

SECTION I: UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT DESCRIPTION

The San Mateo – Santa Cruz Unit includes the counties of Santa Cruz, San Mateo, and San Francisco. The Unit primarily operates in the State Responsibility Areas (SRA) of Santa Cruz and San Mateo County an area of approximately 894 square miles. CAL FIRE is the County Fire Department for both San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County. In addition to providing fire protection in the SRA, CAL FIRE contracts with the Coastside Fire Protection District in San Mateo County and Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District in Santa Cruz County.

San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties border the Pacific Ocean to the west; San Francisco County to the north; San Francisco Bay and Santa Clara County to the east; and the Pajaro River along San Benito and Monterey Counties to the south. The counties straddle the eastern and western flanks of the Santa Cruz Mountains (part of the Coast Range) which runs in a general northwest to southeast direction. The ridgeline travels about 65 miles from just south of San Bruno Mountain in San Mateo County to Mount Madonna in Santa Cruz County. The highest point of the range is Loma Prieta at 3,806 feet (southwest of San Jose). Other notable peaks are: Mount Umunhum (3,442 feet); Castle Rock (3,214 feet); Ben Lomond Mountain (2,600 feet); Eagle Rock (2,488 feet); Kings Mountain (2,315 feet) and Mount Madonna (1,897 feet).

Weather conditions in the Unit are considered to be Mediterranean in nature due to their warm dry summers and colder wet winters. In both Santa Cruz County and San Mateo County, the weather is generally mild throughout the year. Due to the proximity of the Monterey Bay in Santa Cruz County, the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay in San Mateo County, fog and overcast conditions are common in the morning and evening.

Vegetation is dominated by dense conifer stands typically having forest floor accumulations of litter and downed woody material and coastal scrub communities consisting of low vegetation up to six feet in height, typically occurring on coastal bluffs, coastal hills and wind swept summits. Vegetation is usually dense and difficult to penetrate. True chaparral communities can be found in isolated areas on southwest aspects and at higher elevations. Grasslands occupy coastal valleys along the western slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains and in the southern end of Santa Cruz County (the majority of this community has been converted to agriculture or urban development). Grasslands can also be found on the western slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains in rural San Mateo County, especially in areas of upland grazing.

Approximately one million residents make up the combined population of San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties. Additionally, numerous other non-residents frequently visit the counties for work, recreation and tourism. Recreational use of public lands is a year round activity in great demand by people from the local communities, the surrounding metropolitan Bay Area, and points beyond. There are approximately 29 miles of beaches in the county with an additional 40+ thousand acres of parks available to the public.

Santa Cruz County has an estimated population of 250,000 of which the highest population densities occur in the Cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville. San Mateo County has much higher population densities than Santa Cruz, with many of the county's 700,000 residents dwelling in the more urban northeastern portion of the county. The Cities of Daly City, San Mateo, Redwood City, South San Francisco and San Bruno make up the highest population centers. With the exception of Half Moon Bay, El Granada, Princeton, Moss Beach, Montara and Pacifica, coastal San Mateo County is largely undeveloped. Major landowners in the area include local and state government, private timberland, water districts and smaller private ownerships.

The boundary between residential/commercial development and wildland in both counties is not clearly demarcated. Development of rural residential dwellings is progressing at a moderate to rapid pace. Where there were once scattered rural summer cabins on winding, narrow roads, there are now yearlong residential subdivisions, and an increased density of structures. Much of this intermix zone is within the State Responsibility Area (SRA) in Santa Cruz County and contiguous to SRA in San Mateo County.

Due to local topography, fuels (forest, chaparral, grasslands) and certain weather conditions, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties are prone to periodic large wildfire events. Each year, State, local, and volunteer departments throughout the region respond to numerous wildfires. The vast majority of these are held to less than one acre. The reasons for this include, but are not limited to: early identification and reporting, large fire suppression response (both local and state agencies), generally good access to fire areas, favorable fuels, favorable fire weather, and air support. Effective fire suppression over the past 100 years has led to uncharacteristically high fuel loads. When ignitions occur during unfavorable weather and/or in areas with poor access, fires can rapidly increase to an unmanageable size prior to fire resources arrival. In 2008 Santa Cruz County experienced three large wildfires resulting in approximately 5,400 acres burned and numerous homes destroyed. In 2009, Santa Cruz County experienced two large wildfires resulting in approximately 8,500 acres damaging and destroying numerous homes and structures.



Martin Fire as seen from Felton HQ (2008).

Since the 1970s, there has been increasing public pressure to preserve local natural features. This philosophy has influenced the management of parks, open space, and private land holding. There are also the pressures of subdivision and home development on rural lands prone to fire hazards. The result is an ever-increasing land base where little to no vegetation management occurs. In many instances, the resulting landscape is overgrown with a variety of species with an increasing non-native, invasive species component in a variety of age classes. The increased number of homes and proximity to flammable landscapes can be a potentially dangerous situation in the event of a fire. Compounding the problem is with new ownership and management objectives, many existing access roads are abandoned resulting in poor access to fires during suppression activities.

Priority Landscapes

State law requires periodic assessment of California's forest and rangeland resources. Beginning in 2008, this became a Federal Law as well. In June of 2010, the Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) released California's Forest and Rangelands: 2010 Assessment. As part of the assessment, states were required to identify key issues and define the status and trends throughout the forests. Additionally, they were asked to identify specific geographic areas, called "priority landscapes". The intent of identifying "priority landscapes" was assist investment and other programs to focus on the identified areas. The assessment identifies forest and rangeland issues across the state, with strategies to address them. A complete copy of the assessment can be found on the CAL FIRE FRAP Website. The Unit will consider the following priority landscapes, as identified by the assessment, when planning for future projects:

Chapter 1.1 – Population Growth and Development Impacts - Landscapes at risk include annual grasslands and coastal scrub, found in both San Mateo and Santa Cruz County. Strategies to address development include land acquisition, easements and zoning policies.

Chapter 1.2 - Sustainable Working Forests and Rangelands – Priority landscapes were identified in the Unit in regards to "Risk Reduction on Rangelands".

Chapter 3.1 Water Quality and Quantity Protection and Enhancement – Landscapes at risk include Santa Cruz County for water supply from forests in source watersheds.

Chapter 3.3 Planning for and Reducing Wildfire Risks to Communities - San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties have been identified as priority landscapes. A primary strategy for this priority landscape is to complete a CWPP (this has occurred for both counties).

Chapter 3.7 – Climate Change: Threats and Opportunities - San Mateo and Santa Cruz County have been identified as priority landscapes for threats to forest carbon from wildfire, insects, and disease. Strategies to mitigate these issues include reforestation, forestland conservation, fuels reduction, urban forestry and forest management to improve carbon sequestration

UNIT PREPAREDNESS AND FIREFIGHTING CAPABILITIES

The San Mateo – Santa Cruz Unit (CZU) Headquarters is located in the Santa Cruz County in the Town of Felton. CAL FIRE is the contracted to provide personnel and services for Santa Cruz County and San Mateo County Fire Departments, respectively. CAL FIRE has contracts to provide fire protection to Pajaro Valley in Santa Cruz County and to Half Moon Bay, El Granada and Montara in San Mateo County. The Unit is geographically divided into four battalions. Battalion's One and Two are within San Mateo County (with a small sliver extending into Santa Cruz County) and Three and Four in Santa Cruz County. Within the Unit there is State and County paid stations, local government departments, fire protection districts, as well as numerous volunteer companies. Additionally, the Unit manages both schedule "A" and schedule "B" stations.

Paid Schedule "A" Stations

Belmont Station 17320 Paul Scannell Dr., San Mateo, CA 94402
Cordilleras Station 18300 Edmonds Rd., Redwood City, CA 94062
El Granada, Half Moon Bay, Pescadero, Point Montera, Skylonda
Pajaro Dunes Station 61 2661 Beach Rd., Watsonville, CA 95076
Pajaro Valley Fire Department Station 61 562 Casserly Rd., Watsonville, CA 95076

Paid Schedule "B" Stations

Big Creek Station 33 240 Swanton Rd., Davenport, CA 95017
Burrell Station 47 25050 Highland Way, Los Gatos, CA 95033
Corralitos Station 41 120 Eureka Canyon Rd., Watsonville, CA 95076
Fall Creek Station 31 7272 Empire Grade Road, Bonny Doon, CA 95060
Jamison Creek Station 23 16115 Jamison Creek Rd., Boulder Creek, CA 95006
Saratoga Summit Station 2112900 Skyline Blvd., Los Gatos, CA 95033
Soquel Station 43 4750 Soquel-San Jose Rd., Soquel, CA 95073
Belmont Station 17 320 Paul Scannell Dr., San Mateo, CA 94402
Skylonda Station 58 17290 Skyline Blvd. Woodside, CA 94062
Pescadero Station 59 1200 Pescadero Rd., Pescadero, CA 94060

CDCR Conservation Camp

Ben Lomond Camp (Station 80) 13575 Empire Grade Rd., Santa Cruz, CA 95060
The next closest CDC Conservation Camp is Gabilan Conservation Camp in Soledad, approximately 40 miles south of Santa Cruz County.

Volunteer Stations /Equipment

Bonny Doon Volunteers, Company 32
 Martin Station 975 Martin Road, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
 McDermott Station 34 7276 Empire Grade Rd., Santa Cruz, CA 95060

South Skyline Volunteers, Company 29

South Skyline Station 12900 Skyline Blvd., Los Gatos, CA 95033

Las Cumbres Station 29 18271 Las Cumbres Road, Los Gatos, CA 95033

Loma Prieta Volunteers, Company 36

Loma Prieta Station 17445 Old Summit Road, Los Gatos, CA 95030

Burrell Station 25050 Highland Way, Los Gatos, CA 95033

Davenport Volunteers, Company 37 P.O. Drawer D, Davenport, CA 95017

Corralitos Volunteers, Company 41 120 Eureka Canyon Rd., Corralitos, CA 95076

Kings Mountain Fire Brigade 13889 Skyline Blvd Woodside, CA 94062

La Honda Fire Brigade P.O. Box 97, La Honda, CA. 94020

Initial Attack Resources

The following CAL FIRE resources are available for initial attack (not accounting for local agency and adjacent Unit response):

(2) Dozers: D1741, D1744

(14) Engines: E1771, E1765, E1761, E1762, E1763, E1767, E1769, E1768, E1760, E1764, E1766, E1782, E1775, E1774

(5) Fire Crews: Ben Lomond Crew #1 through Crew #5

The nearest air support is Alma Helitack in the Santa Clara Unit off of Hwy 17 adjacent to Lexington Reservoir.

Auto Aid agreements

CAL FIRE has numerous auto aid agreements in both counties. The following list shows those agencies with which CAL FIRE has agreements.

Santa Cruz County

Felton, Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, Scotts Valley

Santa Cruz Central Fire Dept., Aptos La Selva, Watsonville, UCSC and Santa Cruz City

San Mateo County

Belmont –San Carlos, Central County Fire, Golden Gate National Recreation area, Redwood City, San Bruno and Woodside.

Dispatch Agreements

Currently, the Unit has no dispatch agreements.

Local Government

While the majority of wildland fires occur in the SRA, there is potential for many different agencies in the county to be affected. In many cases, fires occur in Mutual Threat Zones (MTZ's) or in areas near adjoining jurisdictions and also in the Local Responsibility Area (LRA). It is through mutual relationships

with local government agencies where initial attack resources become larger and more effective. The following local government agencies are typically available and involved in suppressing wildland fires:

Santa Cruz County

Aptos/La Selva Fire Protection District

www.aptosfire.com

Scotts Valley Fire Protection District

<http://www.scottsvalleyfire.com>

Boulder Creek Fire Department

<http://www.bcfcd.com>

Central Fire Protection District of Santa Cruz County

<http://www.centralfpd.com>

Felton Fire Protection District

<http://www.feltonfire.com>

Santa Cruz City Fire Department

www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/fd

Watsonville Fire Department

<http://www.ci.watsonville.ca.us/departments/fire/firedept.html>

Zayante Fire Protection District

<http://www.zayantefire.org/>

Ben Lomond Fire

<http://www.benlomondfd.com/>

Branciforte Fire District

<http://www.b40fpd.com/default.asp>

UC Santa Cruz Fire Dept.

http://www2.ucsc.edu/fire_dept/

San Mateo County

Central County Fire Department
www.hillsborough.net/depts/fire/

Millbrae Fire Department
www.ci.millbrae.ca.us/fire.html

Redwood City Fire Department
www.redwoodcity.org/fire

San Bruno Fire Department
www.ci.sanbruno.ca.us/fire

San Mateo Fire Department
www.cityofsanmateo.org/dept/fire

South County Fire (San Carlos/Belmont)
www.scfa.dst.ca.us

Woodside Fire Protection District
www.woodsidefire.org

South San Francisco Fire Department
www.ci.ssf.ca.us/depts/fire/default.asp

North County Fire Authority
<http://northcountyfire.org/index.htm>

Coastside Fire Protection District
<http://www.coastsidefire.org/>