

Mountain Fire rages through Southern California causing massive destruction

Dan Conway
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High winds led to the eruption of the Mountain Fire in the Ventura County region of Southern California on Wednesday. As of Friday, the fire had destroyed more than 130 structures, mostly residential homes and has damaged 88 others. Though it began in Somis, a small unincorporated area of Ventura County, it now threatens more populous neighborhoods in the area northwest of Los Angeles.

As of Sunday morning, the fire had engulfed 20,630 acres (83.49 square kilometers) and was considered 21 percent contained. Dozens of nearby schools and colleges had canceled classes as a precaution, with nearly two dozen roads closed and officials warning residents to boil water before drinking. Several structures used by the Crestview Mutual Water Company were destroyed by the fire, leading to the water advisory.

The company released a statement that “these conditions may have caused harmful contaminants, including benzene and other volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) to enter the water system.” The statement continued, “Bottled water should be used for all drinking (including baby formula and juice), brushing teeth, and making ice and food preparation until further notice.”

The situation has become so dire that the administration of California Governor Gavin Newsom secured a Fire Management Assistance Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to bolster the state’s inadequate firefighting resources. The fire continues to spread despite the fact that 48 pieces of firefighting equipment, along with 9 helicopters and over 100 personnel from 19 counties have already been deployed to fight it. This is the ninth such time this year alone that the governor has sought the FEMA grant after he requested support for the

state’s emergency response to the Airport, Bridge, Boyles, Line, Borel, Park, Hawarden, French and Thompson fires.

Ten people suffered non-life-threatening injuries as of this writing with no deaths yet reported. Although temperatures have dropped in recent weeks, strong gusts of what are known locally as Santa Ana winds fueled the spread of the fire. While the winds began subsiding Friday morning, giving firefighters a chance to gain ground, meteorologists predict that they could resume in force by the middle of this week.

Fire conditions have also been exacerbated by an unseasonably warm summer in which the region experienced extended periods with triple-digit temperatures. A much higher than normal winter rainfall did little to offset an explosion of wildfires in the summer and autumn periods. In fact, on a global scale, the summer of 2024 was the hottest in recorded human history.

According to the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service, the global average temperature in the Northern hemisphere was a record-breaking 62.24 degrees Fahrenheit. The high temperatures were particularly alarming to climate science researchers who found that that the rising temperatures exceeded even some of their most pessimistic models.

Despite these alarming trends, the incoming Trump administration has indicated that it will completely roll back even the meager climate change measures installed by past administrations, following an interview in August with Elon Musk where Trump stated that global warming was a hoax.

The Environmental Protection Administration, the Interior Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are all slated to be either

eliminated or drastically defunded, not only as sops to the fossil fuel industry, but as part of the ruling elite's attack on science and scientific thought more generally.

Trump has also threatened to withhold disaster aid to the state of California if it fails to loosen endangered species and other environmental regulations. During his first administration, Trump already withheld such aid to the state of Washington and successfully delayed aid requested by California Governor Gavin Newsom.

Two former aides in the first Trump administration, including Mark Harvey, the former senior director for resilience policy, told *Politico* last month that Trump initially refused to provide disaster aid for California in 2018 due to the state's Democratic Party leanings.

However, the state of California itself, run by Democrats since 2011, has consistently underfunded wildfire fighting and wildfire prevention programs. This is despite the fact that 18 of the state's largest and most destructive wildfires have occurred in the first 24 years of the 21st century.

While funding for CalFire, the state's firefighting agency responsible for 31 million acres, has increased from only \$1.1 billion in the 2014-2015 budget to \$3 billion in the 2023-2024 fiscal year budget, the amount is still a drop in the bucket in a state, which, on its own, would be the fifth largest economy in the world with an annual gross domestic product exceeding \$3.9 trillion.

The state is home to 60 billionaires, all but a handful of whom have assets in excess of what the entire state spends on wildfires every year. The state's richest man, Oracle founder Larry Ellison, has a net worth of \$158 billion, \$14 billion more than what the state spends on firefighting, education and food assistance programs combined.

The next three richest individuals, Google co-founder Larry Page, net worth \$114 billion, Google co-founder Sergey Brin, net worth \$110 billion, and Facebook creator and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, net worth of \$106 billion, have a combined wealth exceeding the state's entire budget, meant to service the social needs of 38.9 million people.

Due to the ruling elite's unwillingness to spend the necessary amounts either to prevent wildfires from emerging or to quickly suppress them if they do, firefighters with CalFire are put on grueling 72-hour work weeks. Firefighters across the state both in Cal Fire and in local departments have been operating

under slim budgets throughout the year. Undermanning and operating on little rest has contributed to the four firefighter fatalities statewide thus far in 2024. There have been a total of 107 fire deaths during the this period.

By June 20, the total area burned by wildfires in California was 90,000 acres. This increased more than 800 percent in a month to 726,000 acres burned by July 29. As of this writing, a total of 7,498 fires have burned more than 1.04 million acres, resulting in the destruction of 1,437 structures.



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