

Southern California Fires 2003

Rural Development Responds!



**United States Department of Agriculture
Rural Development
California**

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRES

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2003

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Pictures provided by: Ginny Monroe, Paul Lehman, Richard Brassfield and Gurcharan Dhillon, all from USDA Rural Development-California and Jason Stevenson, Willow Oak Fire Department, Woodland, CA.

Thoughts about the fires from those in the area.....

"Given the difficult circumstances and tragedies that occurred in Southern California it is hard to imagine how much damage there was until you see it in person. A very special thank you to the firefighters and the California Rural Development Staff, who provided assistance where needed."

**Paul Venosdel, State Director
USDA Rural Development**

"When we heard the sound of distress in the voice of the Fire Chief over the radio, we knew that his order to evacuate was serious."

**Dawn Neuschwander, Secretary/Treasurer
Mountain Pioneer Mutual Water Company**

"Talking with a water operator in the Lake Arrowhead area, he described how one minute the fire was way across the canyon and the next minute it was so close that he barely had time to escape in his truck. He said 'you know how some people that have seen these fires before say the fire sounds like a freight train approaching? That's exactly what it sounded like."

**Greg Aanested, Community Development Specialist
USDA Rural Development**

"USDA Rural Development was the first agency to come to us to ask what we needed, we did not have to find them."

**Rees Skinner, President
Cuyamaca Water District**

"Even though several thousand homes and buildings were destroyed by these fires, the firefighters determination to fight the fires resulted in them being able to hold the line long enough for Mother Nature to help out with a change in the weather, just in time to prevent a much larger devastation."

**Richard Brassfield, Rural Development Manager
USDA Rural Development**

"I don't have any personal photographs, they had all burned in the fire. But that is OK because I keep all the important pictures and experiences of my life in my mind and in my heart."

**Cheryl Calac, Tribal Council Member
San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians**

"I didn't really know the impact the fire was having on the area until I saw it. The damage the fire had done was unbelievable."

**Gurcharan Dhillon, Rural Development Manager
USDA Rural Development**

"The purchase of an additional water tank was a big success for the community. We'd really be crying on your shoulders if we didn't have it. We would be out of service."

**Dwayne Cash, President
Camp Waterman Mutual Water Company**

"It was overwhelming to see the vast area that was burned. The morale of the victims was surprisingly good, and I was glad to see USDA's willingness to help."

**Pete Yribarren, Community Programs Specialist
USDA Rural Development**

"One cannot fully comprehend the devastation the fire caused until you see the charred remnants and listen to the survivors description of what happened and how that impact has dramatically changed their lives. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to help some of our Rural Development borrowers."

**Keith Johnson, Community Development Manager
USDA Rural Development**

"It was very heart wrenching to see people covered in soot from sorting through the ashes of their lost homes, come to the Action Crisis Center in their pickups, with their only belongings in the back. They would get a bite to eat and head back to sort through more ashes. I wondered where they were going to spend the night."

**Dave Hartwell, Community Programs Specialist
USDA Rural Development**

Overview

Beginning October 21, 2003, twelve major wild-land and urban/wild-land fires ignited in the counties of San Bernardino, San Diego, Los Angeles, Riverside and Ventura in southern California. The fires ignited during extreme fire hazard conditions associated with four years of drought, strong easterly Santa Ana winds, high temperatures, low humidity, and dry vegetation. Coupled with that, many of the trees in the area were infected with the Pine Beetle disease, which caused them to die.

The fires destroyed forest wild-lands, residential and commercial structures, resulting in 26 fatalities, 3,600 structures burned and 259 injuries*, forced evacuations and sheltering of residents, and disrupted highway, rail and air traffic, telephone service and electrical power.



It was soon discovered there were 12 USDA Rural Development infrastructure projects located in the fire damaged areas of San Bernardino and San Diego Counties that may have sustained damage. They were:

- Twin Peaks - Alpine Water Users
- Camp Waterman - Mutual Water Company
- Cedarpines Park - Mutual Water Company
- Crestline - Crestline-Lake Arrowhead Water Company
- Oak Glen - Oak Glen Domestic Water
- Rimforest - Mountain Pioneer Mutual Water District
- Green Valley Lake - San Bernardino County
- La Jolla Band of Mission Indians
- San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians
- Julian—San Diego County Water District
- La Posta Band of Mission Indians
- Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians

In order to determine the extent of the damage to the projects, and to provide assistance where possible, on October 27, 2003, Paul

Venosdel, State Director, appointed Richard Brassfield and Gurcharan Dhillon, Rural Development Managers with USDA Rural Development, to lead two Fire Assessment Teams to the San Bernardino and San Diego areas to assess damage caused by the fires and the condition of the USDA Rural Development projects.



The findings from the assessment showed some of the USDA Rural Development projects sustained no damage at all, (Crestline, Oak Glen Domestic Water Project, La Posta Band of Mission Indians, Campo Band of Kumeyaay), some of the water projects had actually assisted in fighting the fires (Cedarpines Park, Camp Waterman, San Pasqual, and Crestline), and it was discovered there were communities located in the burned areas that could use our assistance to assist with the recovery and better prepare for these types of



disasters in the future (Cuyamaca, Valley of Enchantment).

There were also reports of housing and community facility projects located in and around the town of Piru, in Ventura County that may have sustained damage from the Piru fire. After a visit to the

area it was determined these projects were saved, but the fire burned to within 100 yards of one Rural Development housing subdivision and to the edge of the town.

During this same time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was establishing Local Area Centers (LAC) throughout the fire damaged areas. There were approximately 48 federal, state and local agencies staffing the centers who were available to provide information to interested parties about assistance available

Venosdel dispatched Rural Development senior management staff to staff the LACs at Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino County and the Scripps Recreation Center in San Diego County, to assist those in need of services and to provide information on programs available through USDA Rural Development.

For the next four weeks, Richard Brassfield and Gurcharan Dhillon spent countless hours, thousands of minutes on cell phones (when cell phone reception was available) and logging many, many miles traveling across the affected



counties making assessments of the fire damage caused to our projects and providing assistance where needed as they traveled across the areas.

The following pages provide a report on what was found when employees traveled to the different areas, stories they were told along the way, the assistance provided to those affected by the fires and "What is Next" to help several of the communities rebuild.

*Data from CA Forestry Association—Forest Magazine—Winter 2004

Projects Located in Fire Areas

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

- Twin Peaks** - Alpine Water Users
- Camp Waterman** - MWC
- Cedarpines Park** - Water Users
- Crestline** - Crestline-Lake Arrowhead Water Company
- Oak Glen** - Oak Glen Domestic Water
- Rimforest** - Mountain Pioneer MWC
- Green Valley Lake** - SB Co.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

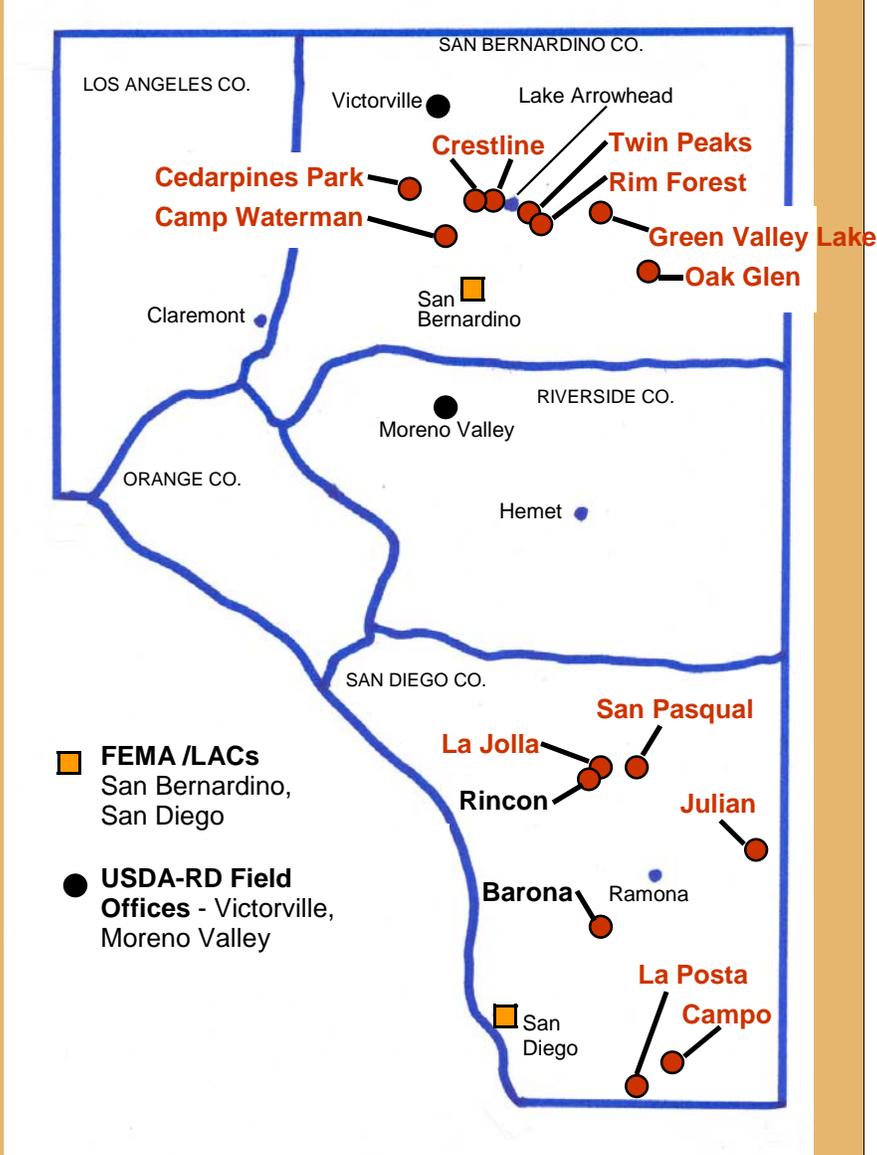
- La Jolla** - La Jolla Band of Mission Indians
- San Pasqual** - San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians
- Julian** - San Diego Co. Water District
- La Posta** - La Posta Bank of Mission Indians
- Campo** - Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians

OTHER HOUSING AND BUSINESSES IMPACTED

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

- Rincon** - Rincon Indian Reservation
- Barona** - Barona Indian Reservation

Projects on Tribal Lands



Staffing

Paul Venosdel
Paul Lehman
Ginny Monroe

Program Directors

Richard Brassfield
Fire Assessment & Recovery
Team Leader

Gurcharan Dhillon
Fire Assessment & Recovery
Team Leader

Damage Assessment Team
Week #1 - 11/3/03 - 11/7/03 - Mike Starinsky
Week #2 - 11/10/03 - 11/14/03
Keith Johnson & Greg Aanestad

Damage Assessment Team
Week #1 - 11/3/03 - 11/07/03 - Dave Hartwell
Week #2 - 11/10/03 - 11/14/03
Pete Yribarren & Doug Colucci
Week #3 - 11/17/03 - 11/21/03 - Jim McIntire

FEMA/LAC Office
Norton AFB
105 N. Leland Norton Way
Airport Terminal Building
San Bernardino, CA 92408-0125

(909) 382-5476 (Land line)
(909) 382-5473 (fax)

Hours: M-F 9:00 am - 7:00 pm
Sat. 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Week #1 11/3/03 - 11/7/03
A. Roger Trindade
B. Paul Rice
Week #2 11/12/03 - 11/14/03
A. Sally Tripp
B. Jose Guardado
C. Judy Twilley

FEMA/LAC Office
Scripps Recreation Center
Scripps Ranch Development
11454 Blue Cypress
San Diego, CA 92131-3771

(858) 693-9228 (Land line)
(858) 693-9042 (fax)

Hours: M-F 7:00 am - 7:00 pm
S&S 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Week #1 11/3/03 - 11/7/03
A. Chris Sundstrom
B. Sue Ladner
Week #2 11/12/03 - 11/14/03
A. Fred Smith
B. Rames Pruneda
C. Carolyn Mueller

State Office Assessment Team
November 17 - San Diego Tour & Visits
November 18 - San Bernardino Tour & Visits

Paul Venosdel
Richard Brassfield
Gurcharan Dhillon
Paul Lehman
Larry Smith (State Dir. NV)
Janice Waddell
Ginny Monroe

San Diego County

Secretary of Agriculture Visits Harbison Canyon

Harbison Canyon is a small community located approximately 20 miles outside of San Diego. The Cedar Fire roared through the canyon, burning several homes, structures and property along its path. When Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman traveled to California to see first hand the destruction caused by the fires, one of her stops was to the community of Harbison Canyon. Resident Kathy Myrick told the Secretary that the community lost their volunteer fire station and fire equipment during the fire. During the conversation, the Secretary offered USDA's assistance to the community to replace their fire station and equipment.

Shortly after the Secretary's visit, Paul Venosdel, State Director, Janice Waddell, Community Program Director and Gurcharan Dhillon, Rural Development Manager made an on-site visit to meet with Ms. Myrick and Mike Simpson, Harbison Canyon volunteer fire fighter, to assess the damage and discuss all options available to help. They found that the Canyon's Rural Fire Protection District does not have the resources to borrow money to rebuild the fire station or to purchase replacement equipment. They need grant assistance to be able to cover the gap between FEMA assistance, insurance and the total replacement cost.



Kathy Myrick (left) and Mark Simpson, (second from right) show Paul Venosdel, State Director how the fire roared through and destroyed the Harbison Canyon Volunteer Fire Department fire station..

Status/What's Next

USDA Rural Development has looked at all possible means of assisting Harbison Canyon with grant dollars but cannot provide funding because Harbison Canyon median household income exceeds the state non metropolitan level and the State Allocation is insufficient. The RD staff in California is working with the National Office and the community of Harbison Canyon to remove roadblocks so funding can be provided for a new Volunteer Fire Department building and fire equipment.



Representations from USDA Rural Development and citizens from Harbison Canyon talk about funding opportunities for rebuilding their volunteer fire department fire station.

Town of Julian Saved!

Julian is a small mountain community in Southern California located 50 miles northeast of San Diego. This historic gold-mining town that is

now a tourist destination known for its apple festival, is nestled among oak and pine forests between the north end of the Cuyamaca Range and the south slope of Volcan Mountain. As the fires continued to rage throughout southern California, many of the firefighters from the Julian community, which are mostly volunteers, were dispatched to other locations, leaving their town without fire protection. Unfortunately, while the firefighters were trying desperately to save homes in other areas, many of them lost their homes to the fires in Julian.

Just when it looked like the town of Julian was going to be lost, firefighters from all over California converged on Julian to make a stand and save the town, and preserve all its historic memorabilia.



Thanks to the tireless efforts of the firefighters and residents, the town was saved.

USDA Rural Development funded a water project in September 1969, however, no damage was sustained during the fire.

Status/What's Next?

Thanks to the assistance from local residents and many firefighters the town of Julian was saved. The Apple festival held each September will have special meaning for the residents of Julian.

But Cuyamaca Not so Lucky

Unfortunately, the town of Cuyamaca, located down the road from Julian, was not so lucky. Cuyamaca sustained heavy damage from the Cedar Fire, losing 113 of the 160 homes, electrical equipment and meter boxes.

Upon hearing of this devastation representatives from Rural Development traveled to Cuyamaca to meet with members of the volunteer fire department and the mutual water company, to tour the damaged area and discuss their needs. When they arrived at the Action Crisis Center, they found volunteers from a nearby church cooking and serving meals for those people in the community who had lost everything and had not yet received assistance.



The volunteers also provided meals for people helping with the recovery process. "USDA Rural Development was the first agency to come to us to ask what we needed, we did not have to find them," said Rees Skinner, President, Cuyamaca Water District.

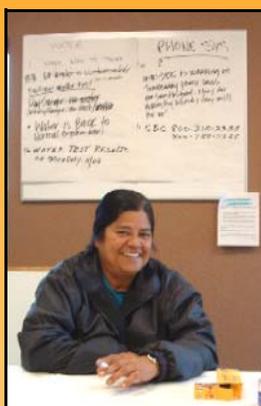
Status/What's Next

As a result of a Rural Development senior staff meeting on-site with Cuyamaca Water District President, State Parks and Recreation officials and local Fire Department representatives, a pre-application was submitted for repairs to their water system and to purchase sufficient backup generators to be better prepared for disasters such as these fires, that may occur in the future.

San Diego County

San Pasqual Suffers Major Losses to Reservation

The Cedar Fire hit fast and hard in the San Pasqual area in the early morning of October 26, 2003. Time was short for members of the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, as the fire was already roaring up the hillsides of the reservation and descending on the town. Tribal members were scrambling to monitor the fire, standing on the rooftop of the local casino watching and planning their next move.



For one tribal member, Cheryl Calac, there was no time to think about her next move, she was told she had 15 minutes to evacuate her house. She got out with the clothes on her back and the car she was driving. She lost everything. "I don't have any personal photographs, they had all burned in the fire" said Cheryl. "But that is OK because I keep all the important pictures and experiences of my life in my mind and in my heart."

Representatives from USDA Rural Development immediately converged to the reservation, set up meetings and began working with local tribal leaders and members, providing them with important information on how they could access funds to repair or replace homes, businesses and infrastructure in the damaged rural areas.

Status/What's Next

When representatives from USDA Rural Development met with tribal leaders, they were told those tribal members who had lost their homes wanted to rebuild on their reservations and they wanted it to be done quickly. They felt the quickest way to accomplish that would be to install modular homes.

Representatives from USDA Rural

Development have continued to meet with tribal members providing assistance in replacing their burned homes with modular homes. Several families have received and/or completed loan applications. USDA Rural Development will continue to work in conjunction with FEMA to provide assistance until tribal members are back in their homes on the reservations.



Federal Help for Native American Tribes

There are many reservations located in the areas burned by the fires in Southern California. For many years USDA Rural Development has been partners with the tribes, assisting with housing, infrastructure and business needs. Immediately following the fires, USDA RD staff attended several meetings organized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which were attended by

representatives from many federal agencies and tribal leaders. Tribal leaders from the area provided information on damage to their reservations as well as a needs assessment.

From this meeting, USDA Rural Development scheduled one-on-one meetings with Tribal leaders to visit their reservations and provide information on repairs to homes, businesses and infrastructure.

USDA Rural Development learned that FEMA would be able to provide the reservations with assistance to clean up their burned home sites, bring in temporary housing and provide utility and sewer hookups for up to 18 months. The tribes felt the easiest and fastest way to get the families back into their homes, would be to install modular homes.

Status/What's Next?

USDA Rural Development staff in California is continuing to work with BIA to develop a model leasehold to use as part of a loan application that is in compliance with USDA regulations and must be used when providing financial assistance on Tribal lands. USDA Rural Development will continue to work with these tribes on possible home replacement.

Indian Health Facility Survives the Fires

In 1995 USDA Rural Development funded the Indian Health Clinic which is located on the Rincon reservation. The clinic serves eight

Indian Reservations, Pauma, Rincon, La Jolla, San Pasqual, Los Coyotes, Mesa Grande, Pala, and Santa Ysabel which are located in central San Diego County.



Fortunately for the members of the reservations, the facility did not sustain any damage during the fires.

► Cedar Fire - Fast Facts

- Size of fire: 273,246 acres.
- 111 total personnel
- 113 injuries 14 deaths
- 2,232 homes destroyed
- 53 homes damaged
- 22 commercial properties destroyed
- 566 other structures destroyed
- 10 other structures damaged
- Cost: \$32,500,616

Statistics provided by CalMAST and USDA Forest Service

San Bernardino County

USDA Rural Development Water Project Saves the Mountain in Cedarpines Park

Thanks RD for saving our Mountain!

The firefighters in the Cedarpines Park area tried to save all the homes in their rural community during the Old and Grand Prix fires that burned up to the top of the San Bernardino Mountains but because of the power outage during the fire, many homes were threatened.

To fight the fire, the water company spent a month's supply of water, leaving a large bill in pumping and water costs, depleting their financial reserves.

"There would be no community standing without the USDA Rural Development water storage tank.

Robert Fawley, President of the CPMWC

What's Next

During a recent trip to the Cedarpines Park area, Paul Venosdel, State Director of the USDA Rural Development in California visited with representatives from the Cedarpines Park Mutual Water Company (CPMWC) to discuss possible solutions for their loan debt and future water needs. As an immediate solution, CPMWC



Robert Fawley discusses future water funding possibilities with Paul Venosdel and Janice Waddell from USDA Rural Development

requested a waiver to the annual audit requirement as part of the loan with Rural Development. The request was immediately granted pursuant to the regulations. This action will save the water company approximately \$5,000 per year.

USDA Rural Development will also be working with the CPMWC for future water needs to include backup generators for use when the electrical power goes down

The Camp Waterman Tragedy

In 1978, USDA Rural Development provided a \$75,900 loan and \$24,700 grant to the Camp Waterman Mutual Water Company (CWMWC) for a new 50,000 gallon water storage tank. The community came together to make this project happen, providing their own money towards the project.

The Old Fire roared up through the canyon, leveling 47 homes along its path, leaving the canyon virtually destroyed with only six homes left standing.



USDA Rural Development funded pump house.

Although the water system was instrumental in fighting the fire, once the electricity went out, there was nothing else the firefighters could do. They had to evacuate the area for their own safety.



Dwayne Cash, President, CWMWC, shows Paul Venosdel and Janice Waddell from USDA Rural Development the damage which occurred from the recent fires

"The purchase of an additional water tank was a big success for the community," said Dwayne Cash, President of the CWMWC. "We'd really be crying on your shoulders if we didn't have it. We would be out of service." Dwayne was out of town on a fishing trip when the fires occurred, returning to find his home, workshop and storage shed were all completely destroyed. Housed in his home were the files for the USDA Rural Development funded water project, which were totally destroyed.

What's Next

USDA Rural Development has duplicated the loan file for the community.

Although all but six of the homes were destroyed during the fires, state regulations require the water company keep supplying water to the homes that were not destroyed, however, there is very little revenue coming in to assist with the monthly loan payments to USDA Rural Development.

Almost all of the CWMWC community that lost their homes during the fire plan to rebuild. It is anticipated that 80% or more will be rebuilt within two to three years.

The problem for the community now is cash flow with only six users online to pay fixed operating costs and debt service.

USDA Rural Development will be working with the community to provide debt restructuring and to provide funding for a back-up generator system so that in the future if the electricity goes out, water is still available.

"The purchase of an additional water tank was a big success for the community. We'd really be crying on your shoulders if we didn't have it. We would have been out of service.

**Dwayne Cash
President, CWMWC**

San Bernardino County

Mountain Pioneer Water Project Receives Damage from Fire

"When we heard the sound of distress in the voice of the Fire Chief over the radio, we knew that his order to evacuate was serious," said Dawn Neuenschwander, Secretary/Treasurer of the Mountain Pioneer Mutual Water Company (MPMWC). Dawn ran into her house, grabbed a suitcase and her PC and left. That was the last she saw of her home, business and cats.

The Rimforest area was virtually wiped out by fire and left with no power available. Of the 18 homes in the area, 17 were destroyed. Possible damage to the weld seams on the water tank was also noted. "One cannot fully comprehend the devastation the fire caused until you see the charred remnants and listen to the survivors description of what happened and how that impact has dramatically changed their lives," said Keith Johnson, Community Development Manager, who was part of the assessment team in Rimforest. "I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to help some of our Rural Development borrowers."

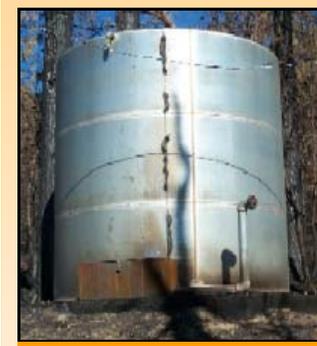
The water system for the Mountain Pioneer area was funded by a USDA Rural Development \$48,900 loan and \$91,100 grant in July 1995. During the fire the water system was virtually shutdown, and sustained major damage.



Dawn Neuenschwander, Mountain Pioneer MWC surveys the damage to the Mountain Pioneer MWC.

Status/What's Next?

The "what's next" for Dawn is more than most who were affected by the fires. Dawn not only has to think about rebuilding her home, but also her business, as her sign shop was located in her home which was also destroyed in the fire. Fortunately for Dawn, she was able to save her computer when she left her home, which contained her business information. It will make the rebuilding of her business a little easier.



Damaged USDA funded water tank

Although Dawn was dealing with her own personal loses, she was still taking time to work with local, state and federal officials to discuss options for a new water system for the community. Her focus was to find out where they could find the money to repair their water system or decide if they should hook up to an adjacent water system. However,

the actual cost will be higher if their storage tank needs to be replaced, and will also depend on how much damage the system incurs during the reconstruction of the community.

Costs to repair the water system could exceed \$100,000, however, an insurance policy may pay for the repairs to the system. If there is a shortfall in insurance money, USDA stands ready to provide funding assistance, even possibly a grant, to restore water service to the area.

Local Assistance Centers

FEMA Local Assistance Centers

As soon as it was safe to return to the burned areas, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) established several Local Assistance Centers (LAC) to house representatives from approximately 48 federal, state and local agencies to provide assistance and information to those people affected by the fires.

Employees from USDA Rural Development in California were dispatched to the LAC located at the Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino and Scripps Recreation Center in San Diego, the locations where our services and programs could be provide for those in need.



Displaced Residents from the fire damaged areas stand in line for assistance and information.

Thousands of people visited the centers each day following the fires, obtaining information on how to assist them with their situations.

► Old Fire - Fast Facts

- Size of fire: 91,281 acres
- 211 total emergency personnel
- 12 injuries
- 6 deaths
- 993 homes destroyed
- 10 commercial properties destroyed
- Cost: \$42,336,057

Statistics provided by CalMAST and USDA Forest Service

► Grand Prix Fire - Fast Facts

- 1 total personnel
- 35 injuries
- 0 deaths
- 135 homes destroyed
- 71 homes damaged
- 1 commercial property destroyed
- 1 commercial property damaged
- 60 other structures destroyed
- 10 other structures damaged
- Cost: \$11,571,772

Statistics provided by CalMAST and USDA Forest Service

Summary

Rural Development Took Immediate Action

The Southern California Fires will long be remembered for the devastation which occurred to the many residents in the San Diego and San Bernardino Counties. The fires burned approximately 749,000 acres, destroyed 3,600 structures, and caused 26 deaths. The fires seemed to burn fast and hot, as there was plenty of "fuel for the fire" which had occurred as a result of several years of drought. In assessing the damage, there seemed to be no rhyme or reason for how and why the fires burned or where and where they did not burn. Whole subdivisions were burned, but when the smoke cleared there might have been a single house still standing.

As soon as word was received about the fires, Paul Venosdel, State Director, immediately began assembling staff to deploy to the area to make an immediate assessment of the situation. A request submitted to the national office for additional dollars was quickly approved allowing the staff to go as soon as it was safe. Daily teleconferences were held to keep everyone abreast of what was happening, what we were doing, and what other resources were needed.

As staff began their assessments, many of them were overwhelmed by the impact the fire was having on the communities and stories from the residents about the tragic losses. **"I didn't really know the impact the fire was having to the area until I saw it,"** said Gurcharan Dhillon, Rural Development Manager, USDA Rural Development. **"The damage the fire had done was unbelievable."**

One staff member spent time at one of the evacuation centers established by the Red Cross and watched as people drove up to the Center in their dirty pickups with their only belongings in the back. They were there to get a meal and then went back to their home sites to sift through the ashes. He wondered where they were going to go that night to sleep.

"Even though several thousand homes and buildings were destroyed by these fires, the firefighters determination to fight the fires resulted in them being able to hold the line long enough for Mother Nature to help out with a change in the weather, just in time to prevent a much larger devastation," said Richard Brassfield, Rural Development Manager, USDA Rural Development. **"Without the firefighters efforts, many more families would be homeless."**



One house remained untouched after the fire burned neighboring houses

"Without the fire-fighters efforts, many more families would be homeless."

Richard Brassfield
Rural Development
Manager

Rural Development's Long Term Assistance

Rural Development's work with local officials has transitioned from initial **"on-site recovery"** to a continuing **"long-term work"** mode. Rural Development water projects normally have a development / construction timeline of 18 months to up to three years from pre-application to final completion of system construction. Projects in disaster areas can take even longer. This is why RD State Director sent senior RD experts on-site to projects in affected areas to work with local officials for immediate recovery needs, but also for long-term reconstruction planning.

When will final funding needs be identified? It is difficult to predict at this time because of several factors:

- Insurance claims have not yet been approved.
- Individual residents (water users) have not all decided yet to return to their property
- Individual residents (water users) have not yet all decided yet if they will rebuild and/or improve their property
- Winter season and personal property repairs slow the decision-making process for officials and residents

Shortly after the fires, and residents began the cleanup, torrential rains hit the San Bernardino Mountains, causing flooding and mudslides, resulting in several deaths. This will continue to be a threat until the area can be restored.

As the staff wrapped up their trips to Southern California it became apparent to them those communities that had completed some pre-planning with their water districts were better equipped to fight the fires which helped save property and lives. USDA will continue to work with the communities to do some long-term planning and look at system improvements to reduce the impact when future fires re-visit this scenic but vulnerable landscape.

Thank You

.....Thank you to FEMA and California OES for all the support they provided to those people affected by the recent fires and the agencies assisting with the recovery efforts.

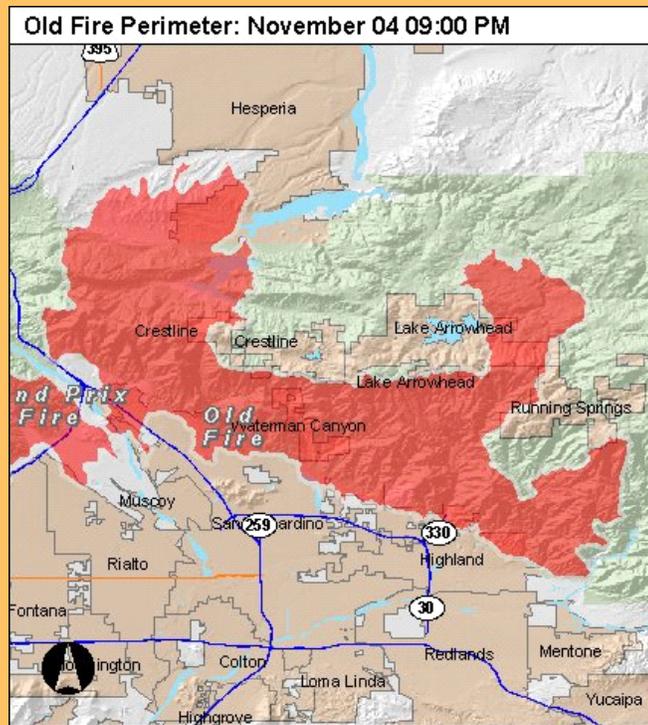
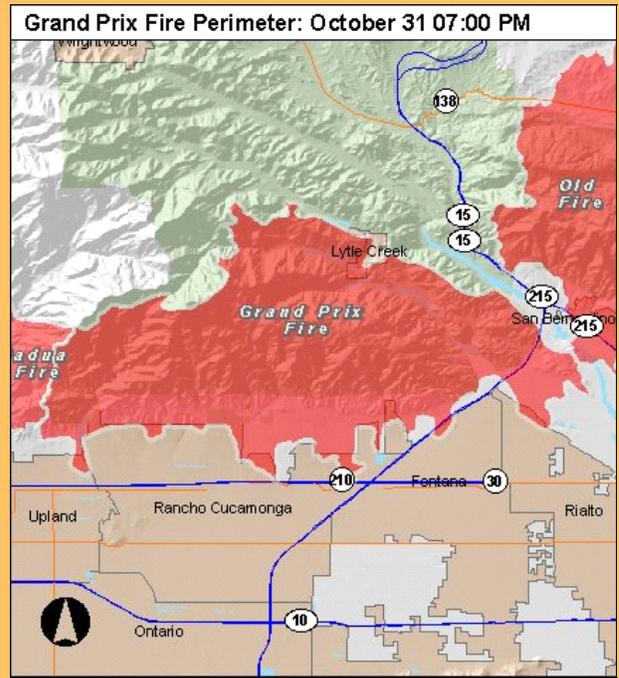
.....To the residents at Harbison Canyon, San Pasqual Reservation, Cuyamaca, Camp Waterman, Cedarpines Park, and Rimforest for meeting with us and telling us your stories.

.....To Rural Development employees in Nevada for their assistance in the assessment efforts conducted and to Rural Development employees in states of Washington, Colorado, and New Jersey for offering their assistance. It was nice to know you were there to assist if needed.

.....To the USDA Rural Development National Office for their immediate response to financial assistance needed to accomplish our assessment and recovery efforts.

.....And, a very special thank you to the California Rural Development Staff, who, when asked to assist, didn't ask any questions, dropped what they were doing, changed their plans, and flew down to southern California to provide assistance where needed and for as long as it took. I am proud of your accomplishments in assisting those in need.

Paul Venosdel, State Director
USDA Rural Development - California



*Maps provided by the CA Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (CaMAST) and USDA Forest Service

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