

SECTION I: UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT DESCRIPTION

The San Benito-Monterey Unit is located along the central coast between San Luis Obispo County to the south and Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties to the north. The Pacific Ocean abuts the western side of the Unit and the Diablo Mountains and the San Joaquin Valley lie to the east. The Los Padres National Forest lies along the coast south of the Carmel Highlands encompassing the Ventana Wilderness and the Silver Peak Wilderness. The community of the former Ft. Ord also lies within the Unit and has largely become Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land for public recreational use. The Pinnacles National Monument is centered in the Unit in both Monterey and San Benito counties.

The Unit encompasses over 3 million acres, in which 2.1 million acres are State Responsibility Area (SRA), representing one of the largest state responsibility jurisdictions in CAL FIRE.

The topography of the unit varies from steep and rugged mountains with moderate to heavy vegetative cover to rolling hills used for livestock grazing. Plant species vary by aspect, slope, elevation, soil type, past fire history and distance from the coast. The predominant vegetation types are coastal sage, chaparral, and oak/grass woodland, with the Monterey Peninsula supporting stands of various coastal tree species.

The weather in the unit is divided into two basic patterns. The northwestern area of the unit experiences a common coastal weather pattern with low clouds and fog which by mid-day give way to temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's, recovering in the evening with the marine layer moving in. This tends to keep fires near the coast to the first burn period. The eastern and southern areas of the unit generally have less fog and temperatures commonly reach the 90 to 100 degree range with strong afternoon valley winds upwards to 10 -15 mph. Fires in the eastern and southern parts of the Unit have greater potential of going into extended attack, especially late in the fire season when heavier fuels are dry. Winters are mild with rainfall from 7 to 30+ inches. Wind speed and direction is variable, but is predominantly northwest at 7-10 MPH.

The coastal weather influence, together with periods of extreme fire weather conditions, provides a window for extreme wildland fire behavior in areas of potentially high dollar loss. These conditions combine with the expanding wildland interface and urban population to yield the potential for large, damaging and costly wildfires. These areas at risk are defined further in the "Priority Landscapes" section of the Strategic Fire Plan. The unit has an overall fire hazard rating of High (56% of Unit) in the State Responsibility Area (SRA), while 30% is rated Very High and 14% is in the Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

Fire history in the San Benito-Monterey Unit is collected for every fire 10 acres and larger. The majority of the fire history is in the Los Padres National Forest on the west side of the Unit, primarily due to lightning and camp fires. Fires in the foothills of the Salinas Valley in light, flashy fuels tend to be afternoon, wind driven incidents ranging from under 100 acres to over a thousand depending on temperatures, wind speed and topography.

There have been several "Priority Landscapes" identified in the Unit, shown in Appendix D, which are further addressed in the Battalion priorities where fuel reduction projects and public education are discussed.

Primary businesses in the Unit include farming, industry, and tourism.

UNIT PREPAREDNESS AND FIREFIGHTING CAPABILITIES

The San Benito-Monterey Unit is operationally divided into three divisions and further into seven battalions offering a wide variety of programs which includes: Fire Prevention, Resource Management, Law Enforcement, Air Attack, Helitack, Conservation Camp, Emergency Command Center (communications) and Cooperative Fire Protection.

FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES

Fire Stations – CAL FIRE 11
Fire Stations – Cooperative Fire 7
Air Attack Base 1
Helitack Base 1
Conservation Camp 1
Volunteer Fire Companies 5

EQUIPMENT

Engines – CAL FIRE 17
Engines – Cooperative Fire 14
Dozers – CAL FIRE 3
Water Tenders – Cooperative Fire 3
Ladder truck 75' – Cooperative Fire 1
Patrol – Cooperative Fire 2
Rescue – Cooperative Fire 2
Com van – CAL FIRE 1
Airtankers – CAL FIRE 2
Helicopter – CAL FIRE 1
Air Attack plane – CAL FIRE 1

PERSONNEL

Permanent – CDF 165
Seasonal – CDF 104
Volunteer FF 110
Volunteers in Prevention 10
Firefighters (inmate) 131
Inmate Crews 6

COOPERATIVE FIRE PROTECTION AGREEMENTS

- Pebble Beach Community Services District
- Cypress Fire Protection District
- Carmel Highlands Fire Protection District
- Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District
- South Monterey County Fire Protection District
- San Benito County Fire Protection District
- Soledad Fire Department

DISPATCH AGREEMENTS

Cachagua Volunteer Fire Department
Mid Coast Volunteer Fire Brigade
Monterey Airport Fire District

MUTUAL THREAT ZONE RESPONSE AREAS

Fort Hunter Liggett

AUTOMATIC / MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS

CAL FIRE maintains several Automatic and Mutual Aid Agreements itself and through the Cooperative Fire Protection agreements in the Unit. All agencies in Monterey County are party to a countywide mutual aid agreement. Many of our contract districts maintain automatic aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions such as:

Cypress Fire Protection District has Auto Aid with:

Pebble Beach Fire Department
Carmel Highlands Fire Protection District
Carmel Fire Department
Monterey Airport Fire District
Monterey Fire Department
Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District

Pebble Beach Fire Department has auto aid with:

Cypress Fire Protection District
Monterey Fire Department

Carmel Highlands Fire Protection District has Auto Aid with:

Cypress Fire Protection District

Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District has Auto Aid with:

North Monterey County Fire District
Pajaro Valley Fire District
Watsonville City Fire Department
San Benito County Fire Department

San Benito County Fire Department has Auto Aid with:

South Santa Clara County Fire District
Hollister City Fire Department
San Juan Bautista Volunteer Fire Department
Gilroy Fire Department

Soledad Fire Protection District has Auto Aid with:

Greenfield Fire Protection District

South Monterey County Fire Protection District has Auto Aid with:

Greenfield Fire Protection District

CAL FIRE has local operating agreements with:

USFS-Los Padres National Forest
Pinnacles National Monument
Clear Creek (BLM)