



**American
Red Cross**

2021 Western Wildfires **ONE-YEAR UPDATE**

July 2022





“As long as my family is taken care of, I’m okay....
the Red Cross is above and beyond.” – Mark Scott

The Scott family could only pack the bare necessities as the Dixie Fire approached their home, but Red Cross volunteer John Van Sickle helped replace the Legos that Gavin, age 9, had to leave behind. The Scott family chose to camp outside the shelter in Susanville to allow the Red Cross to provide more space inside the shelter for others in the community. “We only planned on staying a night or two” Gavin’s mother, Michelle, said, “but the atmosphere for my family has kept us here.”

Above: Red Cross volunteer John Van Sickle looks on as Gavin Scott, age 9, gives his mom Michele a hug outside the Lassen College shelter in Susanville, California. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

Cover photo: Colfax, California, resident Ron Pucci shows Red Cross volunteer Dave Wagner the remains of his home after it was destroyed by the River Fire. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross



Volunteers Gabriela Perez Albarracin and Francisa Romero-Ramos make sure Lisa Hinze-Bluff is comfortable in her new wheelchair outside the shelter in Susanville, California. Hinze injured her leg prior to the family's evacuation from their home in Westwood, California, due to the Dixie Fire. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

Delivering Comfort and Care Through Another Heartbreaking Wildfire Season

Last year, communities across the western U.S. faced another lengthy and devastating wildfire season — from June to December 2021, tens of thousands of blazes across the West consumed more than 7 million acres while evacuations forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. Throughout the 2021 wildfire season and beyond, the American Red Cross has stood with impacted residents to provide immediate relief and ongoing recovery support.

Californians suffered through a series of devastating blazes, fueled by searing heat and prolonged drought conditions. Among them was the enormous Dixie

Fire — which scorched an area larger than the state of Rhode Island, leveled more than 1,300 structures and devastated the community of Greenville, California — as well as the Caldor Fire, which burned for over two months and destroyed more than 1,000 structures. Oregon also experienced another active fire season as the Bootleg Fire — the third largest in state history — raged for more than a month before finally being contained.

Across the western U.S., from Arizona and Nevada to Washington and Montana, Red Cross volunteers and employees worked for months to make sure people who

evacuated or lost their homes due to the fires had a place to stay, food to eat and resources to help them recover. We also provided immediate financial assistance to help families address urgent needs for food, clothing, transportation and lodging.

Safe refuge was a critical need for people like Frieda Ingram of South Lake Tahoe, California, as wildfires sprang up and threatened their communities. Despite being evacuated to a shelter in Reno, Nevada, when the Caldor Fire approached her apartment, she was able to maintain a positive attitude.

"I'm so grateful for the Red Cross," she said. "I know I'll be safe here until this is over."

Delivering vital aid like shelter support through multiple back-to-back fires in the West presented extraordinary challenges, due to the number of major fires, the distances involved and, in some cases, lack of local infrastructure to support sheltering large numbers of displaced people. In particular, the continual deployment of volunteers and employees needed to provide sheltering across far-flung rural communities imposed significant costs.

To better manage these challenges during last year's relentless wildfire season, the Red Cross initiated a new "firehouse" model for disaster response operations, which allowed us to maintain a steady presence in impacted regions, while accounting for the immense resource cost of responding to ceaseless wildfires.

This new model helped us quickly deploy our relief workers where they were needed most, often across great distances, as blazes flared up almost constantly across the West.

Today, with another destructive wildfire season already upon us—including this spring's record-breaking fires in New Mexico—many people are still trying to recover from 2021's blazes, as well as the compounded impacts of other devastating wildfires over the last five years. Thanks to generous support from compassionate donors, the Red Cross has been able to stand with survivors over the past year to help meet their ongoing needs, providing additional financial assistance, guidance with recovery planning and more to help them get back on their feet.

Response at a Glance

More than **1,200 disaster responders** supported wildfire relief operations in 2021 across the western U.S., where they:



21,200

Provided more than **21,200 overnight stays** with partners



118,600

Served more than **118,600 meals and snacks** with partners



7,000

Delivered nearly **7,000 relief supplies**



1,800

Opened nearly **1,800 cases** to provide recovery support

Volunteer Recalls Challenges, Inspiration from a Long Wildfire Season

Red Cross volunteers stand at the heart of our mission, whether they're meeting daily needs in their own communities or leaving their homes and families for weeks to help people across the country. Volunteers comprised the majority of more than 1,200 disaster responders who brought vital aid to wildfire survivors in 2021 — with many of them deploying multiple times through a smoke-filled summer and into the fall.

Angie Irmer, who lives in Chico, California, realized a “dream” when she became a Red Cross volunteer in 2017. Since then, she's helped people through some of the worst wildfires in California history. She said that 2021 was among the most devastating fire seasons she can recall. “This time seemed a little different,” she said, “and maybe that was because I was seeing all of the shelters and fires.”

In addition to the destruction and disruption the fires caused, some of the biggest challenges faced by responders included the sheer number of fires and the vast distances involved, as well as a shortage of available and suitable facilities in smaller, more rural communities. “For many of our volunteers, it was as much as a four-hour drive between shelters,” she said. “In some communities [where we needed to set up shelters], there wasn't a building large enough to accommodate everyone, or a restaurant [to partner with] for food.”

Due to the lack of available space in some areas and the number of people affected, many who showed up at Red Cross shelters chose to camp outside in tents and RVs. In rural California, this was especially true for those evacuating with beloved pets, from dogs and cats to “peacocks, goats and farm animals.” Angie explained that while the Red Cross tries to partner with local animal welfare organizations to kennel or otherwise accommodate pets of shelter residents, “we were not always able to find partners in some of those areas.”

“Others just prefer to live off the grid and wanted to stay with their belongings,” she said. “So we had to adapt our care because we always work to provide equal care, whether you're staying inside or choosing to stay outside.” Angie explained how she worked with shelter volunteers to ensure people staying outside knew when meals were being served, had water to drink and access



Angie Irmer, a Red Cross volunteer from Chico, California, helped wildfire survivors at shelters across California in 2021. Photo courtesy of Angie Irmer.

to facilities, and had their individual needs supported as best as possible.

Often the most important service a Red Cross volunteer can offer is just to listen. Angie remembered a resident in one shelter — an older woman on oxygen who mostly kept to herself in a corner and had no visitors. Angie made a point of checking in on her every day before her shift was over.

“I would try to find out where she was coming from, how she got to be there, and what she was going through,” Angie said. “When she was ready to leave, she came up to me in her walker and said, ‘I just want to thank you ... for just taking the time to talk to me.’ And it just touched my heart ... that I was able to help her and talk to her and just, you know, be a friend.”

“Those kind of stories are what help keep me going,” Angie said.

Supporting Recovery for Wildfire Survivors

As many people who were severely affected by the 2021 wildfires struggled to pick up the pieces, the Red Cross provided emergency funds, which can help families replace clothes, buy food, offset transportation costs or support any other immediate needs. In the year since these blazes began, the Red Cross has also provided an additional round of financial assistance to some of the most severely impacted survivors, helping them build bridges from hardship to recovery.

As of May 1, 2022, we had provided **direct financial assistance totaling approximately \$1 million**, reaching individuals and families who suffered devastating losses to fast-moving blazes that consumed homes and belongings. This financial assistance will allow people to make their own decisions and overcome the barriers standing in the way of their recovery.

This aid meant so much to people like Ronald Duster, who lived a secluded life in the forests of Shasta County, California, before being displaced by the July 2021 Salt Fire. He received \$1,700 in financial assistance from the Red Cross. “I paid my phone bill, my insurance and bought clothing,” he said. “I bought things as needed. If I had to go into town, (I paid for gas and food). It helped me a lot.”

“You guys were amazing. Everybody I dealt with. I have nothing but good to say about that.”

Laurie Bremel, Quincy, California. Laurie received assistance from the Red Cross after she lost her home to the Fly and Dixie fires.

For many hard-hit 2021 wildfire survivors, this Red Cross financial assistance made a critical difference as they began the long journey to recovery, helping them overcome recovery roadblocks to stable housing, such as pay for rental application fees and security deposits, as well as debris removal and structural modifications to ensure easy access for people with disabilities. It was also used to meet job-related needs like replacing work clothing and equipment, and it helped affected residents with needs like repairing damaged vehicles, fuel and public transit costs, and obtaining rides to and from medical appointments.

Recovery from destructive disasters like the 2021 wildfires is a team effort, and trained Red Cross volunteers and disaster workers continue to work closely with nonprofit and civic organizations, local businesses and governments to care for communities and families through the recovery process. These volunteers are working with wildfire survivors to plan their next steps and identify available recovery resources, as well as offering comfort, encouragement and guidance through this difficult process.

Marlene Long, Beckwourth Complex Fire survivor

“The fire was making its own weather,” Marlene Long, 74, recalled of her terrifying experience during the Beckwourth Complex Fire that kindled in late June and early July 2021, burning over 100,000 acres in California’s Plumas and Lassen counties. “It was coming from every direction.”



Marlene Long lost her home in Doyle, California, to the Beckwourth Complex Fire. The Red Cross helped her with medical supplies, and she used Red Cross financial assistance to help replace clothing lost in the fire. Photos courtesy of Marlene Long.



Marlene Long lost her home in Doyle, California, to the Beckwourth Complex Fire. The Red Cross helped her with medical supplies, and she used Red Cross financial assistance to help replace clothing lost in the fire. Photos courtesy of Marlene Long.

Tragically, the wildfire incinerated 33 homes in Doyle, California, including Marlene's. While the fire took all Marlene's belongings, even artwork she had been creating since age 8, she was grateful that her cats, which lived in a wooden outbuilding, survived. She was also thankful for Red Cross assistance, referring to the volunteers she met with as "angels."

"(The Red Cross) directed me where to get a wheelchair and how to replace my medical supplies," she said.

With financial assistance, Marlene was also able to go shopping to replace lost clothing.

She shared a story of having her spirits lifted by finding an embroidered top that was a perfect fit: "It was my size and so much like all the things together that I had lost."

Now living in Sparks, Nevada, Marlene told us that she has revisited her property three times, but it was too hard to go back. "I can't go near my place," she said, "but I'm financially okay."

Red Cross Grants Help Meet Longer-term Recovery Needs

In addition to financial assistance and aid with recovery planning, the Red Cross is also supporting ongoing recovery work carried out by local partner organizations. We will support these organizations as they address unmet longer-term recovery needs in the affected communities and help residents become better prepared for and more resilient against future crises.

Early grants are enabling ongoing recovery support services in some of the most severely affected California communities. For example, Red Cross grantee Plumas Rural Services is operating a resource center in

Greenville, California—where some 75% of the town was destroyed—that serves as a donation hub and distribution point for survivors of the Dixie Fire. Survivors can also visit the on-site information center to learn about available recovery resources and work directly with a caseworker.

In addition, Plumas Rural Services is providing monthly community meals that offer a forum for fire survivors to come together, serving as a mental health resource to people who may not otherwise seek it out. They are also providing financial support for the immediate needs of survivors, such as winterization or cooling support for

residents' trailers, rental assistance, medical bills or child care costs.

Another grant is providing \$385,000 to the North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF) as part of a “funders’ roundtable” that will share information on evolving community needs with funders, identify priorities and streamline the grant process to speed aid where it can make the most impact.

Along with helping to identify the need for and fund operations like the Greenville Resource Center, the roundtable is also seeking to address other recovery gaps, such as housing support for homeowners and renters as well as access to health and mental health services, including trauma reduction.

“The funding supports a group of organization and individuals that have the passion and desire to come together in order to rebuild their communities,” explained Tess Slaton of the NVCF. “[People are] trying to build back not just homes, but a community, and in doing so connecting everyone in this effort to bring back Greenville and Plumas County,” she added. “When you’re living in what looks and feels like a disaster zone, you can see a future for tomorrow in these efforts of coming together as a community.”

Generous Donors Fund 2021 Western Wildfires Relief and Recovery

Thanks to our generous donors, the Red Cross has raised more than \$9 million, including the value of critical donated goods and services, to help people impacted by the 2021 Western Wildfires.

As of May 1, 2022, the Red Cross had spent or made commitments to spend approximately \$6 million on emergency relief and recovery efforts for these wildfires. We continue to program the remaining funds to provide and support services for both individual and community long-term recovery in the impacted communities.



James Reichle chats with Red Cross volunteer Dave Wagner outside the Red Cross shelter in Quincy, California, where he was staying with his dog in a pop-up trailer. Reichle was forced to evacuate his home in Greenville by the fast-moving Dixie Fire. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

Western Wildfires 2021 Expenses and Commitments (in millions)^{1,2}

as of May 1, 2022

Expense Categories	Food, Shelter and Relief Items	Health and Emotional Support	Financial Assistance	Community Recovery	Total	Expense %
Deployment of volunteers and staff (includes airfare, lodging, meals and vehicles)	\$2.2	\$0.5	\$0.1	—	\$2.8	46%
Financial assistance, food and other relief items	\$0.1	\$0.3	\$1.0	—	\$1.4	23%
Freight, postage and warehousing	\$0.4	—	—	—	\$0.4	7%
Full-time Red Cross employees	\$0.3	—	—	—	\$0.3	5%
IT, communications and call centers	\$0.2	—	—	—	\$0.2	3%
Temporary disaster hires	\$0.1	—	—	—	\$0.1	2%
Kitchen, shelter and other logistics that enable service delivery	\$0.1	—	—	—	\$0.1	2%
Equipment, maintenance and fueling of Red Cross emergency vehicles and rented trucks	\$0.1	—	—	—	\$0.1	2%
Total Program Expenses	\$3.5	\$0.8	\$1.1	—	\$5.4	90%
Management, general and fundraising					\$0.6	10%
Total spent and committed					\$6.0	100%
Additional budgeted recovery programs					\$2.7	
Management, general and fundraising remaining to be applied ³					\$0.3	
Total Budget⁴					\$9.0	

¹Dollar figures in all tables are rounded to the nearest \$100,000; therefore, expenses \$49,999 and below are represented as zero.

²Includes wildfire responses in Arizona, California, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.

³Management, general and fundraising expenses support our work at its core and are indispensable to running the organization and helping people in need. They include the people and systems to maintain our enterprise-wide computer and telecommunications, HR and payroll systems to support our approximately 19,000 employees and more than 300,000 volunteers, fundraising and communications functions, and other support services across all program lines. Ninety cents of every dollar spent for the 2021 Western Wildfires will support delivering care and comfort to help people affected by these wildfires.

⁴As of May 1, 2022, we have raised over \$9 million for the 2021 Western Wildfires. California Wildfires donations are supporting the response in California, and Western Wildfires donations are supporting all responses across impacted states.

Thank you!

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to an average of more than 60,000 disasters each year—including home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and throughout their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.

YOU HELPED PEOPLE IN THEIR DARKEST HOURS

The extraordinary generosity of the public helped
thousands in need after the 2021 California Wildfires.





To learn more about Red Cross response and recovery efforts to help survivors of disasters, visit [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org).



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Red Cross volunteer Sharron Munguia plays with the Gray-Powers family children at their campsite at the Lassen College shelter in Susanville, California. Gray-Powers later commented, "If it wasn't for you guys [Red Cross] everyone would still be ashy and stinky. And the store shelves have been wiped clean so everyone would be hungry." Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross