

Unhealthy smoke slows fruit picking



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Margarito Najera said he was wearing scarf because of smoke as he picks Gala apples in Piepel Orchard, East Wenatchee, Wash., Aug. 20. Foreman Gabriel Canchola said many pickers were working fewer hours and others didn't come to work because of smoke from wildfires.

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Widespread unhealthy air from Washington and British Columbia wildfires is hampering apple and pear harvest in Central Washington.

Air quality was rated as "hazardous" Monday in Wenatchee, Chelan, Spokane and Inchelium by Washington Smoke Information, a website sponsored by local, state and federal agencies.

One step better from hazardous was "very unhealthy" for Twisp, Quincy, Leavenworth and other towns. Better yet at "unhealthy" were Omak, Ellensburg, Yakima, Moses Lake, Ritzville and Kennewick.

The agencies warned people to stay inside in areas of less than 1 mile visibility and to minimize outdoor activity at visibility of less than 3 miles. The agencies predicted no significant relief until Thursday, Aug. 23.

Smoke lowers temperatures and prevents sunburn to tree fruit but also can delay fruit maturity and harvest.

"Some pickers are working six or four hours instead of eight and some aren't coming to work at all. It's really bad," Gabriel Canchola, a foreman at Piepel Orchards in East Wenatchee, said of Gala apple harvest in the smoke.

"It definitely is uncomfortable for those outside for long and makes outdoor labor more difficult," said Sean Gilbert, co-owner of Gilbert Orchards in Yakima.

"We haven't seen any ill effects from it but it's too early to tell," he said. "We need to get apples picked but are also conscious of people's well-being."

Gilbert was giving his Gala pickers the option of working fewer hours.

The growing season began with "awesome, phenomenal temperatures in May and June" and despite difficult weather the last two weeks,

fruit is maturing nicely, he said.

"How long it lasts in storage we will see," he said, adding he doesn't know if smoke affects storability.

Jeff LaPorte, director of field services at Chelan Fruit Cooperative, said smoke is slowing workers, some are using masks and growers are leaving it up to workers to determine their hours in picking Gala apples and Bartlett pears.

"Harvest is a push so there's not much leeway," he said.

LaPorte and Gilbert both said the weekend and Monday were the worst smoke yet of the past week. They were hopeful of clearing that was forecast for Thursday.

Wildfire smoke is absorbed quickly by wine grapes and can remain long after the smoke has cleared, University of British Columbia researchers said earlier this year. It can lead to smoky-flavored wine even though grapes taste normal, they said.

Through Aug. 21, 41,563 fires have broken out; less than last year

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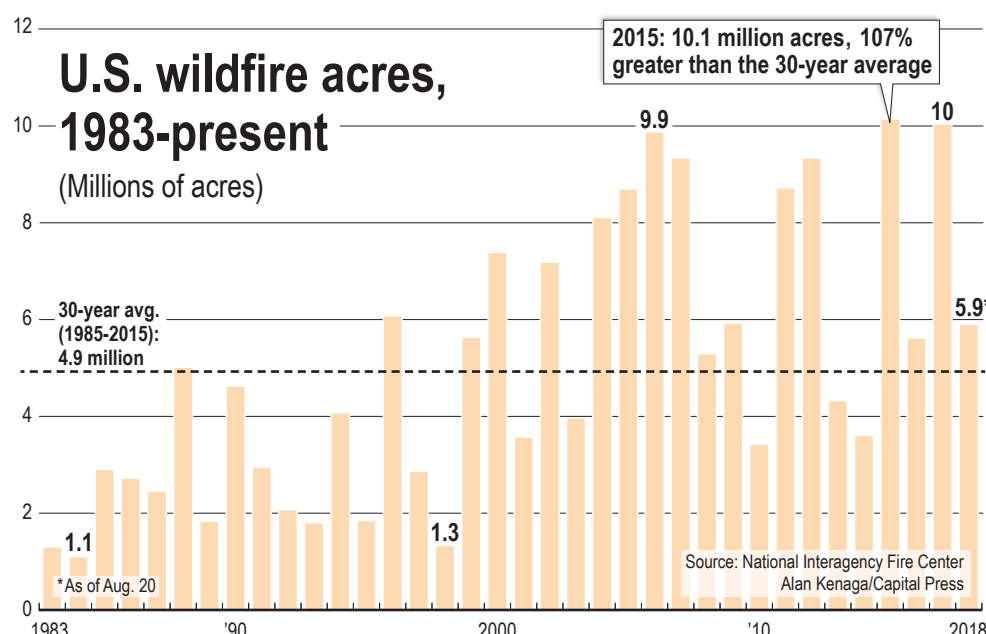
Active large wildfires as of Aug. 21 in six Western states:

Oregon

- 187 Gilman, 12 miles northeast of Monument, 400 acres at last report, percentage contained zero or not listed.
- Columbus, 15 miles east of Tiller, 10,518 acres, 35 percent contained.
- Jennie's Peak, 14 miles south of Fossil, 36,000 acres, 10 percent contained.
- Kinzuna Complex, 12 miles east of Fossil, 619 acres at last report, percentage contained zero or not listed.
- Klondike, nine miles southwest of Selma, 72,074 acres, 32 percent contained.
- Lonerock, seven miles northwest of Condon, 5,000 acres, 30 percent contained.
- Milepost 6, six miles south of Madras, 1,500 acres, 75 percent contained.
- Miles, five miles northeast of Trail, 35,455 acres, 39 percent contained.
- Natchez, 15 miles southeast of Cave Junction, 20,275 acres, 70 percent contained.
- Seal, 14 miles west of Condon, 15,500 acres, 20 percent contained.
- Skyline, 15 miles south of Ironside, 300 acres, 20 percent contained.
- Stubblefield, seven miles northeast of Condon, 18,000 acres, 50 percent contained.
- Taylor Creek, 10 miles west of Grants Pass, 52,588 acres, 95 percent contained.
- Terwilliger, five miles southeast of Blue River, 125 acres at last report, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Watson Creek, 13 miles west of Paisley, 25,800 acres, 5 percent contained.
- Coyote Creek, 15 miles south of Jordan Valley, 598 acres, fully contained.

Washington

- Arctic Jim, two miles southwest of White Swan, 340 acres at last



report, containment percentage zero or not listed.

- Bannock Lakes, 14 miles southwest of Stehekin, 470 acres at last report, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Boyds, three miles west of Kettle Falls, 3,278 acres, 49 percent contained.
- Cougar Creek, eight miles northwest of Manson, 38,924 acres, 40 percent contained Aug. 21.
- Crescent Mountain, 18 miles west of Winthrop, 26,181 acres, 34 percent contained.
- Horns Mountain, 19 miles north of Evans, 2,467 acres, 20 percent contained.
- Maple, 10 miles north of Hoodrport, 1,879 acres, 41 percent contained.
- McLeod, eight miles north of Mazama, 15,313 acres, 5 percent contained.
- Meninick Pass, five miles south of White Swan, 5,537 acres, 90 percent contained.
- Miriam, 15 miles east of Packwood, 3,448 acres, 30 percent contained.

Idaho

- Copper Mountain, four miles east of Eastport, 229 acres, 25

percent contained.

- Cougar, five miles east of East Hope, 5,524 acres, 26 percent contained.
- Kiawah, 49 miles northwest of Challis, 15,437 acres, 1 percent contained.
- Mesa, four miles south of Council, 34,700 acres, 89 percent contained.
- Rabbit Foot, 14 miles southwest of Salmon, 34,518 acres, 5 percent contained.
- Rampike, 23 miles northeast of Kellogg, 2,000 acres, percentage contained zero or not listed.
- Rattlesnake Creek, five miles southwest of Riggins, 8,135 acres, 28 percent contained.
- Sharps, six miles east of Bellevue, 64,853 acres at last report, incident no longer active.
- Smith Creek, 19 miles west of Bonners Ferry, 870 acres, 5 percent contained.
- Surprise Creek, 18 miles east of Athol, 2,300 acres, 19 percent contained.
- Artesian, four miles north of Roberts, 1,980 acres at last report, fully contained.

California

- Call, 22 miles northeast of Bakersfield, 370 acres, 50 percent

contained.

- Carr, four miles south of French Gulch, 229,651 acres, 88 percent contained.
- Donnell, five miles west of Dardenville, 35,000 acres, 51 percent contained Aug. 21.
- Front, 30 miles northeast of Santa Maria, 900 acres, 29 percent contained.
- Hirz, 11 miles east of Lakehead, 17,467 acres, 17 percent contained.
- Holy, seven miles northeast of Rancho Santa Margarita, 22,885 acres, 91 percent contained.
- Lions, seven miles southwest of Mammoth Lakes, 11,606 acres, 75 percent contained.
- Mendocino Complex, five miles south of Potter Valley, 404,532 acres, 74 percent contained.
- Mill Creek 1, four miles southeast of Weitchpec, 1,500 acres, 26 percent contained.
- Stone, 14 miles northwest of Adin, 23,221 acres, 12 percent contained.

Nevada

- Broad, three miles northwest of Carvers, 543 acres, 83 percent contained.
- Sheep Creek, 15 miles north of Battle Mountain, 57,417 acres,

50 percent contained Aug. 21.

Montana

- Bacon Rind, 17 miles north of West Yellowstone, 2,045 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Beaver Creek, 32 miles southwest of Anaconda, 2067 acres, 8 percent contained Aug. 21.
- Brownstone, 25 miles east of Condon, 2,214 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Coal Ridge, 28 miles north of Kalispell, 280 acres, 2 percent contained Aug. 21.
- Davis, 10 miles northwest of Yaak, 6,205 acres, 8 percent contained.
- Garden Creek, two miles north of Ronan, 2,052 acres and 60 percent contained.
- Gold Hill, 13 miles north of Libby, 930 acres Aug. 21, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Goldstone, 12 miles south of Jackson, 9,191 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Howe Ridge, 10 miles north of West Glacier, 11,172 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Monument, 42 miles southwest of Ennis, 6,613 acres, 13 percent contained.
- Pauola Ridge, three miles northwest of Essex, 364 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Shellrock, 25 miles north of Helena, 500 acres, 65 percent contained.
- Sterling Complex, 18 miles south of Eureka, 1,216 acres, 23 percent contained.
- Tenmile, 19 miles south of Eureka, 681 acres, 91 percent contained.
- Whale Butte, 45 miles north of Kalispell, 338 acres, containment percentage zero or not listed.
- Wigwam, 15 miles southwest of Ennis, 4,191 acres, 66 percent contained.

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