post by a person with disabilities looking

for lodging for himself and four others who also have disabilities and who lost their homes in Greenville explained their dire condition. "We have explored every option. We all have special needs in one form or another... I am at the end of my rope."

A federal judge has ordered that PG&E detail its responsibility in the Dixie Fire by August 16. However, given the slap on the wrist PG&E received for the devastation of the 2018 Camp Fire that claimed 85 lives, all indications are that not a single official will lose their job and no one will be held accountable.

Meanwhile, wildfires and extreme weather driven by man-made climate change are impacting many regions throughout the globe including Turkey and the Mediterranean, Spain, France, Albania, Macedonia, Morocco, Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus. Meanwhile Germany, central China, the United Kingdom and the US Midwest have suffered from deadly and devastating record-setting floods. Any effort to successfully combat climate change and its effects depends upon a rational and scientifically planned socialist society to ensure the planet is livable for future generations.



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