

Battalion One Planning Area

Including the Town of Paradise, Magalia and the Upper Ridge Communities
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Specific Fire Behavior Factors and Wildland Urban Interface Situation

The following synopsis is intended to specify the fire behavior factors (fuels, topography and weather) and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) problems specific to the Paradise Ridge Fire Planning Area.

Fuels:

There is a wide range of vegetation types found within Paradise Ridge planning area. The vegetation types range from grass, chaparral brush mix, oak woodland and timber.

Vegetation found within the towns of Magalia, Stirling City and Upper Paradise is predominantly Timber and associated brush. The timber type within most of Paradise is Ponderosa Pine/ California Black Oak mix, with an under story chaparral brush component consisting primarily of Manzanita, Deer Brush, Ceanothus sp., Scotch Broom, and Poison Oak. Some areas of undeveloped lots or greenbelt areas have very dense brush which can affect fire behavior.

Upper elevations of Paradise, Magalia and Stirling City have a mixed conifer trees in the over story include Douglas-fir, Ponderosa Pine, Sugar Pine, White Fir and Incense Cedar. Hardwood trees in the under story include California Black Oak, Tanoak, Canyon Live Oak, Big Leaf Maple and California Laurel. There is also an under story chaparral brush component consisting primarily of Manzanita, Deerbrush, Ceanothus sp., Scotch Broom and Poison Oak.

All these vegetation types provide fire control problems because of overstocked and overgrown conditions due to years of successful fire suppression. The potential for a large, fuel driven fire is very real when fuel moisture conditions are conducive to burning. Fire control will be very difficult due to high fire intensities leading to fire behavior problems such as long range spotting, high rates of spread and long flame lengths. Direct attack will be impossible under these burning conditions for safety reasons. An indirect attack with a defensive approach is the most likely scenario for fire control.

Topography:

The most prominent topographic features in the Paradise Ridge planning area are the numerous steep canyons dispersed throughout the area. The two largest of these canyons, and most influential on fire behavior, are Butte Creek Canyon and West Branch Feather River Canyon. Butte Creek Canyon borders Paradise and Magalia to the west,

while West Branch Feather River Canyon borders both towns and Stirling City to the east. Less prominent canyons, but still very influential on fire behavior, are located along the south border of Paradise. The smaller canyons run north-south into town limits, but decrease in size substantially by the time they enter Paradise. These canyons include Nance, Hamlin, Berry, Clear Creek and Dry Creek.

Gently sloping, broad ridges make up most of the Paradise, Magalia and Stirling City residential areas. There are some smaller canyons entering both Paradise and Magalia. The canyons entering Magalia are Little Butte Creek and Middle Butte Creek. These canyons are relatively small where they enter Magalia. However, a well established fire starting in either canyon would provide a substantial resistance to control. There are also numerous tributaries to all of the canyons entering Paradise and Magalia. These tributaries may also produce minor canyons which can influence fire behavior substantially.

Weather: (refer to pg 9)

Lightning is cyclic in this area and is generally a minor occurrence. However, there have been lightning storms in the past that have started numerous, damaging fires. A recent example of this occurred in August of 1999 when 47 fires started by lightning burned over 33,000 acres in Butte County.

Historically, extreme weather conditions have not been the primary factor in large fires within the Paradise and Magalia area. However, there is a huge potential for weather to be a strong influence on fire behavior and should not be discounted.

Wildland Urban Interface Situation:

The Paradise Ridge Fire Planning Area is comprised of two large communities, Paradise and Paradise Pines (Magalia). The Town of Paradise and community of Paradise Pines are more characteristic of an urban interface environment where wildland abruptly adjoins high density housing. Both communities are relatively large and densely populated, comprised substantially of an elderly population. Other areas within the Paradise Ridge Fire Planning Area can be characterized as intermix areas, where houses are scattered amongst the wildland, such as those south of the Town of Paradise and north and east of the community of Paradise Pines.

Emergency access into and out of both communities is a real concern, due to limited, narrow roads and the expectation of large numbers of citizens trying to evacuate simultaneously. This is especially true in Magalia where the population density is very high and there is only one arterial road, the Skyway, leading in to and out of the community. This is further complicated by a stretch of the roadway that crosses Magalia Reservoir.