

Thousands evacuate as California's McKinney fire spreads

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McKinney is the largest wildfire so far this year in California, which has already battled several blazes [Fred Greaves/Reuters]

San Francisco, August 1 (RHC)-- The largest fire in California this year has forced thousands of people to evacuate as it wrecks homes and rips through the western U.S. state's dry terrain.

The McKinney fire was completely uncontained as it burned in Klamath National Forest in Northern California, the state's department of forestry and fire protection said on Sunday, consuming more than 21,000 hectares (51,000 acres) near the city of Yreka.

Gavin Newsom, the governor of California, which has already battled several blazes this summer, declared a state of emergency on Saturday, saying the fire had "destroyed homes" and "threatened critical infrastructure" after breaking out on Friday.

The fire was "intensified and spread by dry fuels, extreme drought conditions, high temperatures, winds and lightning storms", Newsom added in a statement. More than 2,000 residents were under evacuation orders and some 200 under evacuation warnings, mostly in Siskiyou County, according to the California Office of Emergency Services.

"Surrounding areas should be ready to leave if needed. Please don't hesitate to evacuate," the Siskiyou County sheriff tweeted. Highway 96 and McKinney Creed Road, southwest of the Klamath River, were closed to the public, authorities said.

Yreka resident Larry Castle told the Sacramento Bee newspaper that he and his wife had packed up a few possessions and their three dogs to leave the area for the night.

"You look back at the Paradise fire and the Santa Rosa fire and you realise this stuff is very, very serious," he said.

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