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GARNET FIRE SPREADS IN THE SIERRA

ICONIC GROVE UNDER THREAT



A PG&E firefighter extinguishes a hot spot near a giant sequoia as the Garnet Fire burns in McKinley Grove in the Sierra National Forest on Monday. The fire was mostly contained Wednesday. **PHOTOS BY NOAH BERGER — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

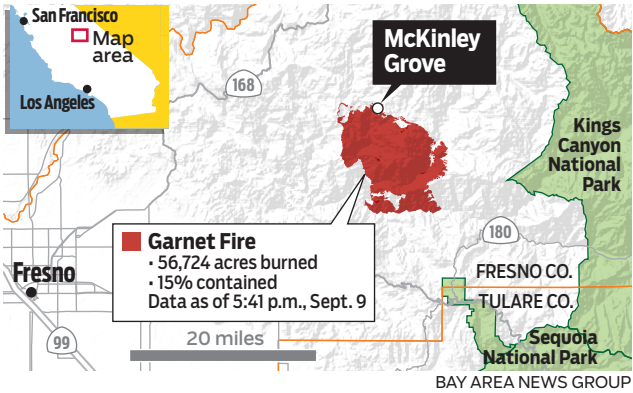
Firefighting ‘smoke jumpers’ are working to put out tree-canopy blazes amid the ancient giant sequoias of McKinley Grove

By Ethan Baron
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Embers spat out by the Garnet Fire overnight Sunday ignited small fires that were still smoldering Wednesday in the high branches of several trees in a cherished grove of giant sequoias in the Sierra Nevada, and a team of firefighting “smoke jumpers” arrived mid-day Wednesday to try to put them out.

Fire officials believe the tree-canopy fires were the last remaining threat to McKinley Grove, after firefighters cleared underbrush and debris and deployed sprinklers, succeeded in keeping flames that entered the grove from inflicting significant damage.

Giant sequoias, found only in California, are the largest trees in the world by volume, and among the oldest, with some in McKinley Grove likely more than 2,000 years old, said Ben Blom, director of stewardship and restoration



at Save the Redwoods League. The grove’s location beside a paved road makes it easier to visit than many other giant sequoia forests, Blom said.

Save the Redwoods estimates McKinley Grove holds 150 to 200 giant sequoias known as “monarchs” for being more than four feet in diameter, plus many smaller trees of that species.

“It’s a spectacular grove,” Blom said. “One of the things that’s unique about this grove is it’s really isolated from other giant sequoia groves. It’s

kind of an island. It’s isolated from where most of the giant sequoia groves are, which is further south.”

On Sunday night and into Monday, when the north side of the 55,000-acre blaze in the mountains east of Fresno exploded in a 10,000-acre run, it launched embers across a valley into McKinley Grove. The firebrands, likely bits of bark and branches, landed in the trees and have been burning in built-up debris on the branches of six to eight giant sequoias, said U.S. Forest

Service spokesman Joe Zwierchowski.

“We’ve identified which trees are holding embers,” Zwierchowski said. “So far, so good — nothing is engulfed in flames and fully on fire.”

The small spots of fire are out of reach of firefighters’ hoses, Zwierchowski said. “You just can’t shoot water that high,” he said, adding that hoses can squirt water upward a maximum of about 50 or 60 feet.

So the Forest Service has called in a team of smoke jumpers, whose work usually involves parachuting into remote locations to fight wildfires. Because their parachutes can get caught in branches, these elite, specialized firefighters “are good at climbing tall trees and retrieving items,” Zwierchowski said.

Several of the trees are each holding multiple smoldering hotspots, he said.

“Our operational people

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‘DEVASTATING TREND’

Student testing scores a concern

National data shows pupils in eighth and 12th grades at historic lows in math, science

By Molly Gibbs
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New data from a crucial national test revealed historically low scores in two major subjects for 12th graders across the country, further emphasizing that U.S. students have struggled to recover academically after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Testing data released Tuesday from the National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that, overall, students’ scores were lower in 12th-grade math and reading and eighth-grade science than the last time students were tested in 2019. With 38% of students scoring below basic in eighth-grade science, students’ science scores were the lowest they’ve been since 2009, while students’ scores in 12th-grade math and reading were the lowest they’ve ever been since the tests were first administered — 1992 for reading and 2005 for math. The data did

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EXCERPTS FROM ‘107 DAYS’

Harris book vague on her future plans

Supporters, analysts try to parse whether presidential run coming

By Julia Prodis Sulek
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Excerpts from former Vice President Kamala Harris’s quasi-confessional new book, released Wednesday, seem to beg the question: Is this the message of someone planning to run again for president?

Harris, who lost her 107-day campaign against Donald Trump last fall, has already announced she won’t run next year for California governor to replace Gavin Newsom. But another run for president in 2028 after a slim but dramatic loss to Trump? Still uncertain.

“It seems like she is edging away from running

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CONSERVATIVE ALLY OF PRESIDENT TRUMP

Activist fatally shot at college event

Charlie Kirk, 31, was the founder of Turning Point USA

By Hannah Schoenbaum, Alanna Durkin Richer and Mark Sherman
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OREM, Utah — Charlie Kirk, a conservative activist and close ally of President Donald Trump, was shot and killed Wednesday at a Utah

college event in an act that drew renewed attention to the threat of political violence across the United States.

No one was in custody late Wednesday, though authorities were searching for a new person of interest, according to a law enforcement official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss the situation by name and spoke on condition of anonymity. Authorities had earlier provided evolving

information on the status of the search, with FBI Director Kash Patel initially saying on social media that a “subject” had been taken into custody, only to later say the person had been released after being questioned.

The death was announced on social media by Trump, who praised the 31-year-old Kirk, the co-founder and CEO of the youth organization Turning Point USA, as “Great, and even Legendary.”

Gov. Gavin Newsom, who recently spoke with Kirk on a podcast that the governor hosts, called the shooting “disgusting, vile and reprehensible.”

Though no motive has been disclosed, the circumstances of the shooting fueled concerns that it was part of a spike of political violence that has cut across the political spectrum. The attacks

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Charlie Kirk addresses the crowd at Utah Valley University in Orem on Wednesday just before he was shot and killed. **TESS CROWLEY — THE DESERET NEWS VIA AP**

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