

Executive Summary

The San Benito-Monterey Unit is located along the central coast between San Luis Obispo County on the south and Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties on 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 Unit encompasses 2.1 million acres of State Responsibility Area (SRA), representing one of the largest state responsibility jurisdictions in CDF. There are approximately 700,000 acres of Federal, State and Local government land, some of which are protected by CDF contractually or by agreement with a Federal agency.

The Unit is operationally divided into four divisions and thirteen battalions or programs. The Unit has eleven state-funded fire stations, six local government stations, thirteen volunteer companies, one air attack base, one Helitack base, and a CDF/CDC inmate conservation camp. Additionally, the unit has Cooperative Fire Protection Agreements with seven local fire protection agencies.

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. The eastern and southern areas of the unit generally have less fog and temperatures commonly in the 90 to 100 degree range. 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 topography of the unit is steep and rugged with moderate to heavy vegetative cover. 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 timbers.

The coastal weather influence, together with periods of extreme fire weather conditions, provide 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 target area section of the Fire Management Plan. The unit has an overall fire hazard rating of Very High (85% of Unit).

Primary businesses include farming, industry, and tourism. San Benito and Monterey Counties continue to be listed among the top five fastest growing regions of the state.

The primary goal of the 2005 San Benito - Monterey Unit Fire Plan is to prevent the ignition and spread of unwanted, human-caused fires with an emphasis on reducing losses as a result of large damaging fires. Utilizing fire history, fuels data, weather data, and assets at risk, the unit has identified several target areas as indicated in this document. Proactive pre-fire suppression activities and public information and education programs are key elements of this plan.

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