

Towns outside of Yosemite National Park evacuated as wildfires rage across California and Pacific Northwest

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Several rural communities in California's Mariposa County near Yosemite National Park were evacuated as the Oak Fire grew from 1,600 to nearly 12,000 acres (650 to 4,900 hectares) on Saturday. The fire, which had zero percent containment as of Sunday, has so far burned or damaged at least 15 structures and threatens another 2,000, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

More than 6,000 people were ordered to leave their homes as a result of the explosive growth of the fire. No fatalities have been reported so far among the evacuees or the firefighters, but the structures that have burned down include homes of residents that have lived in the area for decades. At least one GoFundMe appeal has so far been set up to aid those who have lost virtually everything in the blaze.

Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) has further reported that more than 2,600 homes and businesses have lost power as a result of the fire. According to the utility company's website, they are "unable to access the affected equipment" and do not have an estimated time for when power will be restored. PG&E is notorious for having started the Camp Fire in 2018, after which it plead guilty to 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter because faulty company power lines caused the wholesale destruction of Paradise, California. The cause of the Oak Fire is still under investigation.

The Oak Fire is the third major fire that has erupted near or in Yosemite this month. While the smaller Agua fire is now fully contained, the Washburn Fire has been raging in Yosemite National Park, the Sierra National Forest and the surrounding environment since July 7 and has burned nearly 5,000 acres (2,000

hectares) as of Sunday. The areas hit include the Mariposa Grove, which is located in the southern portion of Yosemite and is the largest sequoia grove in Yosemite. Most of the sequoias are over 2,000 years old and a loss of even a single one would be a tragic loss for the park's ecology.

Critical fire conditions have been rapidly intensifying over the last two months in other parts of the US and Canada. Elevated winds and dry thunderstorms have created conditions for one of the most intense fire seasons in years. On Sunday, the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) reported that 78 large fires and complexes are burning almost 2.5 million acres (1 million hectares) in 15 states. More than 8,300 wildland firefighters and support personnel are assigned to incidents across the country. So far in 2022, 37,904 wildfires have burned 5,559,857 acres (2,249,994 hectares) in the United States, a year-to-date record number of both fires and acres burned.

Among the other current fires across North America, the Nohomin Creek Fire on the west side of the Fraser River, northwest of Lytton, British Columbia, has burned approximately 5,400 acres (2,200 hectares) since it was reported Thursday, July 14. It is currently classified by the Canadian province's wildfire service as "out of control" and threatens a repeat of the disaster last year, when the Lytton Creek Fire burned more than 206,000 acres (83,000 hectares) and destroyed 90 percent of the village of Lytton.

At the time, the Lytton Creek Fire was one of the most disastrous wildfires in years, exacerbated by record high temperatures of 49.6 degrees Celsius (121 degrees Fahrenheit). Climate scientists have made clear in numerous reports that such high temperatures and

more dangerous wildfires are directly linked to global warming.

The Moose Fire near Salmon, Idaho, ignited on Sunday, July 17. The fire is located approximately five miles (8 kilometers) southwest of the North Fork in the vicinity of Moose Creek and Deadwater on the North Fork Ranger District. The fire has burned more than 28,000 acres (11,300 hectares) and is not expected to be contained until August 30.

The NIFC has also reported that two firefighters were tragically killed when their helicopter crashed as they helped to suppress the Moose Fire. The National Transportation Safety Board has been tasked with investigated the deaths.

The two most recent firefighter deaths, along with the massive scale of wildfires this year, highlight the need for vastly improved firefighting infrastructure in the United States, which the Biden administration has failed to build. In November 2021, Biden signed into law the federal \$1.2 trillion infrastructure legislation, which included making \$3.3 billion available for wildfire management over five years. The figure includes \$500 million each to thinning projects, planning and conducting prescribed burns, developing and improving fuel breaks where fires can be stopped or slowed, and mapping and defending at-risk communities.

Another \$1.5 billion (over 10 years) was allocated for the US Department of the Interior's (DOI) Wildland Fire Management Program to be administered on the 7.1 million acres (2.9 million hectares) under the DOI's control. The program also funds fire science research, real-time monitoring equipment and restoration treatments on federal and tribal land with a "very high" wildfire potential.

In reality, \$5-6 billion is needed every year to reduce wildfire risks, according to a recent report from the Nature Conservancy. The US Forest Service and Department of Agriculture similarly note that the fire suppression alone costs about \$1.8 billion each year. Moreover, this figure only includes lands managed by the Forest Service, and does not include other agencies, such as those overseen by the Department of Interior (e.g., the National Parks Service).

In contrast to the paltry amounts given to preventing and fighting highly destructive wildfires, there is no shortage of money for the US military's war machine.

The most recent Pentagon budget, passed by the House of Representatives two weeks ago, is \$839 billion for one year, all of which is geared toward further destruction of human lives and livelihoods around the globe.

It also worth noting that war itself drives global warming, which is a major factor in the increase in number and severity of wildfires over the past two decades. A report by Neta Crawford at Brown University calculated that US military emits about 76 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, making it the largest single producer of greenhouse gases in the world.



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