# WORLD NEWS

# Hundreds of homes feared lost in Colorado wildfires

*Flames engulf homes as the Marshall Fire spreads through a neighborhood in the town of Superior in Boulder County, Colorado on December 30, 2021. – Hundreds of homes are feared lost in fast-moving wildfires in the US state of Colorado, officials said Thursday, as flames tear through areas desiccated by a historic drought. At least 1,600 acres have burned in Boulder County, much of it suburban, with warnings that deaths and injuries were likely as the blaze engulfes hotels and shopping centers. Extreme winds topping 100 mph caused grass fires to quickly spread into the Colorado towns of Superior and Louisville resulting in the mandatory evacuation of over 30,000 residents. Colorado Governor Jared Polis has declared a state of emergency due to the grass fires in Boulder County. (Photo by Jason Connolly / AFP)*

Hundreds of homes are feared lost in fast-moving wildfires in the US state of Colorado, officials said Thursday, as flames tore through areas desiccated by a historic drought.

At least 1,600 acres have burned in Boulder County, much of it suburban, with warnings that deaths and injuries were likely as the blaze took hold of hotels and shopping centers in the town of Superior.

“We know that approximately 370 homes in the Sagamore subdivision… have been lost. There’s a potential of 210 homes lost in Old Town Superior,” Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle told a news conference.

“The Target shopping complex in Superior is on fire; the Element Hotel in Superior is fully engulfed.

“I’d like to emphasize that due to the magnitude and intensity of this fire and its presence in such a heavily populated area, we would not be surprised if there are injuries or fatalities.”

The Colorado Sun newspaper reported that a number of people had been treated for burns, with at least six patients at one hospital.

Footage broadcast by CBS showed what appeared to be an apartment complex on fire, as firefighters attempted to dowse the flames.

One video on Twitter showed a fire in a parking lot, with trees and grass ablaze, as strong wind pushed smoke around.

Thousands of people have been told to flee the fast-moving fire, which is thought to have begun when power lines were toppled by gusting winds.

Patrick Kilbride, 72, was at work in a hardware store when he heard the order to evacuate, The Denver Post reported.

He raced home to gather his possessions, but was unable to save anything other than his car and the clothes he was wearing.

His dog and cat both perished.

“It’s ashes,” he said of the home he has lived in for three decades.

“It’s not a house. If you need a fireplace chimney, that’s all that’s left.

“It’s just a strange feeling to go from having everything to make your life comfortable to having nothing,” he said.

The 20,000-strong town of Louisville, along with the 13,000 residents of Superior, have been told to get out, with the National Weather Service describing the situation as “life-threatening.”

Patti Holtz described the terror of evacuating her Boulder County home.

“The ditches and things and the trees, they’re all up in flames,” she said.

“Like, there’s embers everywhere. So it makes me very frightened of course, with the wind, that it’s going to continue to spread to other homes.

“It was so dark, of course, that you just can’t see anything. It’s like the black of night.”

**‘Like the neighborhood you live in’**  
Wind gusts of over 100 miles (160 kilometers) an hour have been reported in some places, fanning the flames and complicating firefighting efforts by preventing aircraft from taking to the skies.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis declared a state of emergency, over what he said was a devastating fire.

Unlike previous blazes in the state, he said, this one is not in the countryside; it is where people live.

“This area is right in and around suburban sub-developments, stores,” he said.

“It’s like the neighborhood that you live in. It’s like the neighborhood that any of us live in. And so 1,600 acres near a population center can be and is, in this case, absolutely devastating.”

Like much of the American West, Colorado is in the grip of a years-long drought that has left the area parched and vulnerable to wildfire.

Although fires are a natural part of the climate cycle, and help to clear dead brush and reduce disease in vegetation, their scale and intensity is increasing.

Scientists say a warming climate, chiefly caused by human activities like the unchecked burning of fossil fuels, is altering weather patterns.

This prolongs droughts in some areas and provokes unseasonably large storms in other places, phenomena that are expected to get worse as worldwide average temperatures continue to climb.

Daniel Swain, a meteorologist at the University of California, tweeted that it was “hard to believe” these fires were taking hold in December, usually a quieter time for blazes.

“But take a record warm & dry fall, only 1 inch of snow so far this season, & add an extreme (100mph+) downslope windstorm…and extremely fast moving/dangerous fires are the result.”

# BUSINESS NEWS

# Bitcoin faces uncertain 2022 after record year

*Representations of the Bitcoin cryptocurrency are seen in this illustration picture taken June 7, 2021. REUTERS/Edgar Su/Illustration*

The price of bitcoin hit record highs in 2021 thanks to support from traditional finance, but cryptocurrency specialists are struggling to predict next year’s outcome for the volatile sector.

Having more than trebled in value to $60,000 between December 2020 and April, bitcoin has lost some shine to trade at under $50,000 heading into the new year.

“The current choppy and directionless price action with a possibility of further pressure to the downside has introduced a lot of uncertainty to the digital asset market,” noted Loukas Lagoudis, executive director at cryptocurrency investment fund ARK36.

He added, however, that “sustained adoption of digital assets by institutional investors and their further integration into the legacy financial systems will be the main drivers of growth of the crypto space” during 2022.

**‘No certainty in crypto’**  
Bitcoin’s rise in 2021 coincided with Wall Street’s growing appetite for cryptocurrency.

The record high in April occurred with the stock market debut of cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase.

October’s peak above $66,000 followed the launch of a bitcoin futures exchange-traded fund (ETF), or type of financial instrument, on the New York Stock Exchange.

Tesla boss Elon Musk helped the market rise — and fall — with controversial tweets about cryptocurrencies.

The move by El Salvador in September to make bitcoin a legal tender also made an impression.

But pressure has come from China’s crackdown on the trading and mining of cryptocurrencies, while the risk of wider regulatory action, from the likes of Europe and the United States, weighs on bitcoin.

“There is no certainty in crypto, never mind regulation,” said Huong Hauduc, general counsel at digital assets exchange Bequant.

“However one thing is certain, the voices calling for crypto regulation, whether it be for tighter consumer protection or just clarity of the rules for institutions, are getting much louder.”

Created following the 2008 global financial crisis, bitcoin initially promoted a libertarian ideal and aspired to overthrow traditional monetary and financial institutions such as central banks.

In more recent times, climate change watchers have shone a spotlight on the huge amount of electricity used to power computers required to unearth new bitcoin tokens.

**More competition**  
Bitcoin is at risk of increased competition as it enters 2022, especially from its closest rival ethereum, according to some analysts.

In November, Twitter co-founder and CEO Jack Dorsey announced his departure from the social media platform, leaving him to concentrate on his digital payments firm as it looks to expand into cryptocurrency.

For now, bitcoin remains the dominant player.

According to the specialised site CoinGecko, the cryptocurrency sector has a market value totalling $2.36 trillion, with bitcoin worth a combined $900 billion.

For analyst Frank Downing, “bitcoin’s reluctance to evolve its design” compared to the likes of ethereum, is in fact “a feature that provides the stability and consistency required to serve as a true global money”.

# NATIONAL NEWS

# Nigeria’s biggest challenge in 2021 is insecurity, says Mohammed

*Nigeria’s Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed (Photo by K ola Sulaimon / AFP)*

**• Scores Buhari high on security, others  
• Blames economic downturn on COVID-19**

Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, has said that insecurity is the major challenge faced by the Federal Government in 2021.

Mohammed said this during a media briefing in Lagos, yesterday, to showcase the achievements of President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration during the outgoing year 2021.

According to him, despite the long list of achievements by Buhari’s regime, insecurity was a major challenge.

He, however, explained that the Armed Forces of Nigeria recorded some successes using a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic operations, coupled with a review of strategies.

This, he said, led to the neutralisation of over 1,000 terrorists, the rescue of 2,000 civilians and the surrender of over 22,000 terrorists, including their families in the North-East.

He noted that many arms and ammunition were also recovered, adding that several bomb-making factories of the terrorists were destroyed.

He said: “Let me admit straight away that the year has not been devoid of challenges. For the outgoing year, in particular, the major challenge has been that of insecurity. In spite of this and the usual economic challenges, especially the dwindling resources available to the government, the administration has availed itself creditably, as we will be demonstrating shortly.

“As I said in my introductory remarks, our biggest challenge in the outgoing year is in the area of security. Despite the enormity of the challenge, our military has continued to live up to its billing.

“We owe them a debt of gratitude for their patriotism and sacrifice. We just can’t appreciate them enough, as you will soon see when I break down their achievements in the year under review.”

Mohammed, who commended Buhari’s government for the tremendous progress made in 2021, said that in spite of daunting challenges in the course of the year, the administration made tremendous progress in the fight against insecurity, growing the economy and reforming the oil sector.

He added that the government succeeded in emplacing world-class infrastructure, as well as provided social safety net for the poor and the vulnerable in the society in the year under review.

He also attributed the effectiveness of the military to the supportive leadership provided by Buhari and the unwavering commitment of the armed forces and its leadership.

On the economy, he attributed its downturn on COVID-19, which impacted negatively on the world economy.

“Many countries around the world face unprecedented challenges starting from 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Nigeria is no exception. The Nigerian economy was hit by the pandemic in mid-2020, and the economic disruptions led to a recession.

“The poor performance of the economy during the COVID-19 era affected output growth, trade, household welfare and livelihood,” he stated.

According to him, one of the greatest achievements of Buhari’s administration in the year under review was recorded in the oil and gas sector, with the passage and signing of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) as a landmark achievement.

Speaking on infrastructure, works and housing, Mohammed said that the present administration had distinguished itself in the provision of key infrastructure, such as housing, roads and bridges.

# SPORTS

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*Manchester United’s Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring their third goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Burnley at Old Trafford in Manchester, north-west England, on December 30, 2021. (Photo by Oli SCARFF / AFP) /*

Manchester United cruised to a morale-boosting 3-1 win against Burnley on the eve of Alex Ferguson’s 80th birthday on Thursday to strengthen their push for a Premier League top-four finish.

Scott McTominay put United in front early and a Ben Mee own goal doubled their lead before Cristiano Ronaldo finished impudently to put Ralf Rangnick’s men 3-0 up.

Veteran winger Aaron Lennon punctured the party atmosphere at Old Trafford towards the end of the first half, giving Sean Dyche’s depleted team hope, but United largely bossed a flat second period.

The Red Devils are now in sixth spot, four points behind fourth-placed Arsenal with a game in hand after interim manager Rangnick shuffled his pack following a disappointing draw at Newcastle.

The German said he still had work to do with his defence but told Amazon Prime “physically and energetically it was a good performance”.

“For us it’s about taking next development steps — therefore it was important for us to win this game today,” he said.

“Now we’ve gone eight games in a row without a defeat and since I arrived we have three wins and one draw (in the league), which is OK, we’ve got enough points.”

Rangnick, who took the helm after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked last month, made six changes to his starting XI, rejigging his defence and starting Jadon Sancho and Edinson Cavani in attack.

Bruno Fernandes was suspended after picking up a fifth yellow card of the league season.

Burnley have suffered a number of postponements as a result of coronavirus and a snow-bound pitch and Covid-19 again disrupted Dyche’s plans at Old Trafford.

Dyche, whose side had not played since December 12, confirmed before the game that Josh Brownhill, Nick Pope, Jay Rodriguez and Kevin Long had missed out after testing positive for the virus.

Both teams made a bright start to the game, with Burnley’s Chris Wood heading over from close range and Ronaldo side-footing over with just the goalkeeper to beat after a fine pass from the recalled Luke Shaw.

– McTominay strike –  
United opened the scoring in the eighth minute, when Mason Greenwood cut the ball back to the edge of the box, where Ronaldo’s first touch fell for McTominay, who hit a sweet right-footed shot past back-up goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey.

The home side extended their advantage in the 27th minute in front of former manager Ferguson, who was at the helm the last time they won the Premier League, in 2013.

Sancho was freed down the left by Shaw and the former Borussia Dortmund player cut inside onto his right foot before hitting a low strike that nestled in the corner via a slight touch from Burnley captain Mee.

Eight minutes later a superb McTominay effort was met by a similarly impressive stop by the flying Hennessey, who tipped the strike onto a post only for Ronaldo to react by flicking the loose ball into an empty net with the outside of his right boot.

That goal looked to have wrapped up victory for United but their porous defence conceded again as Lennon produced a clinical finish to beat David de Gea after a fine driving run.

The second half started at a more sedate pace but the confident McTominay again tried his luck from range shortly after the hour mark, forcing Hennessey to tip over.

United were largely in control for the rest of the match as they ended 2021 on a high despite a couple of late scares.

The defeat leaves Burnley mired in relegation trouble, third from bottom of the table with just a single Premier League win all season.

ENTERTAINMENT

## ‘Spider-Man’ surpasses $1B globally in second weekend

Peter Parker’s good fortune continued over the holiday weekend as Hollywood prepares to close the books on a turbulent 2021. Even with some mighty competition from new Matrix and Sing movies, and rising concerns over the omicron variant, “Spider-Man: No Way Home” stayed in the No. 1 spot and netted a few more milestones too including crossing the $1 billion mark globally.

According to studio estimates Sunday “Spider-Man” added $81.5 million over the three-day weekend, down 69% from its first weekend. The Sony and Marvel film has now grossed $467 million from North American theaters, more than doubling the domestic grosses of 2021′s previous No. 1 film, “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings.”

With $587.1 million from 61 overseas markets, in just 12 days of release, “Spider-Man” has grossed $1.05 billion globally. It’s the first film of the pandemic to cross $1 billion and is tied with “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” for being the third-fastest film ever to do so — and this without the benefit of its release in China.

Universal’s “Sing 2” came in second place with an estimated $23.8 million, while Warner Bros.′ “The Matrix Resurrections” grossed $12 million to take third place.

The animated musical “Sing 2” features high-profile celebrity talent including Matthew McConaughey, Scarlett Johansson, Reese Witherspoon and Bono, as well as a jukebox soundtrack full of well-known hits. Since its release Wednesday, it’s made $41 million ($1.6 million of that came from Thanksgiving weekend showings) from North America and $65 million worldwide.

“We’re extraordinarily pleased,” said Jim Orr, Universal’s president of domestic distribution. Orr said the stellar CinemaScore (A+) and audience scores suggest that the film will continue to perform well in the next few weeks, when many kids are still out of school for the holidays.

This image released by Sony Pictures shows Tom Holland, left, and Benedict Cumberbatch in Columbia Pictures' "Spider-Man: No Way Home." (Sony Pictures via AP)

The fourth Matrix also opened on Wednesday and has earned an estimated $22.5 million in its first five days in North America. The film, directed by Lana Wachowski and starring Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss, is currently streaming on HBO Max as well. Globally, it’s grossed $69.8 million to date.

While the studio was hoping for a stronger box office, Jeff Goldstein, Warner Bros.′ head of domestic distribution, said the movie achieved what they were looking for as an overall strategy including HBO Max. “The Matrix Resurrections” is the last of the 18 Warner Bros. films released in 2021 to debut both in theaters and on HBO Max simultaneously.

Starting in 2022, the studio will have a 45-day exclusive theatrical window on their films.

In fourth place was Disney and 20th Century’s “The King’s Man,” a prequel to the action-comedy Kingsman series starring Ralph Fiennes. It came in slightly under expectations with $6.4 million from the weekend and $10 million from its first five days. The audience skewed heavily male (65%).

The Kurt Warner biopic “American Underdog” opened on Christmas Day and has made an estimated $6.2 million in its two days in release to round out the top five. Zachary Levi stars as Warner, the quarterback who went from undrafted free agent to Hall of Famer.

Paul Thomas Anderson’s “Licorice Pizza” expanded nationwide on Christmas, after playing in limited release for a month, and added $2.3 million bringing its total to $3.7 million. And right behind it was the Denzel Washington-directed drama “A Journal For Jordan,” which to $2.2 million.

With just a few days left in 2021, the North American box office is currently sitting at $4.3 billion and is likely to net out around $4.4 billion. Pre-pandemic, it was normal for a year’s box office to surpass $11 billion. “To say was a roller-coaster year is an understatement,” said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore, Inc. “The marketplace is still facing challenges from the pandemic, but what an amazing capper to one of the most incredible years ever at the box office.” He added: “The future of the movie theater a year ago was a big question mark, and a year later it’s here to stay.”

This image released by Sony Pictures shows Benedict Cumberbatch, left, and Tom Holland in Columbia Pictures' "Spider-Man: No Way Home." (Sony Pictures via AP)