

Thousands evacuated as wildfires spread across western United States

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A firefighter lights a backfire during the Mosquito Fire in California on September 9, 2022 [File: Noah Berger/AP Photo]

Los Angeles, September 12 (RHC)-- Thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes in the US state of Oregon, as a massive wildfire shoots clouds of ash and smoke into the air and threatens

entire towns. The Creek Fire is the latest to hit the western United States, where dozens of blazes in California, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state have scorched more than 3,100sq km (1,200sq miles) so far this summer.

About 1,200 firefighters and other personnel are working to put out the fire east of Eugene, Oregon, according to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). The Creek Fire has grown to more than 35,000 hectares (86,734 acres) – roughly twice the size of Washington, DC – and it was zero percent contained as of Monday.

Steep terrain has complicated efforts to contain the blaze, and evacuations have been ordered for Lane and Deschutes counties. Authorities say more than 2,000 homes are at risk. “They have been constructing firelines away from the active fire edge, along roads and trails, where they have a better chance of successfully stopping the fire,” NWCG said.

Extreme heat and withering drought have helped create a highly combustible risk of fire in the western U.S. which experts say has been worsened by climate change. In Oregon, even for those not directly threatened by the flames, the fire has made its presence felt: smoke has enveloped the region, creating poor air quality and health risks.

According to NWCG, “smoke has created unhealthy air quality for communities east of the fire as well, including Bend”, a town known for access to outdoor tourism. “Get out of here as fast as I can,” Herman Schimmel, who moved to the small town of Westfir only recently, told The Oregonian newspaper. “That’s all I was thinking about.”

Meanwhile, the National Interagency Fire Center reported that more than 90 fires are currently burning across seven states in the west: California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. The Double Creek fire in a more remote area of Oregon has consumed nearly 63,000 hectares (155,000 acres) and is about 15 percent contained.

In California, a scorching heatwave last week strained the state’s power grid and contributed to fires throughout the state. The largest blaze right now is the Mosquito Fire in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which has spread to more than 19,000 hectares (47,000 acres) and is 10 percent contained, according to the state fire agency Cal Fire.

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