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# Texas fires destroy more than 1,000 homes

More than 180 fires have erupted in the past week across Texas, with one blaze destroying nearly 600 homes in Bastrop county

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A wildfire burns out of control in Bastrop state park in Texas Photograph: Larry W. Smith/EPA

One of the most devastating wildfire outbreaks in [Texas](#) history has left more than 1,000 homes in ruins and stretched the state's firefighters to the limit, confronting Governor Rick Perry with a disaster at home just as the Republican presidential contest begins in earnest. More than 180 fires have erupted in the past week across the lone star state, with nearly 600 homes destroyed in one catastrophic blaze in and around Bastrop, near Austin, that raged out of control on Tuesday for a third day.

Whipped into an inferno by Tropical Storm Lee's winds over the weekend, the fire burned more than 45 square miles, forced the evacuation of thousands of people and killed at least two, bringing the overall death toll to at least four.

Perry cut short a presidential campaign trip to South Carolina to deal with the crisis. On Tuesday,

he toured a blackened area near Bastrop, and later deployed the state's elite search team to the area to look for more possible victims. Texas Task Force 1 is the same outfit sent to New York after the September 11 terrorist attacks and to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"[There are] pretty powerful visuals of individuals who lost everything," he said after the tour. "The magnitude of these losses are pretty stunning."

The governor would not say whether he would take part in Wednesday evening's Republican presidential debate in California, explaining that he was "substantially more concerned about making sure Texans are being taken care of". But his campaign spokesman, Mark Miner, said in an email later in the day that Perry planned to be there.

Perry, a favourite of the conservative Tea Party movement who has made a career out of railing against government spending, has said he expects federal assistance with the wildfires, and complained that red tape was keeping bulldozers and other heavy equipment at the army's Fort Hood, 75 miles from Bastrop, from being put to use; Fort Hood was battling its own fire, a 1,500-hectare (3,700-acre) blaze.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the Obama administration had approved seven federal grants to Texas to help with the latest outbreak, and: "We will continue to work closely with the state and local emergency management officials."

About 1,200 firefighters fought the blazes, including members of local departments from around the state and crews from out of state, many of them arriving after Texas put out a call for help. More firefighters will join the battle once they have been registered and sent where they are needed.

Five heavy tanker planes, some from the federal government, and three aircraft capable of scooping up 6,825 litres (1,500 gallons) of water at a time from lakes also took part in the fight.

"We're getting incredible support from all over the country – federal and state agencies," said Mark Stanford, operations director for the Texas Forest Service.

The disaster is blamed largely on Texas's year-long drought, one of the most severe dry spells the state has ever seen.

The fire in Bastrop county is easily the single most devastating wildfire in Texas in over a decade, eclipsing a blaze that destroyed 168 homes in the north of the state in April. A Texas Forest Service spokeswoman, April Saginor, said state wildfire records went back only to the late 1990s.