

# Hell and high water: Oroville besieged again

Wildfire destroys Northern California homes months after flood evacuations

By DON THOMPSON  
Associated Press

OROVILLE, Calif. — With looming floods and roaring flames, Chuck Wilsey's year sounds more like ancient scripture than modern living in Northern California.

Wilsey returned to his ranch home in Oroville on Monday, relieved to learn it had been spared by the wildfire, just as he had stayed clear of troubles brought on by a damaged spillway at a nearby dam five months ago.

"I don't know what's worse — fire, or water — it's a toss-up," Wilsey, 53, told The Associated Press after returning to his home on Monday afternoon.

He and his family were among the more than 5,000 people evacuated as flames raced through grassy foothills in the Sierra Nevada, about 60 miles north of Sacramento. Most of those evacuations remain in effect, though Wilsey and others have been allowed to return home.

The blaze burned nearly 9 square miles of grass, injured four firefighters and destroyed at least 17 structures. It was 35 percent contained.

Crews were making progress against that fire and dozens of others across California, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, and into Canada.

Wilsey was far from celebratory, instead regrouping almost immediately and making new plans in case the fire makes another run at them. "I was ripping pictures off the wall trying to get ready," Wilsey said.

He said he was leaving his trailer attached to his truck and telling his daughters to keep prized possessions they



CalFire firefighter Jake Hainey, left, and engineer Anna Mathiasen watch as a wildfire burns near Oroville, Calif., on Saturday. The fast-moving wildfire in the Sierra Nevada foothills destroyed structures, including homes, and led to several minor injuries, fire officials said Saturday as blazes threatened homes around California during a heat wave.



Trucks burned by a wildfire rest in a grove near Oroville, Calif., on Saturday.

couldn't take the first time close at hand.

The area burning is southeast of Oroville, near where 200,000 residents downstream from the 770-foot-high Oroville Dam were briefly evacuated in February when the structure's spillways began crumbling. Wilsey's home

was far enough away that he didn't have to evacuate from the floods.

His daughter, Krystle Chambers, who lives on the same property, said the one-two punch of floods and fires was taking its toll.

"It's hard, it's rough," she said. "Way too many hits. First it's this side of town,



Josh Cornelison kisses girlfriend Sharon Reitan as she shows evacuation shelter volunteers video of their burned home on Sunday, in Oroville, Calif. A wildfire leveled their home, as well as several neighbor's residences, as it burned through a mountain community Friday.

then the other side of town. It almost makes you want to move."

Pam Deditch, who is running the shelter where Wilsey and his family were

huddled, also managed a shelter during the winter drenching.

"If it's not one thing, it's the other," she said with a laugh. "We're used to this.

We're resilient. We're strong. We get fires and we get flooding."

In Southern California, at least 3,500 people remained out of their homes as a pair of fires raged at different ends of Santa Barbara County. The larger of the two charred more than 45 square miles of dry brush and threatened more than 130 rural homes. It was 15 percent contained.

The fires broke out amid a blistering weekend heat wave that toppled temperature records. Slightly cooler weather is expected to give crews a break in the coming days.

California officials said the extraordinarily wet winter caused thick spring blooms that are now dried out and burning, making for unpredictable fire behavior.

"You see rapid fire growth in a lot of these fires, larger acreage consumption, which makes it very difficult to fire-fighters to fight," said Bennet Milloy, spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

In Colorado, crews were winding down the fight against a wildfire that temporarily forced the evacuation of hundreds of people near the resort town of Breckenridge. Firefighters built containment lines around at least 85 percent of the blaze.

Across the border in Canada, crews contended with more than 200 wildfires in British Columbia that have forced thousands to flee and destroyed dozens of buildings, including several homes and two airport hangars.

"We are just, in many ways, at the beginning of the worst part of the fire season and we watch the weather, we watch the wind, and we pray for rain," British Columbia Premier Christy Clark said.

Rob Schweitzer, manager of the Kamloops Fire Centre, said it had been an unprecedented 24 hours. "We probably haven't seen this sort of activity that involves so many residences and people in the history of the province of B.C.," he said.

## Iraqi declares 'total victory' over Islamic State in Mosul

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — Iraq on Monday declared "total victory" over the Islamic State group in Mosul, retaking full control of the country's second-largest city three years after it was seized by extremists bent on building a global caliphate.

"This great feast day crowned the victories of the fighters and the Iraqis for the past three years," said Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, flanked by his senior military leadership at a small base on the edge of the Old City, where the final battles for Mosul unfolded.

Al-Abadi alluded to the brutality of the battle for Mosul — Iraq's longest yet in the fight against IS — saying the triumph had been achieved "by the blood of our martyrs."

While Mosul fell to IS in a matter of days in 2014, the campaign to retake the city lasted nearly nine months. The fight, closely backed by airstrikes from the U.S.-led coalition, brought an end to the extremists' so-called territorial caliphate, but has also left thousands dead, entire neighborhoods in ruins and nearly 900,000 displaced from their homes.

Shortly after al-Abadi's speech, the coalition congratulated him on the victory but noted that parts of the Old City still "must be back-cleared of explosive devices and possible ISIS fighters in hiding." ISIS, ISIL and Daesh are alternative acronyms for the Islamic State group.

"The victory in Mosul, a city where ISIS once proclaimed its so-called 'caliphate,' signals that its days in Iraq and Syria are numbered," President Donald Trump said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, airstrikes pounded the last IS-held territory on the western edge of the Tigris, Humvees rushed wounded to field hospitals and soldiers hurriedly filled bags with hand grenades to ferry to the front.

Iraqi troops had slowly



Iraqis celebrate while holding national flags in Tahrir square in Baghdad, Iraq, Monday. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory against the Islamic State group in Mosul Monday evening, after nearly nine months of largely grueling urban combat.

pushed through the narrow alleys of the Old City during the past week, punching holes through walls and demolishing houses to carve supply routes and fighting positions in a district where many of the buildings date back centuries.

For days, the remaining few hundred militants held an area measuring less than half a square mile, and Iraqi commanders described victory as imminent.

Al-Abadi also visited Mosul on Sunday, congratulating the troops on recent gains but stopping short of declaring an outright victory as clashes continued.

The drawn-out endgame in Iraq's fight for Mosul highlighted the resilience of the extremists and the continued reliance of Iraqi forces on air support to retake territory.

Iraqi commanders said gains slowed to a crawl in recent days as IS fighters used their families — including women and children — as human shields. As the battle space constricted, the coalition began approving airstrikes dropping bombs of 200 pounds or more on IS targets within 50 yards of friendly forces.

Plumes of smoke Monday grew larger than the strip of territory under IS control.

"This used to be a beautiful

city, tourists used to come here," said Iraqi army Capt. Marwan Hadi based inside the Old City. The last days of the fight for Mosul were the fiercest, he said.

"All along the front line, there are so many families under the rubble," he said. "I saved two children and their mother, but one daughter, we couldn't reach her."

Reports of civilian casualties spiked as Iraqi forces punched into Mosul's western half in February. Residents fleeing the fighting reported that entire families sheltering in the basements of their homes were killed by airstrikes targeting small teams of IS fighters.

Thousands of civilians were estimated to have been killed in the fight for Mosul, according to Nineveh's provincial council. A toll that does not include those still believed buried under collapsed buildings.

Also Monday, the United Nations said there was no end in sight to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq despite the conclusion of the fighting. Of the more than 897,000 people displaced from Mosul, the U.N. said thousands of residents will probably not be able to return to the city because of "extensive damage caused during the conflict."

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