

Thomas Fire Update from the 12/15 Record Courier by Kurt Hildebrand

East Fork firefighters could be battling Southern California wildfires through the end of the year.

Battalion Chief Troy Valenzuela and Brush 10 with four firefighters are in their 11th day on the Thomas Fire in Southern California.

"They've had fire every day at work," Deputy Chief Dave Fogerson said on Wednesday. "They have helped save multiple homes."



Picture provided by Aaron Leising

East Fork's firefighters are working 24 hours on and 24 hours off, which is standard at the big fire.

On Monday they will hit the 14-day limit, and Fogerson is expecting that East Fork will be asked to exchange the crews.

"If we do this, we will have employees on the fire into the New Year," he said.

In addition to providing structure protection, East Fork firefighters are laying hose and doing backfires to improve containment lines, Fogerson said.

The Thomas fire has grown to 379 square miles, making it the fifth largest fire in California history, according to the InciWeb Incident Information System.

It was first reported on Dec. 4 near Ojai, and has claimed more than 700 single-family homes and two apartment buildings.

An estimated 8,000 firefighters are battling the blaze.

The Thomas fire so far has cost \$68.7 million to fight and is 30 percent contained. Fire officials hope to have it out by Jan. 7, but Santa Ana winds continue to plague the region. On Wednesday, the National Weather Service issued a red flag warning for gusty winds and low humidity in Southern California.

Fogerson said that the fire district is fully staffed.

East Fork Brush 10 consists of Capt. Paul Azevedo, Engineer Kevin Repan and firefighter-paramedics Adam Wennhold and Aaron Leising.

In addition to East Fork, Carson City, Central Lyon, South Lake Tahoe, North Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf, Tahoe-Douglas, Truckee, North Tahoe, Lake Valley, Truckee Meadows, Sparks, Amador and Mule Creek have sent firefighters.

Four strike teams from Western Nevada and Lake Tahoe responded to the fire.