

PRIORITY AREAS

Important components of the fire management plan are projects that can reduce the impact of dangerous wildland fires. Projects currently active in the San Bernardino Unit are summarized below.

Fuel Modification along Designated Evacuation Routes and around Shelter in Place Locations

As Described in the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Evacuation Guideline

For the Mountain Communities Version 2009

As previously mentioned, the San Bernardino Unit has experienced record setting drought, and the accumulation of timber in excess of sustainable levels within the San Bernardino Mountains and significant infestation by Bark Beetles and other destructive insects and disease. This has resulted in vegetation mortality affecting some 600,000 acres. The communities within and adjacent to the San Bernardino Mountains are at extreme risk for a life threatening conflagration.

Local, State and Federal agencies with a jurisdictional responsibility, along with Fire Safe Councils, Southern California Edison and other private/commercial interests have formed the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST). MAST has identified four main priorities:

1. Remove fuel from roads and highways identified in the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Evacuation Plan V. 2009 as evacuation routes.
2. Remove fuel from within and surrounding points of refuge areas as identified in the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Evacuation Plan V. 2009.
3. Remove fuel around all communication and essential service sites within the mountains to ensure reliable fire and law enforcement radio communication and operations in the event of a fire.
4. Create fire defense buffers around mountain communities.

The intent of all fuel reduction projects in the San Bernardino Mountains is to eliminate extreme overstocked conditions. A return to a more natural stocking condition will in and of itself improve community fire safety and an enhanced watershed environment. As such, all efforts of CAL FIRE crews in the San Bernardino Mountains are focused on this goal. Additionally, the San Bernardino Unit has drafted for consideration the "California State Watershed Health Initiative", Legislative Concept Paper (Appendix#1) with the goal of sustained long term maintenance and enhancement of privately held watersheds. If realized to its full potential, this initiative would go a very long way toward meeting the California Fire Plan goal and that of the Mountain Area Safety Task Force objectives of reducing costs and losses due to wildland fires.

EVACUATION ROUTES

The Governor has declared a State of Emergency for this area and directed the Public Utilities Commission to order Southern California Edison (SCE) and Bear Valley Electric to remove all dead trees that constitute a threat to distribution facilities and power lines. As a participant in the MAST, Southern California Edison has prioritized their line clearances to also meet priority area objectives #1 and #2 to the greatest extent possible.

There are 210 miles of designated evacuation routes identified in the evacuation plan. Of those 210 miles, 65 miles are outside the boundaries of the San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF) and the remaining 145 are within the SBNF boundaries. To date there have been no funds allocated to CAL FIRE to carry out the work of removing dead, dying or diseased trees that threaten major travel routes, however, the Unit is hopeful that future initiatives will provide funding relief. Many of the evacuation routes have either Southern California Edison transmission or distribution lines immediately adjacent to them. SCE's clearance has reduced the amount of evacuation route clearance that would have had to be conducted by CAL FIRE and the USFS. Evacuation clearance will take an estimated three to five years to complete and will be carried out in four phases:

1. Remove dead and dying trees that are in danger of falling on and closing off evacuation routes.
2. Remove all dead and dying trees that are within 200 feet of the centerline of all evacuation routes and removing all vegetation necessary to construct within that 200 feet a shaded fuel break
3. Remove dead and dying trees that are within 400 feet of the centerline of an evacuation route and on a 30% or greater slope and removing all vegetation necessary to construct within that 400 feet a shaded fuel break
4. Remove dead and dying trees that are within 600 feet of the centerline of an evacuation route and within a chimney and removing all vegetation necessary to construct within that 600 feet a shaded fuel break

SHELTER IN PLACE

Contained within the evacuation plan are four areas designated as temporary evacuation holding areas and 15 areas designated as Shelter in Place (SIP), pursuant to Sheriff's MAST recommendations. SIP locations are generally schools and organizational camps. In order for these areas to safely shelter civilians who are not trained or equipped to survive in a potential conflagration fuel must be reduced from within and surrounding each of these areas. Dependent on predictable factors of fire behavior such as fuel (type, continuity, etc), slope, aspect etc shaded fuel breaks need to be constructed up to 600 feet from the boundary of the SIP.

Estimated costs associated with the above referenced projects are:

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| Evacuation route clearance (danger of falling and closing only) | |
| \$ 270,400 | |
| Evacuation route clearance (200') | |
| \$ 5,053,620 | |
| Evacuation route clearance (400') | |
| \$10,107,240 | |
| Evacuation route clearance (600') | |
| \$15,314,000 | |
| SIP clearance around schools | |
| \$ 1,547,252 | |
| SIP clearance around organizational camps | |
| <u>\$ 4,916,400</u> | |
| Total | \$37,208,912 |

FIRE DEFENSE IMPROVEMENT AND EVALUATIONS

Fuel break and "Truck Trail" access in Southwest San Bernardino County were evaluated for effectiveness as defense lines and access roads in the event of wildfire. Recommendations were made to abandon or repair fuel breaks and roads. One road was recommended for abandonment due to urban development and alternate access. Other fuel breaks were identified for improvement due to community developments and proximity to proposed burn projects. Following are associated costs.

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| Battalion 1 Evaluation | \$478.00 |
| Battalion 2 Evaluation | \$780.00 |
| Battalion 2 Fuel Break Improvement | <u>\$54,194.00</u> |
| Total | \$55,452.00 |

Additionally, the Unit has identified private fire road damage in Battalions 1 and 2. Severe winter rains have caused some roads to become impassable, thus making them unusable for fire fighting operations. Approximately \$80,000 has been requested from the federal government in order to affect repairs to these roads.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A variety of educational programs are conducted to promote fire safety and responsibility. programs ranging from school presentations regarding prescribed burning to public meetings where vegetation management and fire safety are promoted. Public and agency education is a key component of virtually all aspects of fire protection planning and operations in the San Bernardino Unit.

IGNITION MANAGEMENT

In addition to the priority project areas listed above, the San Bernardino Unit will continue residential, utility line, and railroad right-of-way inspections to help mitigate potential ignitions. Motorized equipment will be monitored and inspected where needed in an effort to minimize the number of fires caused by "equipment use" (historically, the Unit's largest percentage of fire ignitions).

Unit employee performance is enhanced by localized training in Preliminary Fire Cause and Origin Investigation during the annual Continued Professional Training academies. This course emphasizes effective fire investigation techniques in an effort to reduce the amount of LE-66's (investigation forms) listing fire cause as "undetermined" or "miscellaneous".

During Operation Santa Ana, a collaborative effort with Southern California Edison, Unit fire prevention personnel inspect all of the power poles and power lines in the wind-prone areas of the San Bernardino Unit. This joint program has proven to be very effective by visually inspecting approximately, 1,321 miles of power lines and 9,800 power poles. The first year of the program identified well over 250 Public Resources Code (PRC 4292, pole clearance and PRC 4293, line clearance) violations. The program is implemented in the summer months and after ten years; usually less than 30 violations are discovered. The San Bernardino Unit has not suffered any large damaging wildland fires, originating from inspected power lines, during Santa Ana wind events since this program was initiated in 1999.