

New blaze flares in Los Angeles County

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LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

LOS ANGELES — Their resources already spread thin, air and ground crews scrambled Monday afternoon to contain a fast-moving wildfire near Magic Mountain, one of more than a dozen burning across Southern California.

Tens of thousands of residents fled hillside homes in the Santa Clarita Valley, Ventura County and Malibu as exhausted firefighters fought relentlessly against the ferocious flames.

Fanned by powerful Santa Ana winds and fueled by tinder-dry brush, flames raced up hills and across ridgelines covered by burgeoning housing developments.

Teams of firefighters shifted from one fire to the next as threats peaked, and water-dropping aircraft criss-crossed the skies.

"It's nonstop," Los Angeles County fire Inspector Sam Padilla said. "It's been so dry, there's been this potential with the high winds. We saw it today what that can do."

Already battling the 35,500-acre Buckweed fire stretching from Agua Dulce to Saugus, fire crews scrambled Monday afternoon when a huge plume was spotted in Valencia, with flames shooting into the skies behind the thrill rides at Magic Mountain.

The new blaze, dubbed the Magic fire, exploded within a few hours to 1,200 acres, forcing some residents on Mallory Drive and Waycott Avenue to evacuate their homes.

At the same time, the Ranch fire in Castaic drove toward Piru and beyond, threatening hundreds more homes in Ventura County as well as the Sespe Condor Preserve.

"It was horrible, the wind, the smell. The fire was right behind our house," said 19-year-old Jillian Ibarra, who spent the night with her family at an American Red Cross evacuation center in the Saugus High School gym.

More than 1,200 firefighters from across the state, aided by SuperScooper aircraft and an army of helicopters, attacked



Above, fire crews are overwhelmed as the fire crosses Ramblas Pacifico in the Malibu Hills in Malibu. DAMIAN DOVARGANES / AP

Left, a Super Scooper firefighting plane dumps its load of water on a wildfire that started late Monday afternoon, as another plane follows it next to Magic Mountain in Santa Clarita, north of Los Angeles. KEVORK DJANSEZIAN / AP

the numerous fingers of the massive Buckweed fire as gusts up to 60 mph pushed flames toward homes. By late afternoon it was 20 percent contained.

About 15,000 Saugus residents were evacuated as flames threatened their hous-

ing tracts, but unlike Sunday, when 25 homes were destroyed by this fire, none burned Monday.

Also destroyed was the district office in Saugus for the Angeles National Forest. Nine hundred homes and businesses

lost electricity. The blaze continued to spew heavy black smoke into the skies as it charred brush and threatened destruction.

Driven by the relentless wind, the fires sent residents fleeing with the treasures and necessities that fit in a car. Others ignored orders to evacuate and stayed to protect their homes, a hindrance for firefighters who said stubborn homeowners hampered their efforts.

Among those displaced by the fires were about 1,000 inmates at the Pitchess Detention Center in Castaic, in the path of the Buckweed fire.

The men, among 10,000 in five jails at the Pitchess compound, were moved to another facility on the grounds.

The air and ground battle also continued against the Malibu fire, as more than 1,500 firefighters fought to contain the 3,000-acre blaze as it darted in and out of the area's jagged hills, threatening expensive homes and sending clouds of smoke billowing over the seaside city.

As 50 mph winds whipped through the already fire-ravaged hillsides near Pepperdine University, the flames shifted and had begun to burn deep into the hillside near Carbon Canyon.

Five homes, including an ornate mansion known to locals as "The Castle," were destroyed Sunday in the fire, along with a glass shop and the landmark Malibu Presbyterian Church.

On Monday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger toured the rubble of the church, where only blackened bricks, scattered nails, and some untouched play equipment remained.

The church marquee contained a single word: Revelation. "It's a tragic time for California," said Schwarzenegger, who declared a state of emergency in Los Angeles and six other Southern California counties as the wildfires continued their march.

He also deployed the National Guard to help fight the fires, and sought additional resources from Nevada and Arizona.

"We are doing all we can to

protect lives and properties," he said.

Robin Morgan, who lost her Carbon Canyon home in the 1993 fire, evacuated her rebuilt home Sunday night and came back Monday to find it intact.

Malibu residents are resilient, she said, and fire danger is a small price to pay for living along the coast.

"After 1993, this isn't scary," she said. "We stay in Malibu for the beautiful days, when the sky is blue and the water is shimmering."

Firefighters kept up their battle to protect homes, making a stand at Las Flores Canyon and around Will Rogers State Park.

Authorities also continued to evacuate residents living in the path of the fire. Among those evacuated over the weekend were actors Mel Gibson, Kelsey Grammer and Victoria Principal, although their homes were not among those damaged.

With a white cloth held over his mouth to protect him from smoke and ash, television producer Michael Watkins watched Monday afternoon as helicopters doused a far-off ridgeline with water from the Pacific.

On Sunday, the fire skipped his house but destroyed Castle Kashan, the multimillion-dollar mansion owned by socialite Lily Lawrence.

"All you could see was a thousand embers; rocks pelted you," said Watkins, whose credits include "Las Vegas" and "The X-Files."

"It came like it was a wick and shot into the property," he said, pointing to a blackened pine in front of Lawrence's home, where only a couple of giant urns and the remnants of a fireplace remained.

"This one was the scariest one I have been in," Watkins said.

Firefighters from around Southern California were called in to fight the infernos in both Malibu and Santa Clarita, part of a mutual-aid agreement that guarantees cooperation among agencies.

Firetrucks from Redondo Beach, El Segundo and Torrance were among those that could be seen zooming Monday down The Old Road to fight the blaze that erupted near Magic Mountain.

Multiple fires rage through San Bernardino County

GEORGE WATSON, MATT WRYE
and JASON PESICK
SAN BERNARDINO SUN

Wildfires exploded across the Inland Empire and much of Southern California on Monday, destroying at least 138 structures in San Bernardino County and consuming hundreds more throughout this parched region that has endured the driest year on record.

Two major blazes, the Grass Valley Fire and the Slide fire, urged on by Santa Ana winds gusting up to 70 miles per hour, charred nearly 2,000 acres in the San Bernardino Mountains. More fires burned in San Bernardino, Devore and Ontario.

No one died locally, although firefighters did sustain some minor injuries. Officials also had not determined how the two mountain fires started.

Plumes of acrid black and brown smoke filled the air. Highways shut down, many communities were evacuated and Paul Biane, chairman of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, instituted a curfew for evacuated mountain areas.

The multiple blazes, having erupted both locally and across Southern California, brought back painful memories of the Old fire, which destroyed nearly 1,000 homes and structures in 2003.

This time, though, there was a difference from that conflagration four years ago. Million dollar houses went up in smoke in Lake Arrowhead.



Photos by MARCIO JOSE SANCHES / AP

Right, a house burns down in Lake Arrowhead on Monday. A two-front fire destroyed over 100 homes Monday in the same mountain resort community where hundreds were lost four years ago. Above, San Bernardino County firefighters watch as homes burn around them in Lake Arrowhead on Monday.



More homes burned in Green Valley Lake, which went untouched in the previous mountain blaze.

"These are high-end mountain resort homes," said Mike Horton, San Bernardino County's deputy fire marshal. "If we lose as many structures as we did in the Old fire, it will be more costly."

"It's a smaller-scale 2003 event," said Richard Minnich, a professor of fire ecology at UC Riverside. "It's pretty much comparable in weather conditions, Santa Ana winds and the low humidity."

As darkness approached, fire officials confirmed that the blaze had reached the crowns in both mountain conflagrations. It was unclear what the long-term damage to the

forest will be.

Grass Valley fire: The blaze ignited shortly after 5 a.m., near Grass Valley Road and Aleutian Drive, taking off under the guidance of the wild, gusting winds.

Altogether, officials said it destroyed 113 homes while burning nearly 400 acres.

At one point, a balcony patio crashed and broke off on a home, tumbling down the hillside below.

Horton and Von Oesen inspected the remnants of the abode, and immediately noticed a pair of propane tanks sitting in a garage that was in flames. The two men rushed inside, pulling them and a barbecue out.

"They're full, too," Von Oesen said. Slide fire: After years of close

calls, residents watched in horror as black plumes of smoke arose from the tree-covered community. Many, if not all, indicated a home had caught fire.

"You hate to be pessimistic but we are not very hopeful this time," said Robert Andrews of Green Valley Lake. "This is the first one taking down structures."

The fire started around 8 a.m. in Green Valley Lake across from Deep Creek.

At 10:30 a.m., Dave Gordon stood with his stepson, Jamie Whitmer about a quarter mile outside his hometown of Green Valley Lake.

"Flames were coming up right to the house when we left," Gordon said, estimating that they were about

100 feet from houses on Squirrel Drive, where his ex-wife lives.

All together, 25 homes were destroyed and 1,500 acres burned, officials said.

But as the day progressed, firefighters began to get the upper hand on the blaze.

"We're going to mop up and then move on to the next assignment," said Capt. Mike Olson of the Running Springs Fire Department. "The guys did a good job today. We originally thought we were going to lose the whole street."

Cajon fire: By 6 p.m., a wildfire had burned an estimated 200 acres of hillside land west of the 215/15 interchange in Devore.

The Cajon fire ignited at about 11:30 a.m. Monday, said Pam Bierce, a San Bernardino National Forest Service spokeswoman. Firefighters estimated that 25 percent of the fire had been surrounded by sunset, Bierce said.

Fire officials believe the blaze may have been caused by downed or sparking power lines in the area, though the cause had not been confirmed by sunset.

High winds also caused flights to be diverted from Ontario/Los Angeles International Airport on Monday morning.

Ian Gregor, regional spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration, said six of 13 planes were diverted to different airports, including Los Angeles International Airport, because the 60 mph wind gusts were too strong.

Harris fire destroys structures; winds reach 100 mph in the area

CITY NEWS SERVICE

POTRERO — A wind-driven wildfire that killed one person and injured 21 others in its early hours continued raging tonight in rural southeastern San Diego County, forcing scores of evacuations and causing property damage.

At that point, the Harris fire was threatening Barrett Junction, the Barrett Lake area, Deerhorn Valley, Dulzura, Engineer Springs, Jamul, Lawson Valley, Lyons Valley,

Otay Mountain and Potrero. Since it began spreading over the weekend, the blaze has damaged or destroyed structures in Tecate, Dulzura and Barrett Junction. Details on the property losses were not available, officials said this afternoon.

The wildfire, the only one in Southern California to result in a fatality, erupted near Harris Ranch and Potrero Valley roads about 9:30 a.m. Monday, as powerful Santa Ana wind whipped across the region.

Unrelentingly high winds — in some spots, mountaintop gusts hit 100 mph — periodically grounded firefighting aircraft this morning, adding to the difficulty of trying to make headway against the inferno.

Helicopters were able to begin aiding in the firefight by midday, but conditions remained too hazardous for fixed-wing aircraft.

This morning, residents living on Mother Grundy Truck Trail and Deer Horn Valley were evacuated to Steele

Canyon High School, which was already filled with people who were cleared out of their homes Sunday.

When the campus reached capacity, evacuees were sent to Santana High School in Santee.

Residents in Coyote Holler were sent east to Campo. Mandatory evacuation notices were also sent to areas north of Lake Wohlford.

Areas near Honey Springs and Lyons Valley roads and all areas east toward Cleveland National Forest were evacuated

ed about 9:30 a.m.

In Potrero, sheriff's deputies ordered evacuations along Highway 94 for residents in Barrett Junction, Engineer Springs, Dulzura and all points between Potrero, Tecate and parts of Deerhorn Valley were also evacuated.

No information was released about the person who died. Five firefighters and 16 civilians suffered burns and other injuries, officials said.

Authorities said the injured crew members got trapped in a "burn-over." They

were overcome by towering flames that shot over their heads, apparently while defending a structure, but a dispatcher said their injuries were not believed to be life-threatening.

State Route 94 was closed between Otay Lakes Road and Forest Gate Road this morning, according to the California Highway Patrol.

More than 300 firefighters were assigned to the blaze, which had cost an estimated \$1.3 million to battle by this evening, Cal Fire reported.