

The Current Situation

In 2008 Butte County experienced its most destructive wildfire season in recorded history. Fires burning in the Butte Unit and adjacent counties would burn over 139,000 acres and destroy over 200 homes and 178 outbuildings. The cost to suppress these fires would exceed \$120 million dollars. These fires would not be specific to a fuel or geographic model.

Conversely in 2009 Butte County was able to contain all wildland fires to a minimal level of destruction. Adjacent counties were not as fortunate;

- The *Yuba Fire* would cost over 12 million dollars to contain.
- The *Forty-nine Fire* would destroy 65 homes and 5 commercial buildings in less than 6 hours.
- The *SHU Lightning Complex* exceeded costs of 31 million dollars, consuming over 17,000 acres.

The recessed California economy greatly affected grant funded fuels reduction projects in 2008 with a spending freeze on all Prop 40 projects within the county. While a number of the projects have begun work again, the interruption will definitely affect the production.

The 4291 Public Resource Code is a regulation implemented by the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to require persons in the State Responsibility Area to maintain around and adjacent to a building or structure additional fire protection or a firebreak by removing all brush, flammable vegetation, or combustible growth 100' or more if necessary to inhibit fire spread. Butte County Fire/CAL FIRE continues to utilize a volunteer in prevention (VIP) work force consisting of off duty CAL FIRE seasonal firefighters to perform pre-fire season LE 100 inspections. An executive order issued by the Governor will once again allocate an early season hire of inspectors to help enforce this ordinance. The program is being designed to continue into the fire season with an emphasis on enforcement. Strategic areas for LE 100 inspections that are adjacent to fuels reduction projects will be the priority for the 2010 season. Along with the inspection, information was distributed to the residents that included Butte County Fire Safe Council brochures and assistance programs such as the Free Chipper Program.

As of the formulation of this document, California is still expecting drought like conditions. While many storm systems have impacted the State allowing for most alpine areas to report above normal snowpack and moisture content, the full extent of the impact on the drought will not be known until after the spring months. A known result is the winter storms and freezing temperatures have resulted in freeze-killed brush and additional branch wood and needle/leaf litter from trees in some areas of northern California. In addition to the affects of the winter storms, areas from the 2008 fires also have an excessive accumulation of dead trees and slash piles. A warmer spring could cause valley grasses to grow and cure sooner then normal resulting in a more fire receptive fuel bed.

How the State budget will affect CAL FIRE staffing levels is always an area of concern. It is CAL FIRE's continuing mission to contain all initial attack fires to 10 acres or less.