

# Fire tears through Concow, Paradise and into east Chico

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*Staff reports*

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**PARADISE** » The fast-moving Camp Fire burned up to 1,000 buildings and homes in the Paradise area Thursday and reportedly killed multiple people, then roared into Chico and forced evacuations there.

Cal Fire-Butte County Chief Darren Read said in the afternoon that hundreds of structures in Paradise have burned, perhaps as many as 1,000. Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said there are reports of multiple fatalities, and authorities are trying to verify how many.

The fire started in the Feather River Canyon near Pulga and Highway 70, then burned west. It jumped to 18,000

acres in eight hours Thursday, ripping across the Concow Valley and into and across Paradise.

Then the fire turned east. It reached Highway 99 near Neal Road by 7:30 p.m. and was approaching Highway 32 near upper Bidwell Park by 9 p.m. Evacuation orders were issued from Bruce Road east, from East 20th Street to Highway 32 along the east side of Chico, and in the Canyon Oaks subdivision farther north. Homes were reported burning on the lower Skyway near Oak Ridge Drive and Spanish Garden Drive.

Tens of thousands had already been evacuated, perhaps as many as 50,000 people, according to the sheriff. The Sheriff's Office also has received hundreds of calls requesting deputies to perform welfare checks on unaccounted people in the fire zone. Officials expected to work through the night responding to those calls.



BILL HUSA — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Paradise residents try to evacuate the Camp Fire on Skyway early Thursday in Paradise.



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

A vehicle burns on Neal Road in Paradise as a wildfire destroys neighborhoods Thursday.

“This was a rapidly moving fire,” Honea said. “And it moved very very quickly from a rather remote area to populated areas.”

Honea said he had no estimate when evacuees would be able to return.

Residents in Paradise, Magalia, Concow, Yankee Hill and Butte Creek Canyon were initially ordered to evacuate. Thursday evening the evacuation order was extended from Forest Ranch south to Chico, and later to Cherokee and Oro-Chico Highway near Durham. Then the east Chico evacuations were ordered, followed by an order covering everything north of Highway 70 and east of Highway 149

Three firefighters and several citizens were taken to hospitals with injuries. Three more firefighters suffered burns.

The fire started about 6:30 a.m. Thursday at Camp Creek Road near Pulga. Read said the cause of the fire is under investigation, and likely would be for “quite some time.”

Around 2:30 p.m., Cal Fire said 20,000 acres had burned with no containment. The fire was exhibiting extreme fire behavior, Cal Fire public information officer Rick Carhart said. Firefighters are expecting sustained winds up to 30-35 mph on the fire.

“This fire did move through the town of Paradise quickly,” said Paradise Police Chief Eric Reinbold. “We’re very grateful for our partnerships with allied agencies, Cal Fire, our agency, the town staff worked as quickly as possible to evacuate, using our evacuation plans. And the things that we’ve trained for over the years. There is a lot of devastation in town. Just to reiterate, we can’t confirm how many structures, but at this point it’s very devastating to the town.”

### **Chaos on the ground**

Witnesses and reporters on the ground described a chaotic scene as people tried to leave town.

The fire moved so fast that people were cut off by the flames and sheltered in large asphalt parking areas. Radio traffic Thursday afternoon indicated 300 people were at the Kmart lot on Clark Road, with fire in all directions. Another 100 were at a storage business at Clark and Skyway. Still another group gathered at the Holiday Market parking lot on Skyway.

Photographer Karl Mondon said at 4 p.m. the Safeway parking lot at Clark and Elliott roads was half full of evacuees. Many said they knew their homes were lost.

Wayne and Juanita McLish, 20-year residents of Fawndale Lane, said they fought for two hours to save their home until the wa-

ter pressure ran out, then made it to Safeway. Wayne McLish’s face was covered in soot. The former math teacher looked stunned when he was told it was 4 o’clock in the afternoon, not the morning.

Evacuees who were able to get out of town often found themselves in gridlock. A pregnant woman stuck in traffic went into labor. In the late morning, Highway 99 northbound was clogged from south of Durham-Pentz Road to Chico. A number of people took a U-turn across the median to get off the freeway at Durham-Pentz and head toward Durham, but the Midway was backed up northbound as well.

## Hospital evacuated

According to the Sheriff's Office, Feather River Hospital and all Paradise schools were all evacuated. Hospital patients were sent to Enloe Medical Center in Chico and Oroville Hospital.

According to PG&E spokesman Paul Moreno, 32,000 customers were without power as a result of the fire in Butte and Plumas counties, which includes those in the Paradise, Pulga and Concow areas. No public safety power shut off has been implemented.

The county set up evacuation centers at Oroville Nazarene Church (2238 Monte Vista Ave.) and Neighborhood Church in Chico (2801 Notre Dame Blvd.), but both of those were reported full Thursday evening. Another shelter at the Butte County Fairgrounds in Gridley still had space. At 8:30 p.m. Thursday, another shelter was opened at the Chico Elks Lodge (1705 Manzanita Ave.).

The Silver Dollar Fairgrounds is being used as a staging area for fire crews and is not open to evacuees. Butte College is also being used as a staging area.

The city of Chico's Public Works Department said evacuees can also head to DeGarmo Park and Community Park off 20th Street in Chico, as well as Durham Park, but not to expect services.

Camp Fire evacuees are being asked to register with Red Cross' Safe & Well website so concerned family and friends can search those lists. <https://safeandwell.communityos.org/cms/index.php> Concerned family and friends can also search the list of those who have registered as "safe and well" by clicking on the "Search Registrants" button.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) has activated the State Operations Center to provide assistance to Butte County in support of the Camp Fire.

Cal OES Fire, Law Enforcement, and Inland Region personnel are currently working with various response agencies to address all emergency management, evacuation and mutual aid needs.

Smoke from the fire was reported as far away as San Jose and Fort Bragg.

## UTILITIES

# Pulga woman says PG&E had planned tower work

By Matthias Gafni

*Bay Area News Group*

**PULGA »** The day before a PG&E transmission line may have sparked the state's most destructive and deadliest wildfire in history, a business owner in this tiny town near the Camp Fire's origin received an email from the utility.

The company said they'd be coming out to work on one of their towers Thursday, implying they had to fix a problem, said Betsy Ann Cowley, owner of the Town of Pulga, a retreat popular with techies.

"This needs to become a class-action lawsuit," she said. "They don't help people pay to rebuild their homes."

Just what the problem might have been is unclear, but firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group and an alert sent to state regulators indicate a transmission line created a hazard about 15 minutes before the blaze was first reported. Firefighters found downed power lines and a fast-moving fire beneath the high-tension wires when they arrived to the fire's origin about a mile northeast of Pulga by Poe Dam.

State regulators have launched investigations into California's two largest utility companies after both PG&E and Southern California Edison Company reported

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# PG&E

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that their electrical infrastructure suffered malfunctions near ground zero of two deadly blazes raging across the north and south of the state.

The California Public Utilities Commission has launched probes to "assess the compliance of electric facilities with applicable rules and regulations in fire impacted areas," CPUC spokeswoman Terrie Prosper said Monday. "The CPUC staff investigations may include an inspection of the fire sites once Cal Fire allows access, as well as maintenance of facilities, vegetation management, and emergency preparedness and response."

On Friday, PG&E disclosed in a filing to the CPUC that it had detected an outage on a transmission line in Butte County, occurring about 15 minutes before the Camp Fire was first reported and in the same location Cal Fire pinpointed as the origin. The utility said a subsequent aerial inspection detected damage to a transmission tower on that same transmission line a mile northeast of the town of Pulga "in the area of the Camp Fire."

That is the approximate



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
Fire smolders under high voltage towers in Pulga near the reported start of the Camp Fire.

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location of Poe Dam where initial radio transmissions of the fire — which has killed at least 29 people and destroyed more than 6,000 structures — indicate that a damaged transmission line was found by firefighters who discovered the initial fire beneath the high tension wires.

On Monday, guards blocked access to the road beyond her property preventing anyone from continuing the final  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile to the transformer towers.

A crew from Capstone Fire Management was on the dam inspecting the area. The San Diego-based private firefighting company was hired by PG&E to buffer its fire prevention operations, including engine crews and personnel to staff operations centers.

Cowley said she had just returned Monday from her first vacation in four years since buying the place, to find her home destroyed. Much of the other structures on the property, including the historic school house with a mural of a hybrid butterfly snake survived.

On Thursday, SoCal Edison issued an alert to the CPUC that a substation circuit near the origin of the Woolsey Fire in Southern California “relayed,” or sensed a disturbance on the circuit, just two minutes be-

fore Cal Fire said that devastating fire began.

“Preliminary information indicates the Woolsey Fire was reported at approximately 2:24 p.m.,” the company reported. “Our information reflects the Big Rock 16 kV circuit out of Chatsworth Substation relayed at 2:22 p.m.”

The company said personnel had not been able to access the area to investigate further. No cause has been determined yet for either fire, although a Cal Fire official said it would be reviewing “electrical equipment” as part of its probe into the Camp Fire.

Both utility companies have reiterated that no cause of either fire has been determined, but stockholders have engaged in a massive sell-off since Friday.

The Camp Fire’s death toll of 29 has matched the deadliest wildfire in the state’s history dating back to 1933. The fire is also the most destructive with more than 6,700 homes and businesses destroyed, reducing the town of Paradise to ashes.

The Woolsey Fire, which swept through Malibu, has burned more than 91,000 acres, an estimated 370 structures and killed at least two people.

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*Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.*

DAY 5

# CAMP FIRE BECOMES STATE'S DEADLIEST EVER

By Andre Bylk

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**CHICO »** The Camp Fire became the deadliest wildfire in California state history Monday.

Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said Monday evening that an additional 13 deaths have been confirmed, bringing the total number of deaths to 42.

The Sheriff's Office released the names of three people killed in the fire, saying their families had been notified.

The people identified Monday were Ernest Foss, 65, of Paradise; Jesus Fernandez, 48, of Concow; and Carl Wiley, 77, of Magalia.

Honea said he has requested about 150 additional search and rescue personnel to assist in the search for human remains. Additionally, he has asked for cadaver dogs, portable morgue units and additional radio equipment.

The sheriff would not say whether he expected the fire's death toll to rise. But he did say he wanted to complete the search in a timely fashion for both the families of the deceased and the communities that have been affected.

With the number of fatalities at 29 on Sunday night,

it was tied with Los Angeles County's Griffith Park Fire of 1933, which burned 47 acres.

## Conditions

The Camp Fire consumed more acreage, reaching 117,000 acres as of Monday evening. The fire started Thursday morning near Camp Creek Road in the Feather River Canyon off Highway 70 near Pulga. It quickly moved west and engulfed the town of Paradise.

Cal Fire said 7,177 residential and commercial buildings have been destroyed and 92 have been damaged. The damage assessment team has created an interactive website that displays which buildings have been destroyed and those that are still standing.

Containment increased to 30 percent Monday, but Cal Fire said 15,500 structures remain threatened. A total of 5,139 people are working on the fire.

According to Cal Fire, winds from the northeast are fueling the fire. Firefighters worked Sunday night into Monday to hold lines and protect homes in areas in or near Magalia, Brush Creek and Cherokee.

Fire crews are fighting flames "aggressively," according to Cal Fire. Officials are concerned about possibly shifting



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea delivers the grim news Monday that 13 more human remains were recovered for 42 total fatalities in the Camp Fire, making it the most deadly wildfire in California history.



CONTRIBUTED BY MANDY FEDER-SAWYER

A badly damaged motorcycle is still standing in Paradise.

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RANDY VAZQUEZ — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
A cadaver dog and law enforcement officials search through rubble from the Camp Fire in Paradise on Monday.

## Day 5

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winds, putting other areas in danger.

### Evacuations

Fifty-two thousand people from the areas of Paradise, Magalia, Concow, Butte Creek Canyon and Butte Valley remained under evacuation orders Monday, and Honea said no new evacuation warnings or orders had been issued. It was not yet clear, however, when residents could return home.

There are more than 200 people still missing, according to Honea. A hotline network has been set up to report people missing and people found. The numbers are (530) 538-6570, (530) 538-7544 and (530) 538-7671.

Many of the evacuation centers are full, so new ones are being evaluated. Those

open with space available include: Bidwell Jr. High School, 2376 North Ave, Chico; Yuba-Sutter Fairground, 442 Franklin Ave, Yuba City; Plumas County Fairgrounds, 204 Fairground Rd, Quincy; and Butte County Fairgrounds, 199 E Hazel St., Gridley.

Small animals can be taken to the Chico Municipal Airport, 150 Airpark Blvd. Large animals can go to the Butte County Fairgrounds, 199 E. Hazel St. in Gridley.

The Gridley fairgrounds are no longer accepting donations, but Gridley High School is. Chico and Pleasant Valley high schools Monday collected clothing for students from Paradise High School, and they'll be able to pick from what's available Tuesday at the small gym at PV.

### Disaster

Air quality is forecast to be very unhealthy through Tuesday by the Butte County Air Quality Management



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
Fire burns around PG&E transmission towers on Monday, east of Pulga. The first report of the deadly Camp Fire was made near here.



DYLAN BOUSCHER — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
Preston Wrachford helps Andres Garcia-Baker, 4, pick books out of a box of free items in the Wal-Mart parking lot in Chico. They were among dozens sifting through free provisions in the lot.

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RANDY VAZQUEZ — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

A cadaver dog and law enforcement officials search through rubble from the Camp Fire in Paradise on Monday.

District. Smoke levels are expected to be the highest near the active fire, immediately downwind of the fire area, and within and downwind of canyon drainages.

People with heart or lung disease, older adults, and children should avoid all physical activity outdoors. Everyone else should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion.

The Butte County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday in their chambers in the County Administration Building to ratify a local disaster proclamation and a health emergency declaration concerning the Camp Fire.

Chief Administrative Officer Shari McCracken declared the local emergency Thursday, which is necessary to qualify the county for state and federal aid. The supervisors have to ratify it within seven days for it to remain in effect.

Butte County Health Of-

ficer Dr. Andrew Miller declared the health emergency Friday, because the debris from the fire likely contains hazardous material and probable radioactive material. Again it has to be ratified by the supervisors.

President Donald Trump on Monday approved a major disaster declaration for California, opening access to federal funding for people affected by wildfires in Butte, Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other programs to help residents and business owners recover from the disaster.

Residents and business owners can apply for assistance beginning Tuesday at <http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov> or by calling 1-800-621-3362.

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Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.



CAMP FIRE

# More remains found

**Deaths:** Six more bodies discovered in Paradise homes, authorities continue search

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*Staff reports*

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**CHICO »** The death toll in the Camp Fire rose to 48 on Tuesday, and more than 8,800 structures have been destroyed.

The authorities also continued their search for human remains with the help of cadaver dogs while firefighters reported good progress on the fire lines.

Six more people were found dead in homes in Paradise Tuesday, Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said, adding that an additional 100 National Guard troops have been ordered to help in the search efforts for remains.

Honea said the authorities are trying to more quickly identify people who perished in the fire and notify their families. To assist that effort, the sheriff said his office and state Department of Justice will work in conjunction with a private DNA company to more quickly identify remains.

“This will allow us to identify those victims, hopefully within days, and bring closure to grieving families,” Honea said. “This is, as I understand it, cutting-edge technology. This is a monumental event. I think it’s appropriate to bring to bear as many resources as we possibly can.”

The fire had grown to 130,000 acres and remained at 35 percent containment. Cal Fire said 8,817 structures have been destroyed, which includes 7,600 homes. The blaze is now expected to be surrounded, but not out, by Nov. 30.

An interactive website to check on buildings in Paradise has been set up. It is not yet a complete inventory.

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Fire is still burning in areas and putting out hot spots is a priority, while protecting structures, Cal Fire reported. Fire personnel numbers have grown to 5,615, including air tanker crews that have been dropping retardant and water for fire suppression when conditions have allowed. Winds, visibility and steep terrain continue to be challenges for firefighters.

It has been 212 days since the area has received any rain, a meteorologist said. Conditions continue to be dry, but rain is predicted around Thanksgiving.

Progress was made in the Santos Ranch area. The fire progressed in Magalia, but was kept away from Stirling City.

Evacuations were still in place for Paradise, Magalia, Concow, Butte Creek Canyon and Butte Valley. Evacuation warnings in Thermalito were lifted. There was no estimated time when evacuated residents could return to their homes, but officials were beginning to caution people about what to expect when evacuation orders are ultimately canceled.

Lisa Almaguer, a spokesperson for Butte County Public Health, said residents should prepare to be without power, water and cellphone service. Additionally, there is the potential for falling trees and limbs, as well as contaminated well water and compromised septic tanks. Bottled drinking water should be used.

A PG&E spokesperson said 23,000 customers remained without power Tuesday, and it was working to complete damage assessments in fire-ravaged areas.

Cal Fire-Butte County Chief Darren Read said Tuesday at the Butte County Board of Supervisors meet-

ing that two of the three firefighters reported injured so far were members of an inmate fire crew. The inmates had minor burns to the head and neck, and they were treated at UC Davis Medical Center's burn unit and released.

The third firefighter injured was a fire captain who suffered serious burns. The captain remained hospitalized.

Read also noted that the first engine to respond to the Camp Fire's ignition point near Pulga reported the fire at 15 acres in size. The engine, however, couldn't get to the fire because the road to it, Camp Creek Road, was damaged in the storms of January 2017. The fire took off and burned 6.7 miles in the first hour, and 19.7 miles in 17 hours.

Typically, the fire chief said, a fire heading in the direction that the Camp Fire took would stop at the West Branch of the Feather River, but the Camp Fire did not.

Firefighters, deputies, police officers and others saved "tens of thousands of people," Read said.

Honea said at the meeting that the "threat to the ridge has been talked about for many, many years." He added, "Without the work that's been done to mitigate it, the death toll would have been much, much higher."

Honea also said there have been 208 calls for suspicious activity in the evacuation areas, and of those calls 18 were for looting, which resulted in six arrests.

The Sheriff's Office has established a missing person hotline with three contacts: 530-538-6570, 530-538-7544 and 530-538-7671. A list of missing people is also being circulated.

The state Department of Water Resources said Tuesday that the fire was not a threat to Oroville Dam, but it was taking safety precautions. Construction operations on the spillways have been stopped, among other precautions.

The town of Paradise said Tuesday that it has opened a call center to help answer residents' questions and to provide information regarding resources. Residents affected by the fire can also call for information about the fire's status, containment and evacuation updates. The call center is not for missing persons information.

The call center is will be

open daily from 6 a.m.-6 p.m. and can be reached at 530-879-3709, 530-879-3712 and 530-879-3713.

Evacuation centers that are open include: Bidwell Jr. High School, 2376 North Ave., Chico; Yuba-Sutter Fairground, 442 Franklin Ave., Yuba City; Plumas County Fairgrounds, 204 Fairground Road, Quincy; and Butte County Fairgrounds, 199 E Hazel St., Gridley.

Small animals are still being taken at the Chico Municipal Airport 150 Airport Blvd., and space for large animals is still available at Butte County Fairgrounds in Gridley.

The public information line for questions about the Camp Fire is still active at 530-538-7826.

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## PG&amp;E

# president says cause of Camp Fire unknown

By Laura Urseny and  
Matthias Gafni

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@LauraUrseny on Twitter*

**CHICO** » The president of PG&E says the utility does not know what caused the Camp Fire, but is cooperating with the investigation by state agencies.

Geisha Williams told the Chico Enterprise-Record in a phone interview Tuesday that there was a power outage around 6:15 a.m. Thursday, about 15 minutes before the fire was reported, and that later an aerial patrol observed damage in the area of the transmission lines.

There has been speculation that problems with transmission lines in the Pulga area was the source of the fire.

"We don't know what the cause of the fire is," she said Tuesday.

According to firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group, downed PG&E power lines and high winds may have contributed.

Asked if there were sparks from the transmission line that started the fire, Williams said, "It's too soon to tell."

"We haven't had access to the site yet," she added. "Employees have not seen the site."

On Friday, Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey told E-R reporter Andre Byik that that his office has been in discussions with Cal Fire to preserve the fire scene and any potential evidence for a possible criminal investigation.

PG&E's Williams said the utility is cooperating with the investigation into what became the Camp Fire, which as of early Tuesday had burned 125,000 acres.

She said after the aerial patrol spotted the damage, PG&E sent an electric incident report to state agencies.

"We thought it was important for the state agencies to be aware of," she said.

She said Cal Fire is leading the investigation and that sparks from the transmission lines is one of several "options" being examined.

Among the thousands displaced by the fire, she said 71 employees in the area lost their homes.

"This is an unprecedented moment in history, not only for the company but for California. The PG&E family is devastated by the disaster," Williams said.

She said PG&E has established an emergency operation center that will be working with the community to restore power.

During press briefings earlier this week, officials said the California Highway Patrol has begun the process of clearing cars from the road, which will help PG&E in reaching the area.

PG&E is working to restore electric and gas customers but is still assessing the damage, Williams said.

"Immediate restoration may not be possible. It may take longer to rebuild the system," she said.

Regarding the public safety power shutoff planned on Thursday but canceled, Williams said the utility's meteorologists said the weather conditions did not reach the threshold levels that would have prompted the shut off.

However, Clay Helmstalk, a Caltrans maintenance supervisor for the Pulga station who was there shortly after the fire started, tells a different story.

"I got back there around 7 a.m. and it was just taking off," Helmstalk said. "It was so windy it was hard to stand up."

Helmstalk had finished dragging a fallen oak tree out of the roadway when a PG&E truck flagged him down around 6:30 a.m. and alerted him that a fire broke out near his maintenance yard about six miles west.

Firefighter radio transmissions and PG&E regulatory filings indicate a transmission line may have sparked the fire amid heavy winds that blew the fire up the valley ridges.

"We all just stood there and watched," Helmstalk said. "There's nothing more anyone could have done after it started. Not firefighters, no one. The wind was carrying it so hard there was nothing anyone could do except get out of town."

In the short interview, Williams said that PG&E's "goal is to support the community every step of the way."

"We are in an unprecedented time. It's bigger than PG&E," she said.

Contact reporter Laura Urseny at 530-896-7756 and Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.

## Authorities are trying to more quickly identify people who perished in the fire and notify their families.

### Staff reports

The Butte County Sheriff's Office has released a list of some of the people missing in the Camp Fire and is seeking the public's help to locate them.

"In our ongoing effort to locate people thought to be missing as a result of the Camp Fire, the Butte County Sheriff's Office will be releasing the names of the individuals we are currently looking for," the Sheriff's Office said.

"If you are one of the individuals listed below please contact the Butte County Sheriff's office Missing Person Call Center to advise that you are safe and there is no further need to search for you. The numbers are 530-538-6570, 530-538-7544 and 530-538-7671. This list will be updated on a regular basis. We appreciate your assistance."

Mary Ann McAlvain, 65, Paradise

Dorothy Larsen, 88, Paradise

Steven and Sharon Parker, 40, Paradise

Michael Maddox, 79, Paradise

Hannelore Maddox, 75, Paradise

Scott Charmers, 40, Chico

Ken Woodie, 72, Magalia

Kathryn Woodie, 69, Magalia

Charlene Riby, 85, Magalia

Bob Biehler, 72, Paradise

Nadeen Biehler, 72, Paradise

Marie Wehe, 78, Concow

Ronald Amberg, 77, Paradise

## Search: Sheriff's Office releases partial list of the missing, seeks help from public

Joseph D. Carmack, 85, Paradise

Evelyn R. Carmack, 77, Paradise

Richard B. Carmack, 63, Paradise

Stacy A. Carmack, 45, Paradise

Judith Anglin, 79, Paradise

Robin Draper, 57, Magalia

Harold Henderson, 57, Magalia

Robert Walker, 60, Paradise

Joyce Walker, 84, Paradise

Jackie Villanova, 80, Magalia

Terry Cecil, 57, Magalia

Calvin Cunningham, 95, Paradise

Bill Pritchard, 65, Butte Meadows

Linda Alice Miihu, 82, Paradise

Shannah Hess, 56, Paradise

Rosanne King, 72, Paradise

Roger Schlect, 75, Paradise

John Thomas Hickey, 84, Paradise

Rev. Joe and Patricia Glenn, 70s, Paradise

Marilyn Price, 80, Magalia

John Sedwick, 65, Magalia

Arlene Beck, 85, Paradise

Tony Alvarado, 65, Paradise

Chris and Phyllis Salazar, late 70s, Paradise

Catherine Mildred Williams, 70s, Paradise

Albert Chabot, 95, Paradise

Mia, 65 or 67, Paradise

Charles Deaderick, 60s, Paradise

Patrick Fernea, 25 or 26, Paradise

Lloyd Laird, 90s, Magalia

Cathy Shores, 90s, Magalia

Ron Phillips, 89, Paradise

Margorie Puccinelli, 90, Magalia

Shonnie Davidson, 80s, Paradise

Nelson Parmerter, 70s, Paradise

Ronald Dowe, 78?, Paradise

Paul Williams, 90s, Paradise

Paul Williams Jr., 65?, Paradise

Gail Williams, 60s, Paradise

Chuck Piazza, 90, Magalia

Richard Dwayne Poole II, 30s, Fort Bragg?

Carol Haven Thew, 67, Paradise

John Sparks, 70, Paradise

Robin Marie Bay-Cetina, 60s, Paradise

Nancy Britts, 49, Paradise

Richard Bowen, 87?, Paradise

Merium Lopez, 71, Paradise

Shirlee Teays, late 70s, Paradise

Janice Dahlgren, 75

Howard Morey, 60s

Marcela Wilson, 93, Paradise

David William Marbury, 66, Paradise

Sarah Rowland, 34, Paradise

Jerry Medina, 78, Paradise

Verna Medina, 78, Paradise

Michael Earhart, 75, Magalia

Kathleen Brunson, 65, Paradise

Vern Hartje, 88, Paradise

Josephine Hartje, 94, Paradise

Kris Josephson, 43, Oroville

Russell Troge, 71, Paradise

Maria Troge, 60, Paradise

Maria Troge, 60, Paradise

Maria Troge, 60, Paradise

Art Martinez, 61, Paradise

Kathy Wood, 67, Paradise

Ron Wood, 70s, Paradise

Dorothea Silva, late 70 to 80, Paradise

Bonnie Pickett, 54, Magalia

Jon Nelson, 64, Paradise

Bob Conner, 69-72, Paradise

Anita Pagan, 58, Paradise

Beverly Jean Sparks, 76, Paradise

Wallace Sparks, 76, Paradise

Cheryl Brown, 75, Paradise

Larry Brown, 72, Paradise

Karen Kelly, 77, Paradise

James Kinner, 84, Paradise

Diane Meier, 83, Paradise

Trisha Johnson, 72, Paradise

Patricia Saunders, 80, Paradise

Josephine Leier, 91, Paradise

Pete Kidwell, 60, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

Bob Duvall, no age given, Paradise

DISPLACED

# FIRE EVACUEES CAMP OUTSIDE WALMART



PHOTOS BY KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Kika Powers wakes up in the parking lot of a Chico Walmart after he was displaced from his Magalia home by the devastating Camp Fire. Powers works in the bike department of that Walmart.

## ‘We’re all in the same place’

By Mary Nugent  
mnugent@chicoer.com  
@ER\_MaryNugent on Twitter

**CHICO** » Laura Whitaker never imagined she’d be camping in the field next to the parking lot at Walmart. But this week, that’s where she is, along with other family members including her 9-year-old grandson.

Whitaker is among thousands of people evacuated from the Camp Fire in Paradise. She lost her home and is staying at this informal camp area outside Walmart.

“All that’s left up there is ashes,” she said. “But I’ll say everyone around here is so nice and helpful. A woman came who survived the Santa Rosa fire, and she told everyone all kinds

of things that are good to know as you try to move forward.”

For some, like Whitaker, the camp area was a place to go when the shelters filled up. For others, it just felt more comfortable than a shelter.

“All of us here are in the same situation — whether you lost a trailer or a really nice home, we’re all in the same place,” Whitaker said, adding she’s not sure what she will do. “I can’t see past the trauma right now.”

Holly and James Wells lost their home in Paradise and were preparing for a new start.

“We just decided to come here first and stay. People have been great here. We’ve gotten food, and Walmart gave us a \$100 gift card,” said Holly.

“I was born and raised in Par-



People made homeless by the devastating Camp Fire in Butte County live in a tent city growing up around the Walmart parking lot Tuesday.

adise, but there’s nothing left,” said James. “We’re going to Ohio where my brother lives.”

Jeanine Cartwright has been living in the Walmart camp area since 2 p.m. Thursday, she said.

“My daughter and son-in-law are here too, and some friends. All the evacuees are helping each other, it’s like a family,” she said. “I’ve only seen two negative

**WALMART** » PAGE 4

# Chico Enterprise Record

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## Walmart

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situations since I've been here. People have been so great."

Cartwright lived with her friend, Paul Hossfield.

"It was terrible, losing our house like that," Hossfield said. "I also lost a Harley (Davidson) I was going to restore. But we're here now, and there has been so much support."

Cartwright and Hossfield plan to rebuild in Paradise.

Chris Crippen and Melissa Britt came to the Walmart area after they lost their home in Paradise. Britt's 8-year-old son was with them Tuesday, inside their tent.

"We came here because we had friends here, and it has been nice," said Britt. "It's been pretty amazing, really. We've even gotten some nice clothes."

The couple were headed



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Tammy Mezera ponders an uncertain future living at a growing tent city of homeless Camp Fire victims in the parking lot of Walmart on Tuesday.

to a church shelter.

Those who were evacuated, needing some kind of shelter, maybe a coat and a meal, found all of it at the Walmart parking lot because of other people. One of them was Erick Ralston of Chico.

"I got a call from a friend who said they need sleeping bags and chairs down here. I camp so I had

all that and brought some," he said as he passed out printed lists of resources for people who are now homeless.

"Yeah, I like to be helpful, but I'm not the only one doing this. There are a lot of people here doing the same kind of thing," said Ralston.

Another volunteer was Olivia Cerullo, whose fam-

ily owns Roots Catering and Restaurant. "We've been out here serving food every day since the fire," she said. "There are so many people willing to help by donating food and clothes."

But meeting evacuees in the Walmart parking lot showed her something else.

"I think the people need someone to listen, someone to talk to about what they've been through. They need emotional support. And they could use help from services like FEMA," Cerullo said.

Outside his tent on Tuesday morning, Daniel Hansen said he plans to eventually move back to Magalia.

"I've lived in Sacramento, but it is so much better up here — the openness. It is my place and I love it."

For now, camping outside Walmart is a step in moving forward.

"With all the great people here, it feels like the world is coming together," Hansen said.

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Contact reporter Mary Nugent at 530-896-7764.

# PG&E emailed woman about problems 1 day before fire

Napa Valley Register  
11-14-2018

**MARTHA MENDOZA  
AND GARANCE BURKE**  
Associated Press

**PULGA** — A day before a deadly blaze destroyed a California town, the giant utility Pacific Gas & Electric Co. got in touch with Betsy Ann Cowley, saying the company needed access to her property because its power lines were causing sparks.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation. What is known is that it started Thursday near Cowley's property in the tiny town of Pulga, incinerated the neighboring town of Paradise and killed at least 42 people.

On Monday, fire investigators declared the area surrounding power lines on Cowley's property, in an oak-filled canyon, a crime scene. Security guards would not let PG&E inspectors pass.

Cowley said she was on vacation last Wednesday when she got a surprise email from PG&E. Details of that exchange, described to The Associated Press, combined with the utility's track record in California wildfire history has again brought the company under scrutiny.

The email said that crews needed to come to her property to work on the high-power lines, Cowley said. PG&E told her "they were having problems with sparks," she said. They visited her property but she said she wasn't there Wednesday and was not aware of their findings.

Cowley was back at the property Monday and expressed gratitude at finding most of the 65 structures on it still standing, just a few hundred feet from the crime scene where investigators worked to determine what had happened to spark the massive fire.

The former landscaper bought Pulga, an abandoned and decrepit historic gold prospecting town, in 2015 and embarked on a project that transformed it into a picturesque private destination. She cleared overgrown brush, patched up buildings and added new ones. With Bay Area artists and architects, she recreated a town, complete with a stage and school house. And then, a year ago, she opened for business, rent-



PETER BANDA

Private security guards block the road in Pulga Monday to where investigators were trying to determine how the deadly Camp Fire started in Northern California that destroyed the town of Paradise. With the cause of the inferno under investigation, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. came under scrutiny after telling state regulators that it had been having a problem with an electrical transmission line in the area before the fire broke out. Investigators with the state fire agency were at the scene of the transmission line Monday.

ing out Pulga for corporate retreats.

As she reached the site of her own home, she raised her hand to her cheek.

"It's gone," she said. "That's where all my stuff was, but it's not there anymore."

She paused and picked up a mug that somehow had survived the inferno. "It's OK," Cowley told herself quietly. "It's OK."

PG&E declined to discuss the email it sent Cowley with AP, saying it has provided an "initial electric incident report" with state regulators and will fully cooperate with any investigations.

Publicly, PG&E has said it experienced a problem on an electrical transmission line near the site of the massive fire, minutes before the blaze broke out.

In its Friday filing to the state Public Utilities Commission, it said it had detected an outage on an electrical transmission line near the site of the blaze. It said a subsequent aerial inspection detected damage to a transmission tower on the line.

The area where CalFire says the blaze started, and where PG&E says sparks were detected on Cowley's property is roughly the same, according to an AP reporter at the site.

The utility, which has been criticized and sued in a number of other large and deadly fires across Califor-

nia, had announced before the blaze started that it might shut down power in nine counties, including Butte County where Pulga and Paradise are, because of extreme fire danger. But it never did.

Later Thursday, PG&E said it had decided against a power cut because weather conditions did not warrant one.

State Sen. Jerry Hill, a Redwood City Democrat and longtime critic of the utility, called the report of troubles on PG&E's lines in the area extremely worrisome.

"If PG&E is found responsible for burning down the state again, at some point we have to say enough is enough and we have to ask should this company be allowed to do business in California?" Hill said. "These fires take a spark, and at least in the last few years fires have been caused by negligent behavior by PG&E. We need to see how we can hold them responsible, or look at alternative way of doing business."

California utility regulators are working with CalFire staff on their own, separate investigation into whether PG&E complied with state rules and regulations in areas that were torched in the fire.

The California Public Utilities Commission will be evaluating PG&E's maintenance of their fa-

ilities, vegetation management and emergency preparedness and response, said commission spokeswoman Terrie Prosper.

This is not the first time PG&E's management practices have come under question in the drought-stricken state.

In 2014, regulators ordered the state's investor-owned utilities to set priorities for inspecting and removing dead and sick trees near their power lines, warning that "climate change has facilitated and exacerbated numerous wildfires" that have damaged and threatened their facilities.

But after a wildfire killed two people, destroyed 475 homes and scorched 70,000 acres in the Sierra Nevada foothills the following year, homeowners and their attorneys questioned whether PG&E had done enough to clear dry trees flanking its power lines. In 2016, Cal Fire ultimately found PG&E was responsible for that fire, after tree maintenance by PG&E and its contractors led to a tree falling on a power line.

Investigators have determined that PG&E equipment started several of the 2017 wildfires in Northern California wine country that killed 44 people. The company says it expects to pay more than \$2.5 billion.

11-15-2018

# Probe near Pulga wrapping up, DA says

**By Andre Byik  
and Steve Schoonover**

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**CHICO** » Fire investigators hoped to wrap up their probe of the Camp Fire ignition point near Pulga Wednesday, but it was not clear when a cause could be determined or if any criminal liability could arise, Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said.

Ramsey said his office was briefed on the fire investigation Wednesday morning, but he said he was not at liberty to release many details because of Cal Fire's ongoing investigation.

"The investigation is continuing," he said. "They're up there, still today (Wednesday), still doing their gathering and documenting and so forth."

The district attorney added that it was hoped the investigation of the fire scene near Pulga, where PG&E has said a power outage there preceded the first report of the Camp Fire by about 15 minutes, would "wrap up" Wednesday.

"Meaning all evidence and documentation from the aspect of Cal Fire will be complete," Ramsey said, adding that it was his understanding that officials with the state Public Utilities Commission were on the scene Wednesday monitoring the situation.

"PG&E," he said, "is cooperating with Cal Fire investigators,

supplying equipment and manpower that is needed."

According to firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group, downed PG&E power lines and high winds may have sparked the fire.

PG&E said Wednesday that an email received by the owner of the Town of Pulga concerning upcoming work on a power line in the area, referred to a different power line than that investigated in connection with the Camp Fire's start.

Spokesman Paul Moreno said the email sent Nov. 7 — the day before the Camp Fire erupted — to Betsy Ann Cowley came from contractors hired to work on a line that had already been de-energized.

Moreno also said PG&E's copies of the email contain no references to sparks. Cowley said the email she received said PG&E was "having problems with sparks," according to the Associated Press.

The district attorney said it was yet to be determined whether a PG&E transmission tower caused the Camp Fire, and there was no indication when Cal Fire could determine and announce a cause.

Ramsey said his office becomes involved in fire investigations any time a death

is involved. The Camp Fire has claimed at least 48 lives, and it is the deadliest wild-fire in state history.

"We are there in anticipation that if anything is referred to us in terms of a criminal case, that we're on top of it right now," the district attorney said. "And also supply legal advice."

Cal Fire has said the cause of the fire remained under investigation.

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CRIME

# Officers shoot, kill Berry Creek man

Suspect in 2014 double homicide was pursued by authorities through a Camp Fire evacuation zone

By **Andre Byik**

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**BUTTE VALLEY »** Law enforcement officers shot and killed a Berry Creek man following a pursuit Thursday in a Camp Fire evacuation zone, Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said.

The man, identified as 48-year-

old GD Hendrix, was a suspect in a 2014 double homicide investigation in Butte County, and he was wanted by the authorities after skipping on his parole in a separate matter, Ramsey said.

The district attorney said seven shooting officers were involved, including three officers from the Butte County Sheriff's Office, three officers from the Shasta

County Sheriff's Office and a California Department of Fish and Wildlife warden out of Shasta County.

The incident happened about 11 a.m. Thursday when a citizen in the Yankee Hill area contacted a sheriff's deputy, saying a "suspicious" man had been staying for several days in his car in



**Hendrix**

the parking lot for Yankee Hill Pines Hardware Store on Miller Flat Road, Ramsey said.

A Butte County sheriff's sergeant approached the man, Hendrix, determined he was a known wanted person, and called several other officers to the scene, he said. The responding law enforcement officers then tried to get Hendrix out of his car, yelling at him.

Hendrix, Ramsey said, instead backed his car toward officers before running his car forward and crashing into a civilian vehicle

in the parking lot. He then drove south on Highway 70 toward the Oroville area.

Hendrix allegedly yelled something to the effect of, "I'm not going back," during the encounter, Ramsey said.

Officers pursued Hendrix, reaching speeds up to 90 mph, and set up a spike strip in the area where Highway 70 intersects with Pentz Road, Ramsey said. Hendrix drove over the spike strip, which flattened his tires, and

**SHOOTING » PAGE 4**

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# Shooting

**FROM PAGE 1**

continued driving for about half a mile before coming to a stop.

A number of officers got behind Hendrix's car, again telling him to get out, the district attorney said. Hendrix got out of his car and allegedly refused to take his right hand out of his jacket.

A Sutter County police dog was released, and the man allegedly "rapidly advanced" toward the officers and the dog on foot, Ramsey said. Around the same time there was an indication that at least one officer saw the man allegedly throw something off to the side.

Ramsey later said Hendrix also had a "metallic object" in his hands and allegedly pointed it at officers.

That's when multiple officers began shooting at the man, Ramsey said. The police dog was wounded in the shooting and attacked by a large pit bull that emerged from the man's car. One of the officers shot the pit bull. Both the pit bull and police dog were killed in the shooting.

The man was shot at least twice, once in the torso area and once in the head, Ramsey said. The man died on the scene. The man did not shoot at officers. It was not clear whether the man had any weapons on him or what, if anything, he threw.

The Butte County Of-

ficer Involved Shooting/Critical Incident Protocol Team, which is overseen by Ramsey, will investigate the fatal police shooting.

Hendrix was a suspect in a double homicide in the Berry Creek area in December 2014, Ramsey said. In that case, according to reports previously published in this newspaper, Peter "Mike" Kroencke, 59, and his wife, Olga Kroencke, 56, were shot to death on Dec. 19, 2014, about a half-mile from Galen Ridge Road and Oro-Quincy Highway.

The Kroenckes were shot in their white SUV and discovered on Dec. 20 in an area between Hendrix's property and a Galen Ridge Road property owned by the Kroenckes, according

to the reports.

The authorities identified Hendrix as a person of interest and, on Dec. 29, 2014, searched his Galen Ridge Road home in connection with the case, according to the reports. Officers found an explosive device and firearms, and he was charged with drug and weapons violations.

Ramsey said Hendrix was released from prison on parole in May 2018. He went missing in July 2018, becoming a "parolee-at-large."

He had been seen occasionally but successfully avoided the authorities until his encounter with officers Thursday, Ramsey said.

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*Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.*

## CAMP FIRE

**Concow survivors are happy to be alive, but they need supplies****By Dan Reidel***dreidel@chicoer.com*  
*@danthephotog on Twitter*

**CONCOW »** “We’re living on a green postage stamp on a black envelope,” Fred Hugg said.

Hugg battled the flames from the Camp Fire with his neighbors Nov. 8, felling a tree to act as a fire break and using both his own hands and a John Deere tractor to push pine needles away from his home and into the blaze that was burning the house on the hill above him. In a spot that was too steep for the tractor, he used his hands to push the dry pine needles away from his home and suffered burns to his arms.

He and his wife, Sally Hugg, are happy to be alive, but say they need to be able to get out and resupply.

“I’ve got seven, maybe eight days of propane left,” Fred Hugg said Wednesday. “I don’t want a handout, I don’t need anything special from anybody. We just need to be able to get supplies in here for us.”

The Huggs and others in the area are rationing what they have. As they ration, they also share.

With no plumbers available to call, a leak in the kitchen turned into an emergency, and neighbor Jeff Evans came over Wednesday afternoon to help repair it. The two men fixed the leak while Sally Hugg shared photos of the area online.

“Some of the folks who lost their homes, I’m sending (photos) to them so that

they can get them to their insurance company, get the claims started right away,” she said. “And sharing a lot on Facebook because people can’t get back in. So they can see it.”

An antenna picks up the internet signal.

“We’ve got the rather nebulous Digital Path, God bless them,” she said. “It hasn’t been great most of the time; we lost it for a few days, but we got it back. It’s not much but we have it.”

The Huggs took in nearly 200 animals — about 100 chickens, 60 ducks, 20 goats, three pigs and four donkeys — and cared for them for five days. In their front yard Wednesday, just two horses and a donkey chewed on hay.

“We’ve been like donkey central here,” Sally Hugg said. “We had all our neighbors’ donkeys down here up until yesterday when a really great animal disaster rescue group from Eastern Washington came up with some trucks and trailers and they teamed up with the local Gridley FFA. Those kids were amazing.”

Fred Hugg wears a New York Yankees baseball cap with an “I voted” sticker affixed to the brim. He’s got hay and feed for the animals still on the property and plenty of water, but they still have needs, he said.

“At this point we are being kept in when we should be able to get out and get back and they should be able to put a number on us where we can get in and back out,” he said. “Right



DAN REIDEL — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Jeff Evans, left, gives his neighbor Fred Hugg a big hug after Hugg brought fresh veggies to Evans on Wednesday in Concow.

now we can’t because the forensics, they’ve got you guys in here driving around, I’ve got reporters driving around, I can’t get out to get the things I need and get back in.”

Down the street, Jeff Evans keeps an eye on the gasoline-powered generator. He’s been watching the fuel gauge on his pickup as well.

“The truck is down to a quarter tank,” he said.

Evans, a thin, smiling man, welcomes a firefighter onto his property and thanks the man profusely when he offers a five-gallon jug of gas.

Evans has 12 dogs stay-

ing with him, 10 he rescued, plus two of his own.

“It’s disconcerting to me. I had bad things to think about those folks the following morning, when we went down to see the devastation after we fought this fire. How could somebody leave their dogs?”

Like the Huggs, Evans has internet and shares photos on Facebook. He got responses when he posted photos of the half dozen dogs he pulled out of a pickup left on Concow Road.

A Cal Fire crew had rescued a group of people trying to get out of Concow. It was a small truck.

“They had no choice, they had no room, and they were told you can’t bring the dogs, we gotta get the people out,” Evans said. “So they were cramming people in like sardines.”

He’ll take more in as he finds them.

Evans owns his own pest control business and he can shift his schedule around to keep his bills paid. His mother and father live with him, both 91 years old, and Evans said his father helped battle the fire for hours without a break when it was threatening their home.

“He never took a break,” the younger Evans said. “I took breaks, but he never did.”

Evans attributed his house being saved to defensible space, but also said there was some luck involved.

“The flames were 40 feet away and the wind was blowing them right toward me,” he said. “The flames were horizontal, they were moving like that.”

Another neighbor’s home also survived, but many didn’t.

Fred Hugg said a family with young children lived on the hill above his house.

“When they first woke up they opened their door and looked out their window and took the two kids. They climbed in their vehicle and left because the flames were at the door.

“At that point they opened the cages for the animals so they could get out.”

Much of Concow now looks like Paradise. It’s a smaller community, the last

census lists a population of 710, but many homes were wiped out.

“When it started at 6:30 (a.m.) it was here at 10 minutes after 7,” he said. “And it blew through here just like a blowtorch.”

They hope their community will return.

“We’ve been here since 1996, and this is a wonderful community,” Sally Hugg said. “It’s really sad to see it torn to pieces like this.

“A lot of people will never come back. I’m hoping people have the courage to come back and restart their lives again. They lost a lot.”

A few hours after Evans had helped the Huggs out in the kitchen, Fred Hugg stopped by with a bag of fresh tomatoes and a head of lettuce.

They both showed empathy for those who aren’t as fortunate.

“I understand them wanting to keep people out, but when they come in they need to escort them in in groups, show them their property,” Fred Hugg said. “They won’t be able to live there, and my heart goes out to them, but they at least can get some closure, see what happened there. And it is horrific, it’s way worse than ’08 and Paradise — I have a lot of lovely friends there, the biggest thing is people forget about us.”

He and Evans both wondered why — if law enforcement could set up roadblocks — couldn’t they check people in and out?

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Contact reporter Dan Reidel at 530-896-7761.

## CAMP FIRE

# Probe leads to possible 2nd origin away from Pulga

**By Andre Byik and Dan Reidel**

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**CONCOW »** Cal Fire announced Thursday that investigators have identified a possible second ignition point for the Camp Fire.

The announcement came after this newspaper reported Thursday that a roadblock manned by security guards Wednesday outside Concow was related to Cal Fire's investigation into where and how the Camp Fire started.

Cal Fire-Butte County Chief Darren Read said investigators have identified a "possible second origin" for the fire. He did not release any additional information regarding the second origin point, saying the fire remained under investigation.

A cause has not been released.

The roadblock Wednesday outside Concow was on Concow Road somewhere between Mountain Pine Lane and Rim Road. Read said Cal Fire is conducting a thorough investigation into fire, and

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the probe has led investigations in multiple directions.

The roadblock was, as the crow flies, several miles away on a ridge far above the Camp Fire's first reported origin near Pulga "under the high-tension power lines" across the Feather River from Poe Dam, according to firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group.

PG&E's president, Geisha Williams, previously told E-R reporter Laura Urseny that there was a power outage about 15 minutes before the Camp Fire was first reported, and a later aerial patrol observed damage in the area



DAN REIDEL — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

A roadblock was set up on Concow Road near Rim Road on Wednesday in Concow.

of transmission lines.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said Wednesday that PG&E is cooperating with fire investigators, but it was not clear whether the utility's transmission

tower caused the fire.

Ramsey said fire investigators hoped to wrap up their investigation Wednesday of the initially reported Camp Fire ignition point near Pulga. The District Attorney's Office was involved "in anticipation that if anything is referred to us in terms of a criminal case, that we're

on top of it right now."

The camp fire has claimed at least 63 lives and has destroyed 9,700 homes. It is the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in state history.

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*Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760 and Dan Reidel at 530-896-7761.*

**CAMP FIRE**

# TRUMP TO VISIT AREA OF CALIFORNIA'S WORST FIRE



LIPO CHING — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Aerial footage shows homes destroyed by the Camp Fire near the Paradise Plaza off Clark Road in Paradise on Thursday.

## Staff reports

One week after the Camp Fire started, the White House announced that President Donald Trump will visit California fire victims on Saturday. The president will be landing at Beale Air Force Base near Marysville.

Plans are still being made, the White House also said.

Firefighters continued to gain control of the blaze and better quantify the staggering toll, as the number of deaths and structures burned climbs every day.

As of Thursday night, 63 people had died and 631 people were unaccounted for, Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea

said. Seven additional remains were located. Three were found in Magalia, three in Paradise and one in Concow. Fifty-three of the victims have been tentatively identified, but DNA confirmation on the burned bodies was being sought.

The number of victims is updated each night after difficult days of searching in Paradise

and surrounding communities, with workers and dogs trained to detect human remains.

Honea said the large increase in people reported missing Thursday was the result of his staff going back and updating records generated during the “most intense” portion of the fire.

Cal Fire investigators also identified a possible second origin of the fire in the Concow area, officials announced at a

Thursday night briefing.

No other information about what caused the fire was released.

The fire was reported at 141,000 acres with 40 percent containment. Cal Fire expects full containment in two weeks. There’s an enormous perimeter partially surrounding the fire. The fire was expanding the perimeter on its eastern side, including near one of the suspected ignition points near Camp Creek Road off Highway 70 in Pulga.

With 9,700 homes and 290 commercial buildings destroyed, the Camp Fire is the deadliest and most destructive in terms of structures burned in state history, by far.

The California Highway Patrol said it has recovered 165 vehicles in the fire.

Widespread evacuation orders were still in effect for more than 50,000 people in Paradise, Magalia, Butte Creek Canyon, Butte Valley, Concow and elsewhere.



DOUG DURAN — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Vehicles sit next to a destroyed home in Magalia.



Highway 32 to Highway 36 has reopened.

Evacuation orders have been reduced to warnings in the north Little Chico Creek area. The area north of Ten Mile House Road is open to Forest Ranch Road. Doe Mill Road south at Village Drive is closed. Santos Ranch Road, Wilder Drive and Autumn Lane will remain closed.

The evacuation order in the Humbug area has been lifted. Doe Mill Road is open east to Powellton Road.

In Forest Ranch, the evacuation warning has been lifted. Forest Ranch Road north to Highway 36 is open.

Evacuation centers are full in Oroville, Orland and at Neighborhood Church in Chico. Centers still accepting evacuees are at Bidwell Junior High School in Chico, Butte County Fairgrounds in Gridley, Yuba-Sutter Fairground in Yuba City and Plumas County Fairgrounds in Quincy.

Officials said they don't expect the stagnant smokey air to go away, but improved air could be possible by Sunday.



DAN REIDEL — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Deer visit the aftermath of the Camp Fire in Concow on Wednesday.

Cal Fire says 5,473 people are fighting the fire. Federal Emergency Management Agency officials arrived in Butte County on Wednesday to start the process of helping evacuees who have lost homes.

A disaster recovery center will open Friday in the former Sears store in the Chico Mall to connect evacuees with the resources for rebuilding.

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### Hot shot



DAN REIDEL — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

**Watering animals:** Butte County Probation Officer Deputy Lucas Russell pours water into a makeshift dish for farm animals that survived the Camp Fire in Concow on Wednesday.

INVESTIGATION

# The mystery Camp Fire ‘second start’: Was it captured on firewatch camera?

By Matthias Gafni

Bay Area News Group

**CONCOW** » Firefighter radio transmissions indicate that a possible “second start” of the Camp Fire was caught on a firewatch camera near Concow Reservoir, about a half-hour after the first flames were reported about five miles northeast near Poe Dam and Pulga.

At 7:04 a.m. Nov. 8, a fire dispatcher rerouted a couple of fire crews to a “possible second fire” on Rim Road, just east of Concow Reservoir. Satellite images indicate that Rim Road crisscrosses underneath several PG&E high-tension lines in that vicinity. There are no obvious radio discussions indicating what may have sparked that second fire, in a review of archived radio chatter.

Minutes later a fire-

fighter described the initial blaze as having grown to about 300 acres with a rapid rate of spread and heading toward Concow Reservoir. Firefighters responding to the second ignition alerted other crews to “two little kids walking the road” along the lower portion of Rim Road, also called Andy Mountain Road, near Jarbo Gap on Highway 70.

On Thursday, the Chico Enterprise-Record reported that security guards had set up a roadblock the day before outside Concow. Later, Cal Fire-Butte County Chief Darren Read confirmed that investigators have identified a “possible second origin” for the fire. He did not release any additional information regarding the second origin point, saying the fire remained under investigation.

Cal Fire spokesman Scott McLean also declined to elaborate Friday.

“Our investigators, Cal Fire, have identified a possible second origin for the Camp Fire,” he said. “The fire remains under investigation, and no further details will be released at this time.”

No cause has been determined for the Camp Fire, according to Cal Fire. In addition to the first radio reports of a downed power line near Poe Dam where the first ignition began, PG&E reported to state regulators that minutes before the fire was reported, a transmission line had a malfunction in the area of the dam.

It’s unclear which firewatch camera possibly captured the second ignition. However in 2014, PG&E announced it funded \$2 million to install 28 remote

fire sensing cameras on “some of the most important lookout towers” in four counties, including Butte.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said Wednesday that PG&E is cooperating with fire investigators, but it was not clear whether the utility’s transmission tower caused the fire.

The District Attorney’s Office was involved “in anticipation that if anything is referred to us in terms of a criminal case, that we’re on top of it right now,” Ramsey said.

The Camp Fire has claimed at least 71 lives and has destroyed more than 9,800 homes. It is the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in state history.

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*Chico Enterprise-Record staff writers Andre Byik and Dan Reidel contributed to this report.*

**LEGAL ACTION**

# Suit filed against PG&E over Camp Fire

**By Andre Byik**

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**CHICO** » Retired Chico Police Chief Kirk Trostle and his wife, Patricia Garrison, a retired elementary school principal, have filed a lawsuit against Pacific Gas and Electric Company over the deadly Camp Fire.

The fire destroyed the couple's home in the southern edge of the town of Paradise. They are alleging the utility's negligent operation and maintenance of its power lines caused the Camp Fire, which has become the state's deadliest and most destructive wildfire ever.

The suit, which names as defendants PG&E Corporation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company and unnamed defendants, was filed Friday in Butte County Superior Court.

Trostle, during an interview Thursday at a restaurant in Chico, said PG&E knew its power lines were faulty and displayed "deliberate indifference" to the problem. The utility, he said, needs to be held accountable for its actions.

"No community should have to go through this again," Trostle said.

Cal Fire has not released a cause of the fire, saying its investigation remains ongoing. PG&E has told this newspaper that the cause of the fire is unknown, but it did experience a power outage about 15 minutes before the fire was reported near Pulga.

According to firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group, firefighters

were sent about 6:33 a.m. Nov. 8 to a vegetation fire "under the high-tension power lines" across the Feather River from Poe Dam.

PG&E has said it later observed by aerial patrol damage to a transmission tower about a mile northeast of Pulga, in the area of the Camp Fire.

Asked for comment about the lawsuit, PG&E spokesman Paul Doherty issued a written statement.

"The safety of our customers and the communities we serve is our highest priority. It's important to remember that the cause has yet to be determined," it said. "We are aware of lawsuits regarding the Camp Fire. Right now, our primary focus is on supporting the communities and assisting first responders as they work to contain the fire. We are also getting our crews positioned and ready to respond when we get access, so that we can safely restore gas and electricity to our customers."

Trostle, 54, a Chico State University graduate whose law enforcement career included stints as the chief of police in Chico and Oroville, said PG&E should have known its policies and/or its failure to properly follow policies already in place could have led to a fire like the one that ravaged Paradise and surrounding communities.

According to the complaint, PG&E "repeatedly notified customers in various areas of Butte County, including Paradise, that PG&E was considering and may de-energize power

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lines on November 8, but PG&E failed to de-energize the lines despite the extreme fire risk.”

The complaint further alleges that a “witness states she contacted PG&E over a period of two years before the fire about sparks falling from the lines. The day before the fire started, she received an email from PG&E to the effect PG&E would be coming out to make repairs. That never happened.”

Trostle said the utility has shown a pattern of conduct of knowing a problem exists and failing to correct it, leading to the “horrific” deaths of dozens of people.

The retired police chief said he is pursuing legal action to hold to account PG&E and its employees in charge of creating and enforcing policies, in addition to compelling the utility to change or update its policies and procedures if needed.

Michael S. Feinberg, legal counsel to Trostle and Garrison, said PG&E — under red flag warning conditions — failed to properly respond to property owner complaints and internal information regarding a high-voltage transmission line that was “faulting and generating sparks” and capable of destroying Paradise and killing many residents.

“In addition,” Feinberg said, “PG&E lulled the community into a false sense of comfort and security by advising as early as three days prior to the fire that they would be shutting down their electrical system during the red flag conditions so that their power lines would not ignite a fire, and yet never followed through with the promise action of shutting off the flow of electricity

under classic conditions for that action.”

Garrison, who recently retired as principal of Stanford Avenue Elementary School in Oroville, said a primary objective of her occupation was ensuring the safety of her school, students and staff.

“When safety is your objective,” she said, “it’s possible to create policies ... to make sure the public is safe.”

Trostle and Garrison were out of town at the time the Camp Fire erupted and forced more than 50,000 residents to flee their homes along jammed roadways. At least 71 people died in the fire, some found burned in vehicles.

But while they were safe from the flames, their family, including adult children in their 30s, with families of their own, were in the fire’s path.

It was an “incredible feeling of helplessness,” Trostle said. Garrison added that she was receiving updates through her phone from her daughter, who described the town of Paradise becoming engulfed in flames and fireballs running in the roadways.

Trostle and Garrison said 25 members of their immediate and extended family survived but lost their homes and had their properties burned. The couple’s home was flattened by fire as well, and Trostle said two of their cats, Stella and Sterling, remained missing.

The town of Paradise and its community went through a “hellfire,” Trostle said, and PG&E cannot defer it or ignore it.

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*Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.*

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# Los Angeles Times

CALIFORNIA

## California fires: The tiny community of Concow was hit hard by the Camp fire. Residents hope they're not forgotten



Megan Butler, 26, and her daughters Aurora, 2, and Novalei, 5, (not shown) are home after their house burned down in Concow, Calif. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

“It feels like we are being ignored. Completely ignored,” said Megan Butler, 26, of Concow. “Maybe it’s just a lot of confused people or maybe because we’re so close to Paradise that they consider it all the same.”

“But it’s Concow. It’s my home.”

[LIVE UPDATES: Latest on the California fires »](#)

The death toll has risen every day since the fire broke out Nov. 8 near Camp Creek Road in Butte County. As of Saturday, authorities had confirmed 71 deaths. Of those, eight bodies have been found in Concow — three in homes, three outdoors, two in vehicles.

Among those the Butte County Sheriff’s Office has identified as dead is 48-year-old [Jesus Fernandez](#) of Concow. A family friend wrote that he was a loving father and “tireless provider.”

A drive through Concow — which is named after the Konkow Maidu American Indians — now is a journey through an ashen hellscape. The top portions of power poles that burned from the bottom are still attached to electrical wires and hang over the roads. Smoke rises from the ground. Charred vehicles are marked with spray-painted Xs to show that they’ve been checked for the dead.

Nothing is left of the dozens of houses in the Camelot subdivision, a gated community where people lived closer together.

By HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS, DAKOTA SMITH

NOV. 17, 2018 | 4 AM

Reporting from Concow, Calif. — It’s easy to drive right past Concow on Highway 70 here in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

Some 700 or so people live on dirt and gravel roads that snake deep into a forest of pine. Many have been here for generations. There are artists and retirees, veterans, loggers and marijuana growers. There are people living off the grid and others who just couldn’t resist the fishing in scenic Concow Reservoir and the friendly, if far off, neighbors.

The Camp fire burned most of Concow’s homes to the ground.

Much attention has been paid to Paradise, the much larger nearby town of 27,000 people, where the fire destroyed thousands of homes and killed dozens of people. But in the midst of an enormous disaster, tiny Concow hopes it’s remembered.

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The grassy campground at Concow Reservoir that regularly hosts music, arts and ancestral festivals is now a ghostly site. This week, a pair of chairs was neatly arranged around a fire pit, but only their frames remained.



The remains of a vehicle at the campgrounds near Concow Reservoir after the Camp fire swept through the area. (Kent Nishimura / Los Angeles Times)

The good news is that the only store in town, Canyon Lakes Market, a local institution called the Dome because of its large round roof, is still standing.

So, too, is Concow Elementary School, which was untouched by flames while everything around it is charred. A wall surrounding the campus is covered in the painted murals of elementary classes. One, from 2008 — the year another fire tore through Concow — depicts an eagle and flames and the words “Memories That Burn On Forever.”

Capt. John Gaddie, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman, said the Camp fire was the fourth blaze he had worked on in the area since 1999. He was driving last week along the back roads, using a tablet computer to map properties that were damaged.

“It’s pretty bad,” he said. “It’s the worst I’ve seen.”

“But the thing about this community is they’re really resilient,” he added. “They will come back.”

Some families have been here for decades, he said, passing down property from one generation to another.

Butte County Supervisor Bill Connelly, who represents Concow and pushed for federal funding for residents to rebuild after the 2008 fire, said residents feel overlooked in light of the fire’s devastation in Paradise and nearby Magalia, a town of 11,000 people.

“Those are huge tragedies,” Connelly said in an interview. “Not to take away from that,” but Concow residents “are upset and feel left out.”

At a town hall meeting this week in Oroville, a woman angrily asked fire officials why Concow wasn’t being discussed more at public gatherings and in the media.

“I mean, they got destroyed just as bad as Paradise,” she said. Were people overlooking the community “just ‘cause it’s all hillbillies and stuff and trailers and not, like, retirement people?”

Tony Karsten and his wife, Willow, lived off a bend of Hog Ranch Road, a dirt road. They loved the seclusion, living behind a gate with a “Keep Out” sign.

A black bear sometimes traipsed through their yard at night and poked around their outdoor ice box, said Willow, 53. She kept an herb garden with rosemary and sage, and the couple got their eggs from a man they called Chicken Bob because he had so many chickens.

“It’s a hippie community living off the land,” Tony said.

Tony, 46, who is on disability, said there are so many people in Concow named Tony that he adopted the moniker “Hillbilly Tony” to differentiate himself.

As the flames erupted, the Karstens fled the mountain in their 1989 Oldsmobile, hearing the explosion of propane tanks all around them. Two of their five dogs are gone. Now, they’re staying in an Oroville hotel, waiting to figure out what’s next.

On their property this week, flames still licked at a charred tree stump in the driveway. The recreational vehicle they lived in had been reduced to its metal frame.

Next door, the house of Matt and Donna Montgomery was a crumpled pile of blackened debris. Nearby was a floor mat that read, “Wipe your paws.”

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Matt Montgomery, 59, said he served in the military in Afghanistan and has post-traumatic stress disorder.

“That’s why I live up here, because it’s calmer and there’s not a lot of people around,” he said.

[For California fire victims, it will be a long, tough road to rebuild »](#)

The 2008 fire burned their home, too, he said. They rebuilt, and there was one silver lining: “We had wildflowers that we never had before,” Donna Montgomery said.

Butte County Treasurer-Tax Collector Peggy Moak also lives in Concow, on 50 acres of land with goats and cattle. As the fire leveled the community, she used a hose to water fields and bushes on the perimeter of her property to protect her house and other homes.

She helped care for a 90-year-old man who survived the flames by wading into Concow Reservoir, she said. He was brought to her house, where he was given new clothes and stayed the night.

Moak described Concow as a “a close-knit community, especially after the 2008 fire when we all pulled together.”

Megan Butler lived with her husband and two young daughters in a two-bedroom modular house with a wraparound deck on Big Bend Road. They had just built a huge chicken coop.



Smoke from the Camp fire obscures the view of Highway 70 near Concow. (Kent Nishimura / Los Angeles Times)

On Nov. 8, Butler took her 5-year-old daughter, Novalei, to Concow Elementary. When she got there, the school had no power and staff told her it was being evacuated.

She rushed home and packed. Novalei grabbed clothes. Two-year-old Aurora put baby dolls in trash bags. They drove out as fast as they could.

The next day, she managed to visit her destroyed house. Parts of it were still aflame.

Butler’s mom and grandmother both went to Concow Elementary, and her grandmother’s house has been a constant in her life.

“I don’t think I’m going to get to go back to Concow,” said Butler, who is staying with family in Oroville. “There’s nothing up there for me right now.”

She paused and took a breath.

“This is really starting to upset me.... My grandma’s has been there my entire life. Right there. All my dogs are buried there. It’s everything. My kids had rooms there. It just really sucks.”

Butler said she and her husband disagree over whether to rebuild. He wants to. She doesn’t.

Novalei, she said, has been crying for days. She wants to go home.



# Why didn't PG&E shut down power before Camp Fire? Here's the data

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-19-2018

By Matthias Gafni

Bay Area News Group

**PARADISE** » On Nov. 8, two hours before the deadly Camp Fire erupted, a weather station at Jarbo Gap recorded sustained winds of 32 mph blowing through the valleys east of Paradise, with gusts of up to 52 mph. A Red Flag Warning was in effect, humidity had dipped to 22 percent, and the rural communities hadn't seen significant rain since April.

Nearly all of PG&E's fire danger thresholds had been met — such as wind speeds and the fire-alert declaration — to warrant a preemptive shut down of power for the second time in the utility's history. But, despite 48 hours of warnings to residents in Butte and eight other counties that power could be interrupted Thursday morning, PG&E decided to keep the electricity flowing.

The decision has led critics to ask why and state regulators to investigate whether PG&E acted appropriately.

"We don't discuss details of ongoing investigations, but our investigations include assessment of operator decisions, such as (whether) to proactively shut-off power," said Terrie Prosper, spokeswoman for the California Public Utilities Commission.

In a tweet at 3:14 p.m. Nov. 8, almost nine hours after the Camp Fire roared to life, PG&E announced it would not conduct a Public Safety Power Shutoff anywhere "as weather conditions did not warrant this safety measure."

PG&E spokeswoman Mayra Tostado further clarified the company's decision this week. She said the Camp Fire did not start in an area where they had alerted customers of a possible interruption in power last week. The utility, at the time, said the possible shut down would impact about 26,500 cus-

tomers in portions of Butte County, including the cities and towns of Berry Creek, Chico, Forest Ranch, Magalia, Oroville and Paradise. Cal Fire pinpointed the fire's origin near Poe Dam, just north of the tiny resort town of Pulga. It also is investigating whether a second fire was subsequently ignited near Concow.

"The forecasted conditions didn't meet the criteria to initiate a Public Safety Power Shutoff in those areas," Tostado said. "It is used under specific extreme weather conditions to further reduce the risk of wildfires and is not deployed as a response to an active fire."

The day after the Camp Fire started, PG&E reported to state regulators that a transmission line malfunctioned near the origin of the fire. The blaze quickly turned Paradise and other nearby towns to ash and killed scores of people, making it the deadliest and most destructive fire in California history. No official cause has been determined, but Cal Fire has said it is investigating electrical infrastructure.

Since last year's deadly North Bay fires, PG&E has beefed up its weather tracking capabilities and set up protocols to conduct Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the event of extreme fire weather danger, similar to what Southern California utilities have done for years.

The company did shut off power for the first time in its history last month, ahead of forecasted heavy winds and dry conditions. PG&E received blowback from customers complaining about spoiled food, shutdowns in areas with milder weather and other inconveniences. However, in a required de-energization report sent to the California Public Utilities Commission to justify the service interruption, PG&E explained that before restoring power to its lines, it found significant wind-related damage to infrastructure, any one of which

could have sparked a fire had the power been on.

The utility was poised to take action again. On Tuesday, Nov. 6, with a forecast of high winds and low humidity expected two days later, PG&E alerted the public that, as a precautionary measure, power might be interrupted in certain Northern California counties, including Butte County.

Over the next 48 hours, the utility tweeted out 17 different warnings of an impending Nov. 8 morning shut-off. It even tweeted out a warning at 7:56 a.m. Thursday, more than an hour after the Camp Fire was reported, that the power interruption was still an option, before calling it off at 3 p.m. that afternoon, hours after the Camp Fire swept through Paradise.

PG&E calls the shutdowns a "last resort," and its policy says no single factor drives the decision-making process. But many of the company's criteria appear to have been met by Thursday morning. Those criteria include a Red Flag Warning declaration, humidity levels "generally 20 percent and below," sustained winds of more than 25 mph with gusts above 45 mph, and extremely dry conditions.

Roy Montgomery, a wildland fire consultant in Oregon, said PG&E's standards seem sound, but he stressed wind speeds are most important.

"High wind speeds need to carry the heaviest weight since overhead power lines are vulnerable to the influence of extreme winds," he said. "Shutting down the power grid is a complex issue."

At 5 a.m. Nov. 8, about 90 minutes before the fire, sustained winds had reached 30 mph, according to the Jarbo Gap weather station, with gusts reaching 51 mph. The humidity was 23 percent, which would drop to as low as 11 percent in the coming hours.

Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.

## CAMP FIRE

# Firefighter's pickup stolen from fire station, DA says

By Andre Byik

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**OROVILLE** » Two men have been accused of stealing a firefighter's pickup from the Cal Fire station at Jarbo Gap while the firefighter was out responding to the Camp Fire.

The men, William Erlbacher, 39, and Robert DePalma, 59, both of Concow, have been charged with vehicle theft in connection with the alleged theft that happened Nov. 8, the day the Camp Fire erupted.

Erlbacher faces an additional charge of first-degree burglary, because it's alleged he broke into the fire station and swiped the key to the pickup from a bunk area inside, Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said.

Erlbacher and DePalma appeared Monday in Butte County Superior Court for arraignment proceedings but did not immediately enter pleas, according to online court records. They are scheduled to return to court Tuesday.

The charges against the men stem from an episode that began Nov. 8, Ramsey said. A firefighter was called in to respond to the Camp Fire and drove his Ford F-250 to Cal Fire Station 36 at Jarbo Gap.

The firefighter left his key in a nightstand next to a bunk and departed the station on a fire engine, Ramsey said. Later the same day the firefighter returned, and firefighters noticed things amiss, including melting ice cream, food taken out of a refrigerator and cash missing from another firefighter's wallet.



DePalma

Erlbacher

A review of camera evidence revealed the firefighter's truck left the station about 3:30 p.m. Nov. 8, Ramsey said. It was later reported seen near the Safeway on East Avenue in Chico.

On Friday, Cal Fire law enforcement arrested Erlbacher and DePalma on suspicion of their alleged roles in the incident, Cal Fire said. Ramsey said the firefighter's pickup was found parked near the side of a house on Cactus Avenue.

It was noted that the truck, while parked between Nov. 8th and Friday, had its back window covered and rear license plate covered with a board, Ramsey said.

The suspects allegedly indicated they had fled the fire in the truck and drove to Chico, the district attorney said. But he added that it not appear the suspects had a plan to return the pickup.

Ramsey said the truck was found eight days after it had been taken from the fire station, and its back window and license plate continued to be covered when it was parked.

A Cal Fire news release said the men's bail was set at \$250,000 each.

Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-20-2018

# Transmission line eyed in Camp Fire had collapsed during a storm in 2012

By Matthias Gafni  
Bay Area News Group

**PULGA** » In December 2012, a fierce winter storm toppled five steel towers that support the same PG&E transmission line that malfunctioned minutes before the Camp Fire roared to life.

Six years later, the 115,000-volt Caribou-Palermo transmission line near Poe Dam and the tiny resort town of Pulga is again under the microscope. PG&E reported damage to it around 6:15 a.m. Nov. 8, about 15 minutes before flames were first reported under the high-tension wires, according to a regulatory filing and firefighter radio traffic. Another transmission line in nearby Concow also malfunctioned a half hour later, possibly sparking a second fire.

The problems underscore the utility's struggles to maintain and safely operate equipment that serves residents living in the rural towns that dot the Feather River Canyon, where every morning cold air from the Sierras rushes down the valley walls to create treacherous winds. Downed trees and power outages are so common in the Yankee Hill and Concow communities that residents often keep chainsaws in their vehicles and generators gassed up — just in case.

PG&E paid settlements from fires in September 2001 and October 2017 from trees or vegetation coming into contact with power lines.

Back in December 2012, a series of wet winter storms, with winds at times reaching 55 mph, drenched the Feather River canyon, knocking over the Caribou-Palermo transmission towers.

Little is known about the incident. PG&E and the California Public Utilities Commission did not provide specifics.

"We appreciate the interest in the details associated with these incidents, but we are not able to share more information beyond what is included in the reports we've filed," said PG&E spokeswoman Lynsey Paulo.

But some details appear in a July 16, 2013, letter to the California Public Utilities Commission from then-Vice President of Regulatory Relations Brian Cherry. He wrote about the planned fix: "To repair



Water drops are made on the fire line burning around PG&E transmission towers on Nov. 12 east of Pulga. The deadly Camp Fire was first reported burning a few miles west up Highway 70.

damage caused by a winter storm event, PG&E proposes to replace six consecutive lattice-steel towers with new towers on the Caribou-Palermo 115 Kilo-volt (kV) Power Line," he wrote. "Spanning the Plumas-Butte County border, the repair segment is located up slope and west of Highway 70 and generally parallel to the unpaved Pulga Road in a remote area of the Feather River Canyon within Plumas National Forest."

The construction project, which is in the direct vicinity of the first reported transmission line problem the morning of the Camp Fire, was scheduled for completion by the end of 2013 but wasn't finished until 2016, according to PG&E.

Attorney Frank Pitre, who is co-counsel representing more than 600 clients suing PG&E over last year's North Bay fires, said an independent audit of the 2012 incident and the condition of the towers needs to be done.

"The cause or causes of the five transmission towers that collapsed in 2012 along this line must be thoroughly investigated, to determine if any of the same causes are associated with the

malfunctions reported before the Camp Fire started," Pitre said. "If so, then the multibillion-dollar question for PG&E to answer will be: 'What did they do to assure themselves that other towers and equipment along the same line were safe for continued operation during high wind conditions?'"

In his explanation of the 2012 project, Cherry cited the "extreme topography" surrounding the transmission lines, adding that the utility used wood poles to temporarily restore service back then. Transmission lines carry high voltage between steel towers, while distribution lines are smaller and send electricity to individual customers often by wooden poles.

Wind also played a role a decade earlier, when a downed PG&E line nearly threatened Paradise and the surrounding community.

On Sept. 6, 2001, heavy winds near Poe Powerhouse, south of Poe Dam, knocked over a dead 100-foot-tall Ponderosa pine that crashed into three backup power lines running into the PG&E hydroelectric facility there, sparking a fire. Multiple fires converged into what

would become known as the Poe Fire, quickly gobbling up more than 1,000 acres in the Big Bend and Yankee Hill communities southeast of Paradise. The winds died down, slowing the blaze, but early morning winds the next day topping 30 mph and a humidity at less than 7 percent stoked the fire a second time.

Firefighters made contingency plans in case the fire jumped Lake Oroville toward Paradise. It became so dangerous that fire officials nearly evacuated themselves from their staging area, according to reports at the time.

The Poe Fire burned 8,333 acres and caused more than \$6 million in damage, destroying 40 homes, 152 outbuildings and 146 vehicles. Fifteen people were injured, including four firefighters.

In 2006, PG&E reached a \$5.9 million settlement with 122 residents who sued the utility and some of its contractors. PG&E admitted no wrongdoing in the agreement.

Chico attorney Ken Roye represented the homeowners and said PG&E attempted to blame an arsonist but had failed to remove the large dead tree that was within 40 feet of its equipment.

"It's always the same story," Roye said in a phone interview Monday. "I've been fighting these bastards for over 30 years."

"Here's the deal. PG&E needs to be dismantled and whoever's responsible needs to do some time," he said.

Last month, Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey reached a \$1.5 million settlement with PG&E in connection with three wildfires sparked in October 2017 by vegetation hitting distribution lines. The money was to go toward a four-year Butte County program — Enhanced Fire Prevention and Communications Program — to keep vegetation away from power lines and reduce wildfires by hiring four defensible space inspectors.

One of the blazes, the Honey Fire, burned about 150 acres and threatened the town of Paradise. Those fires were again sparked late in the fire season during an "extreme wind event," the DA's office said.

Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-20-2018

# Footage of shooting released

By Andre Bytk  
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**OROVILLE** — The Butte County District Attorney's Office on Tuesday released dashboard camera video of the fatal police shooting of a man Thursday in a Camp Fire evacuation zone.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said he believes the video clearly shows the moments before multiple law enforcement officers opened fire on 48-year-old GD Hendrix of Berry Creek.

Hendrix, who had been sought since around June for parole violations and was a "prime suspect" in a double homicide investigation in Butte County, allegedly pointed a "metallic object" toward officers following a high-speed chase along Highway 70 that started in the Concow area and ended near Butte Valley, Ramsey said.

Hendrix was struck at least twice, once in the torso area and once in the head, the district attorney said. He died on the scene. A Sutter County Sheriff's Office police dog, Bandit, also was killed by gunfire. A pit bull associated with Hendrix also was shot dead.

Ramsey said officers recovered a steel pipe that Hendrix allegedly raised toward officers, imitating an "armed attack on officers," before officers shot him. No firearms were found on Hendrix or in his car. Several folding and fixed-blade knives were found on Hendrix after he was shot.

The district attorney also released a photo of the steel pipe Tuesday.

Ramsey said it appeared Hendrix "may have committed what is referred colloquially to as 'suicide by cop.'"

The video, which is nearly two minutes long, shows officers stopped behind Hendrix's car, yelling at him multiple times to show and raise



Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said GD Hendrix allegedly raised this six-inch steel pipe toward officers before he was fatally shot Thursday along Highway 70 near Butte Valley.

CONTRIBUTED

his hands in the air. Seconds before he is shot, Hendrix appears to open his driver's side door and emerges from the vehicle, turning suddenly and extending his arms in the air with his hands clasped together.

The Butte County Officer Involved Shooting/Critical Incident Protocol Team, which is overseen by Ramsey, is investigating the shooting. The district attorney said he decided to release partial video of the incident for several reasons, including transparency, the clarity of the video's depiction of what happened and the public's interest in the case.

He said the final results of the investigation will take some time.

Hendrix was well known to local law enforcement. He was a person of interest in the December 2014 slayings of Plumas County residents Peter "Mike" Kroencke, 59, and his wife, Olga Kroencke, 56.



Hendrix

The Kroenckes were found shot to death in their SUV Dec. 20, 2014, between property they owned on the 400 block of Galen Ridge Road and Hendrix's residence in the 300 block of Galen Ridge Road, according to a Chico Enterprise-Record article published in January 2015.

Hendrix and the Kroenckes reportedly knew each other.

A search warrant served at Hendrix's home at the time uncovered a shotgun, handgun and a pipe bomb, Ramsey said. Hendrix was later arrested Jan. 6, 2015, at the Canyon Creek Roadhouse store in Berry Creek.

At the store Hendrix was found armed with an AK-47-type rifle, a .223 pistol, a .22 revolver, a dagger and brass knuckles, the district attorney said. Hendrix ultimately pleaded no contest in March 2016 to felony counts of possession of a destructive device and possession of a methamphetamine while armed.

Superior Court Judge James Reilley sentenced Hendrix to seven years, four months in state prison, according to court transcripts. At his sentencing Nov. 9, 2016, deputy district attorney Leah Payne said Hendrix was not "initially cooperative" when deputies tried to arrest him at the store.

"It could have gone much, much messier than it did,"

Payne said, according to the transcripts. "And, in fact, he made the comment when they arrested him that they should have just shot him. He was reaching in his jacket ... where loaded firearms and illegal assault weapons were found. He is a public safety risk."

But while Hendrix was identified a person of interest in the killings of the Kroenckes, he was not, and never has been, directly charged in their deaths.

Ramsey, who called Hendrix a suspect in the double homicide investigation after he was fatally shot by law enforcement, said Monday that his office had been in discussions with the Sheriff's Office about the case but it never reached his office "on a request for a complaint."

The district attorney said while Hendrix was strongly suspected in the deaths of the Kroenckes, the evidence against Hendrix never rose to a level beyond a reasonable doubt.

About a year ago, he said, it was pointed out that investigators needed additional forensic evidence. The Sheriff's Office was pursuing that evidence, as well as eliminating potential defenses that could emerge, up until the day Hendrix was killed.

Ramsey said investigators obtained "stronger evidence" in the case but were still "methodically" eliminating potential "excuses" Hendrix could have come up with.

A part of the ongoing forensic work, the district attorney said, was linked to a shotgun believed used in the killings. The shotgun had potential glass inside it that may have come from glass blown out from the Kroenckes' SUV.

The Kroenckes were shot through the windows of their vehicle, Ramsey said. Investigators were eliminating other potential sources for the glass.

The district attorney added that once the Sheriff's Office had completed its investigation, it would have "most likely" led to Hendrix being charged.

A call to a sheriff's investigator Monday regarding the status of the homicide investigation was not returned.

Before Hendrix was sentenced in 2016 on weapons and drug violations, he submitted a letter to the court expressing remorse for his actions. In the letter, he appeared to make reference to the Kroenckes' deaths.

"I lived in a remote somewhat primitive (sic) property," Hendrix started his letter. "My neighbors were fatally (sic) injured. I have always been concerned about my safety in the area where I lived. When I learned of the incident I became frightened and I understand now that I became obsessed by my fear

and made drastic choices to attempt to protect myself from an unknown threat."

Hendrix said he believed his guns would make him feel "safer and less vulnerable."

Hendrix was released from prison on parole in May, but he went missing in June after cutting off his ankle monitor. He had been sought since, becoming a "parolee at large," Ramsey said at a news conference Thursday.

He surfaced Thursday morning, when a sheriff's deputy on patrol was contacted by a citizen who pointed the officer to a man in a car in the parking lot of the Pines Yankee Hill Hardware Store, which was in the Camp Fire evacuation zone, Ramsey said.

The citizen said the man had been staying in the parking lot for about three days and was "suspicious," Ramsey said. The deputy went to the car, got its license plate and determined it was associated with a man — Hendrix — who was well known to the Sheriff's Office and wanted for parole violations.

The deputy requested backup and surrounded the car, making contact with Hendrix, who appeared to be sleeping in the driver's side of his sedan, Ramsey said. After the officer knocked on the car's window, Hendrix "immediately jammed his hand into his jacket, as if he was reaching for a weapon."

The officers then drew their weapons and moved back, Ramsey said. Hendrix then allegedly yelled something to the effect of, "You guys should've left me alone" and, "I'm not going back."

As officers yelled at Hendrix in an attempt to get him out of his car, the officers also heard a "metallic click consistent with perhaps the racking of a gun."

Hendrix proceeded to start his car, backing up toward the officers before driving forward and striking at least one civilian vehicle in the parking lot, Ramsey said. Hendrix then led officers on a high-speed chase west on Highway 70 toward the Oroville area.

Spike strips were deployed and Hendrix's tires flattened by spike strips and his car came to a stop on its rims.

Officers subsequently yelled at Hendrix to get out of the car, Ramsey said. After refusing at first, Hendrix got out, with officers telling him to show them his hand, which was still in his right pocket.

At that point Bandit, the Sutter County Sheriff's Office police dog, was released in an attempt to "stop" Hendrix, Ramsey said. As Bandit was doing his job, Hendrix "came with a metallic object in his hand and pointed it at the officers."

Seven officers fired their duty weapons, which included handguns and rifles, Ramsey said. The shots brought Hendrix down, as well as Bandit. During the confrontation a pit bull emerged from Hendrix's car and attacked Bandit, leading officers to shoot the pit bull.

Hendrix, Bandit and the pit bull died on the scene.

Ramsey said the seven shooting officers included three from the Butte County Sheriff's Office, three from the Shasta County Sheriff's Office and a California Department of Fish and Wildlife warden out of Shasta County.

The names of the officers have not been released.

Contact reporter Andre Bytk at 530-896-7760.

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-21-2018

**CRIME**

# Concow men accused of stealing firefighter's pickup enter pleas

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-22-2018

**By Andre Byik**

*abyik@chicoer.com*

*@andrebyik on Twitter*

**OROVILLE** » Two men accused of stealing a firefighter's pickup while the firefighter was responding to the Camp Fire have pleaded not guilty.

William Erlbacher, 39, and Robert DePalma, 59, both of Concow pleaded not guilty Tuesday in Butte County Superior Court to vehicle theft stemming from the alleged theft of a pickup from the Cal Fire station at Jarbo Gap, according to court documents.

Erlbacher also pleaded not guilty to an additional count of first-degree burglary in connection with the incident, which began Nov. 8, when the Camp Fire erupted, the Butte County

District Attorney's Office said. Erlbacher and DePalma are next scheduled to appear in court Dec. 6 for a preliminary hearing, according to the documents.

They remained in custody with bail set at \$250,000 each.

The charges against the men stem from an episode that began Nov. 8, District Attorney Mike Ramsey has said. A firefighter was called in to respond to the Camp Fire and drove his Ford F-250 to Cal Fire Station 36 at Jarbo Gap.

The firefighter left his key in a nightstand next to a bunk and departed the station on a fire engine, Ramsey said. Later the same day the firefighter returned, and firefighters noticed things amiss, including melting ice cream, food taken out of a refrigerator and cash missing from another firefighter's wallet.

A review of camera evidence revealed the firefighter's truck left the station about 3:30 p.m. Nov. 8, Ramsey said. It was later reported seen near the Safeway on East Avenue in Chico.

On Friday, Cal Fire law enforcement arrested Erlbacher and DePalma on suspicion of their alleged roles in the incident, Cal Fire said. Ramsey said the firefighter's pickup was found parked near the side of a house on Cactus Avenue.

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*Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.*

HISTORY

# Camp Fire is deadliest US wildfire in 100 years

Eerily similar to 1918 inferno that killed 453

By Paul Rogers  
Bay Area News Group

With the death toll at 84 and counting, the Camp Fire in Butte County ranks as the deadliest wildfire anywhere in the United States in 100 years.

But the last time a wildfire killed this many people in America, many of the circumstances were eerily similar: Parched forests. Strong winds. Terrified townspeople killed while fleeing in their cars. Towns wiped off the map. A nation stunned.

It happened in 1918 in northern Minnesota, near Duluth.

"Our photos are black and white," said Rachel Martin, executive director of the Carlton County Historical Society in Cloquet, a town of 12,000 people. "The images from California's fire are in color. But they look similar. When I heard Jerry Brown on TV, I thought he could be talking about this area. All the conditions were the same."

America was a different place in 1918. Woodrow Wilson was president. World War I was in its final weeks. Charlie Chaplin filled movie theaters. Women still didn't have the right to vote. And much of the country was built around a rural farming economy.

On an unusually hot, sunny day on Oct. 12, and following a several years of drought, sparks from steam-powered locomotives ignited the vast pine forests of northern Minnesota, about 100 miles north of Minneapolis.

The monstrous blaze took people by surprise. Huge walls of flame, fed by piles of branches and bark left from logging operations,



Cloquet, Minnesota was destroyed in a wildfire in October 1918 that killed 453 people.

roared into towns like Cloquet and Moose Lake, wiping several off the map. The fire burned into the city of Duluth. Thousands of desperate people escaped on trains, or survived by diving into lakes and streams. The smoke plume was so big ships in the Atlantic Ocean reported it.

Scores were killed as they tried to flee in Model T cars, which crashed and burned along the rural roadways as flames overtook them. When it was over, more than 4,000 houses and 41 schools were destroyed, 249,000 acres blackened and 453 people were dead. Many bodies were never found. It was the worst disaster in the United States since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

People who live in the small towns near Duluth have marked this year with tributes and commemorations of that terrible event 100 years ago. They have watched with sadness at California's loss. And they know how long the scars and memories will last.

"That's how you tell time

around here," Martin said. "Something either happened before or after the fire. Every family from here who has lived here a long time has family stories to tell. We have filing cabinets full of them. It was a really big deal."

Families died while trying to take refuge in wells and root cellars. One family, the Soderbergs, lost 13 people, including nine children, when they hid in a root cellar and the fire consumed all the oxygen.

A 27-foot-tall obelisk at Riverside Cemetery in Moose Lake marks the spot where 200 victims were buried in a mass grave.

The event remains the deadliest disaster in Minnesota history. After the fires, residents sued the railroad companies, but didn't win repayment until 1935 after 17 years of court battles. In the weeks after, people flocked to the town to help it rebuild. As with other decimated towns, and likely with Paradise, some survivors moved on for good.

"The weekend after the fire, 300 carpenters from

Duluth built hundreds of houses," Martin said. "They worked furiously to make it livable. But a lot of people didn't come back. They stayed with relatives or couldn't afford a new house. It displaced a lot of people."

Letters from survivors paint a harsh picture — some of which is echoed in the stories from Paradise.

"The flames looked as if they reached the sky, and it roared like thunder," 20-year-old Tony Hanson wrote in a letter to his sister Alice, after the Cloquet fire. "I cannot tell how terrible it looked out on the west side. Mothers with children in their arms all burned together. Car after car all along the road were burned and Moose Lake is under military rule. It is just covered with tents — soldiers guarding everywhere. You have to get a pass to go in and out of town. They caught one man robbing the dead — they held a little trial and took him out and shot him."

Wildfires that destroyed entire American towns were not uncommon in the

## DEADLIEST U.S. WILDFIRES

- 1,200+ deaths, 1871 (Peshtigo Fire, Wisconsin)
  - 453+ deaths, 1918 (Cloquet Fire, Minnesota)
  - 418+ deaths, 1894 (Hinkley Fire, Minnesota)
  - 282 deaths, 1882 (Thumb Fire, Michigan)
  - 87 deaths, 1910 (Great Fire of 1910, Idaho and Montana)
  - 84 deaths, 2018 (Camp Fire, Paradise, California)
  - 65 deaths, 1902 (Yacolt Burn, Oregon and Washington)
  - 29 deaths, 1933 (Griffith Park Fire, Los Angeles, California)
  - 25 deaths, 1991 (Tunnel Fire, Oakland Hills, California)
  - 22 deaths, 2017 (Tubbs Fire, California)
  - 19 deaths, 2013 (Yarnell Fire, Arizona)
  - 16 deaths, 1947 (The Great Fires of 1947, Maine)
  - 15 deaths, 2003 (Cedar Fire, San Diego County, California)
  - 15 deaths, 1953 (Rattlesnake Fire, California)
  - 15 deaths, 1937 (Blackwater Creek Fire, Wyoming)
  - 14 deaths, 2017 (Gatlinburg, Tennessee)
  - 13 deaths, 1994 (South Canyon Fire, Colorado)
- Source: Jeff Masters, co-founder Weather Underground

late 1800s and very early 1900s.

The 1871 Peshtigo Fire killed about 1,500 people in Wisconsin and Michigan, with so many fatalities that there weren't enough survivors in some communities to identify the dead. The Great Fire of 1910 burned 3 million acres in Washington, Idaho and Montana, killing 86 and sending smoke plumes to New York. Afterward, the U.S. Forest Service set a policy of putting out fires by 10 a.m. the next morning, and radios, helicopters, planes and other equipment improved safety dramatically over the generations.

But now, with hotter, larger fires growing ever more intense in a warming world, creating "fire tornadoes" and walls of flame hundreds of feet tall, whole towns could again burn down, fire experts say.

"Fire scientists I've been talking to have been predicting this," said Michael Kodas, author of "Megafire: The Race to Extinguish a Deadly Epidemic of Flame."

"We're finally seeing it happen. It's terribly sad. It's probably going to happen again and happen more often."

Fires destroyed whole

neighborhoods in the San Diego suburbs in 2007.

They burned into the city limits of Colorado Springs, the second largest city in Colorado, in 2012, destroying 346 homes. Last year, the Tubbs fire leveled 2,800 homes in Santa Rosa, killing 22 people.

Jeff Masters, a meteorologist who co-founded Weather Underground, a weather website, put together a list of the most deadly wildfires in U.S. history, combining information from databases and other sources. When he saw where the Paradise fire fit in — on par with fires from a century gone by — he said it underscored the impact of warmer temperatures, longer fire seasons and millions of people who now live in fire-prone areas.

"I was shocked," he said. "We thought we eradicated this. It's a very sobering reminder we are in a new climate regime, and some of the old threats we thought were past are with us again. The same goes for hurricanes. We're an increasingly vulnerable society. We have more people, more people in harm's way, and more extreme weather. That's adding up to higher death tolls."

# Map shows where PG&E had planned to shut down power before blaze began

Chico Enterprise Record  
11-24-2018

By Matthias Gafni  
Bay Area News Group

A PG&E map of the Camp Fire area obtained by the Bay Area News Group raises new questions about the utility's power-shutoff policies and its decision to keep electricity flowing in advance of the deadly and destructive blaze.

The map, received from a PG&E official by Butte County chief administrative officer Shari McCracken, includes red lines overlaying the towns of Paradise, Magalia and others like a swarm of aggressive tapeworms. The red indicates the distribution lines that PG&E had planned to de-energize in advance of high winds and other dangerous fire conditions forecast for the morning of Nov. 8 — a plan the utility ultimately decided was unnecessary.

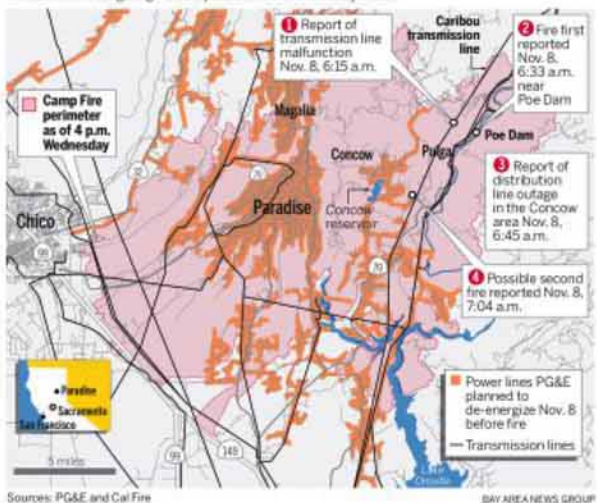
The shutoff area shown on the map did not include the high-voltage transmission line that malfunctioned near where the fire first was reported. PG&E explained it has a policy of not cutting power to lines 115,000 volts or higher — but regulators interviewed in the wake of the disaster said this week there are no state and federal policies that prevent it.

The map reveals, for the first time, that PG&E did initially consider de-energizing a line near Concow that went out 17 minutes after the first reported fire. A second fire reportedly ignited near that line, which may have helped feed the deadly Camp Fire on its march through Magalia, Concow and Paradise.

"If PG&E has knowledge that there are high risk fire conditions, (it) should probably not restrict itself on what types of lines can or cannot be shut down," said attorney Britt Strotman, who represented the city of San Bruno in its lawsuit against PG&E for the deadly pipeline explosion.

## ABORTED POWER-SHUTDOWN PLAN

In the days before the Camp Fire, with dangerous fire weather expected, PG&E warned that it might cut power to about 25,500 customers in portions of Butte County on Nov. 8, the day the fire started. But the utility kept the power running, and now state officials are investigating PG&E's possible role in the deadly blaze.



"PG&E and the (California Public Utilities Commission), as PG&E's regulator, should also actively work together on deciding which lines should be shut down."

PG&E has said it decided on Nov. 8 — after the fire started hours earlier that day — that the forecasted weather conditions did not meet its criteria for a Public Safety Power Shutoff after all but has declined to provide further details of its decision-making process. The company did provide an explanation why it keeps its highest voltage lines operational even during the worst storms.

"In light of the potential public safety issues resulting from de-energizing higher voltage transmission lines, including the potential to impact millions of people and create larger system stability issues for the grid, PG&E has not extended the (shutoff) program to transmission lines that operate at 115kV or above," spokeswoman Lynsey Paulo said. She added that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates transmission lines and such an emergency shutdown would need to be coordinated with the California Independent System Operator, which oversees the state's power grid.

But state and federal regulators say PG&E can shut down transmission lines of any size at its own discretion.

"The transmission owners are solely responsible for operating their transmission and distribution lines and they can de-energize transmission and distribution lines without seeking approval from the ISO, with or without prior notice," Cal ISO spokesman Steven Greenlee said. "The transmission owner tells us that they are de-energizing a line and if a 230kV or 500kV line is de-energized it may require (us) to re-dispatch generation

if the remaining lines become heavily loaded. This is a practice we perform every day with scheduled work and unplanned outages."

CPUC spokeswoman Terrie Prosper also said the decision is up to the individual utility.

"Utilities can de-energize whatever lines and voltage they deem appropriate," Prosper said. "They typically de-energize distribution lines because those lines are more localized than transmission lines."

FERC Spokesman Craig Cano said PG&E would not need its approval to cut power to high-voltage lines for safety reasons.

"FERC-approved standards address transmission system reliability and explicitly exclude safety matters, which could be the reason for shutting down a power line in response to wildfires or to mitigate the risk of fires," he said.

One of the two largest Southern California utilities, San Diego Gas & Electric, has no such restrictions on the size of lines de-energized, said spokeswoman Allison Torres.

"Our highly-trained personnel monitor conditions 24/7, and if conditions ever threaten the integrity of our system, we will de-energize for public safety," she said.

Southern California Edison, on the other hand, only does emergency shutdowns of facilities at 66,000 volts or lower, a spokesman said.

"Transmission lines are under the control of the California Independent System Operator in coordination with Southern California Edison and have implications on the state-wide and regional electric grid potentially impacting millions of customers," spokesman David Song said. "They also tend to have much wider setbacks for vegetation clearance than distribution lines and are significantly less prone to fail during ex-

trema weather events."

Attorney Frank Pitre, who is co-counsel representing more than 600 victims who are suing PG&E over the deadly North Bay fires last year, said the safety distinction between transmission and distribution lines is moot.

"When transmission lines blow, there is a shower of sparks akin to fireworks on the Fourth of July," he said. "All it takes is one spark to ignite a fire. If that occurs during high-wind conditions, with dry vegetation below, you have a calamity."

Firefighter radio transmissions indicate the Camp Fire started underneath high-tension power lines, and winds buffeted the flames from the managed vegetation area beneath the lines to the surrounding wild brush and timber. No cause has been determined for the fire, now the deadliest wildfire in California history, but Cal Fire has said its probe includes electrical infrastructure.

In light of a possible high-voltage-sparked deadly wildfire, is PG&E re-thinking its policy?

"As of right now, PG&E has not extended the Public Safety Power Shutoff Program to transmission lines that operate at 115kV or above," spokeswoman Andrea Mennitti said.

Pitre said PG&E needs to open up the books on their inspection and maintenance records from the area, particularly in light of its checkered history in the Feather River Canyon, including millions of dollars in settlements.

"If you are going to operate equipment at the margins of failure," Pitre said, "then you better have a plan to shut down lines during adverse weather conditions to prevent the risk of a catastrophic event like a wildfire."

Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.

# Former Spring Valley School site will reopen for Concow students

*Staff reports*

**OROVILLE »** Students in the Golden Feather Union School District displaced by the Camp Fire will be located in a new school facility, the district announced Tuesday.

Spring Valley School at 2771 Pentz Road will reopen its doors Monday for students in transitional kindergarten through eighth grade. The site was

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**Before students return to class, items are being moved down from Concow School. Internet is being installed. Detailed cleaning and landscaping work is being done, and more.**

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closed in 2010 due to declining enrollment, but became the answer for educating district students after the Camp Fire ripped through Concow, the district said.

"Many families from the area are displaced, but they want to send their children to school with their classmates and teachers. Most of our displaced families from the Camp Fire are now residing in Oroville. Our vacant Spring Valley School site is less than 15 miles from Oroville, making access to the Concow School family possible," Superintendent Josh Peete said in a press release.

Before students return to class, items are being moved down from Concow School. Internet is being installed. Detailed cleaning and landscaping work is being done, and more.

The Golden Feather Union School District serves students in the Butte Valley, Cherokee, Yankee Hill and Concow commu-

nities.

The Paradise Unified School District has also found new locations for some of its students, the district announced during a school board meeting Monday in Chico.

Paradise Elementary students and staff will be at Bird Street School in Oroville. Those from Ponderosa

Elementary will take over nine classrooms at Durham Elementary School.

Students at Cedarwood and Pine Ridge will return to their schools in Magalia.

Paradise Intermediate and Paradise High School students will be learning in an independent study model with drop-in labs at the Chico Mall.



**INVESTIGATION**

# PG&E issues report on why it didn't cut power during Camp Fire

**By Matthias Gafni**

*Bay Area News Group*

PG&E on Tuesday issued an explanation about why it decided against interrupting power to Butte County communities on Nov. 8, but failed to explain why that decision came at 1 p.m. — more than six hours after the Camp Fire conflagration began its deadly march toward Paradise.

In its report to state regulators, PG&E said it opted not to interrupt power because winds were decreasing and conditions no longer met the company's emergency criteria. The utility did not divulge whether its experts discussed weather conditions in the morning, either before the fire started or as it was quickly spreading.

The utility had warned 70,000 customers for two days before the fire of an impending power shutdown Thursday morning, even

tweeting out a warning at 7:56 a.m. that the power interruption was still an option.

The utility did not provide specifics of what weather data failed to meet their shutdown thresholds and the Camp Fire was not mentioned at all in the report. The company also did not comment specifically about conditions near Pulga, where the fire started around 6:33 a.m., and where a weather station showed most of the utility's power interruption standards appeared to have been met.

PG&E reported a transmission line malfunction in the area 15 minutes before the fire started.

“By around (1 p.m.) on Thursday, Nov. 8, winds were decreasing, and conditions were no longer forecast to approach (Public Safety Power Shutoff) crite-

ria,” wrote Patrick Hogan, PG&E senior vice president electrical operations, in the report. “Based on the forecasted information, PG&E no longer anticipated a possible need to de-energize. PG&E immediately informed all stakeholders of the change in conditions and that no lines would be proactively de-energized.”

Attorney Frank Pitre, who is suing the utility on behalf of more than 600 clients over the deadly wine country fires last year, said it boggled the mind how the company made that final call to keep power on after the Camp Fire already destroyed the town of Paradise.

“The report PG&E submitted to the PUC confirms the obvious — they had the ability to shut down the power during weather conditions comparable to that preceding the start of the fire,” Pitre said. “PG&E has once again failed to learn from past history. You don’t gamble when it comes to the risk of a wildfire. Shut off the power when in doubt, as

the potential consequence of failing to do has repeatedly been illustrated by the recent victims of the Butte, North Bay and Camp Fire calamities.”

At the Jarbo Gap weather station, two hours before the Camp Fire erupted at 6:30 a.m., sustained wind speeds hit 32 mph with gusts of up to 52 mph. PG&E’s wind criteria for a shutdown is sustained winds of 25 mph with gusts in excess of 45 mph. A red flag warning was in effect and the vegetation was bone dry, also meeting the utility’s standards, and more than 70,000 customers in nine counties had been given the necessary warning of an possible shutdown.

The California Public Utilities Commission requires utilities to issue a report on Public Safety Power Shutoffs when electricity is cut, and also, as in the Camp Fire situation, when the utility warns the public of a shutdown but decides against it. The CPUC

has said in the past that it is investigating why PG&E decided against shutting down power as part of its wider probe into PG&E's possible role in the blaze.

One change in Tuesday's report is a footnote PG&E added to its criteria for shutdowns. In previous reports and documents listing its weather standards policy for an emergency shutdown, the company included six bullet points for what weather thresholds must be met to shut down the power as "last resort."

The requirements appear identical as before in Tuesday's report, including the wind standard: "Forecasted sustained winds above approximately 25 mph and wind gusts in excess of approximately 45 mph."

However, for the first time, PG&E added a footnote to the wind standards: "PG&E damage prediction model is utilized to understand if winds are expected to produce elevated outage conditions."

PG&E explained in the

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**"Based on the forecasted information, PG&E no longer anticipated a possible need to de-energize."**

— *Patrick Hogan, PG&E senior vice president of electrical operations*

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report that it activated its Emergency Operations Center on Nov. 6 when the forecast changed and it "predicted extreme fire danger and high wind conditions" two days later. The utility initially warned 70,000 customers across nine counties they may lose power, but it dropped the impacted areas to 63,000 customers by Nov. 7.

"Weather conditions stayed consistent, nearing but not reaching forecasted levels that would warrant temporarily turning off power for customer safety," Hogan wrote in the report.

"As we have expressed previously, turning off power to our customers is a decision that does not come

easily, is not made lightly, and will be exercised only as a last resort," Hogan wrote.

PG&E's policy also prevents it from shutting down transmission lines at or above 115,000 volts, meaning it would not have powered down the Caribou-Palermo line that suffered a malfunction minutes before the fire started near Pulga. However, Cal Fire is investigating a possible "second start" in Concow where the utility reported a power issue around the same area and time. The utility has confirmed that distribution line was part of the tentative shut down plan Nov. 8.

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*Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.*

## REBUILDING

## Since 1999, 13 large wildfires burned in footprint of the Camp Fire

By Matthias Gafni  
Bay Area News Group

Chris Folkman deals in catastrophic risk. As a disaster analyst, he builds models that simulate wildfires. So as he watched the horrific headlines of the Camp Fire unfold last month, he began researching and creating a map of the region's fire history.

What he found left him speechless. Since 1999, 13 large wildfires had burned within the footprint of the Camp Fire's 153,000-acre scar.

The history of fire in this dry, blustery region of Northern California has added emphasis to a difficult question raised by the destruction of last month's historic blaze: Should Paradise be rebuilt?

Repeat natural disasters haven't stopped human habitation in the past. Despite the deadly October 2017 Tubbs Fire in Sonoma County, whose footprint almost mimics the 1964 Hanley Fire, rebuilding efforts are underway in Santa Rosa. New Orleans resurfaced after Hurricane Katrina. And so on.

But whether we should live in such disaster-prone areas is the billion-dollar question — or \$7.5 billion to \$10 billion question, if you consider Folkman's estimates on insured losses so far from the Camp Fire. The blaze that decimated the Gold Country town of Paradise killed at least 88 people and destroyed more than 14,000 homes and businesses, both records for California.

"I think there needs to be a frank conversation about rebuilding and fire resil-



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue speaks with Paradise Mayor Jody Jones during a visit following the Camp Fire in Paradise.

ience," said Folkman, a disaster analyst with RMS. "The good news is there are measures to be taken to make a house less susceptible to a wildfire. In the end, we have to face the fact that the climate is changing and a lot of houses are built in dangerous areas."

#### Stay or go?

For a decade, Cindy Hoover has feared the Jarbo Gap winds. Ever since she plopped her fish in a mason jar and sat in gridlock as she tried to evacuate Paradise during the 2008 Humboldt Fire — which started east of Chico and eventually destroyed 87 homes — Hoover would pack her bags and have her keys, water and dog leash sitting on the counter when the winds started whistling.

"For 10 years I tortured myself with anticipation of what had just happened on

Nov. 8," said Hoover, who escaped the Camp Fire with her husband. "I escaped effortlessly only because I was ready. I always watched the weather, the wind and slept with my windows open smelling for the smell of burning vegetation."

The couple lost their house, and she's not sure she will return after 45 years.

"I want to live in Paradise. It's my home but I cannot live in a community that Paradise has become," Hoover said. "This fire wasn't a case of protecting homes, it didn't have a chance."

Casey Taylor does not share Hoover's doubts. As a Paradise native, she can't imagine living anywhere else than where her three-bedroom home built in the 1970s once stood. The executive director of Achieve Charter School already has

contacted her insurance company and is receiving temporary housing help.

"I know our town leaders personally and they were committed to revitalizing Paradise before the fire, and even more now, to bring it back better than ever," she said.

Cal Fire historical data shows that 42 fires larger than 300 acres have burned within the Camp Fire footprint since 1914. By sheer luck, the town of Paradise had largely been spared widespread destruction despite a century of close calls.

The Camp Fire was the eighth blaze Linda Luck had to flee in California, including two others in Paradise, but it hasn't scared her away. Her Grinding Rock Way home, built of cinder block and a tile roof, is damaged but still standing.

"Would I go back? Yes," Luck said. "My husband built that house."

She's heard from neighbors who won't be joining her; at one meeting, only seven of 60 residents said they'd return to Paradise.

"I'm hearing that from a lot of my friends. It terrorized them," she said.

#### Wildland interface

Sixty percent of new homes built in California, Washington and Oregon since 1990 have been developed in what's known as the Wildland Urban Interface, according to Headwaters Economics, a Montana-based group that created the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire program. Folkman said that includes intermix — where vegetation and houses intermingle, such as in Paradise, and interface, where a concentration of houses abuts a forest or chaparral.

"The interface is really susceptible to very large losses because there tends to be a big cluster of houses," Folkman said. "At the same time, it's an extremely desirable place to live ... it's picturesque."



Dave Porter visits his home in Paradise on Nov. 18 for the first time since it was destroyed by the Camp Fire.

Kelly Pohl, a Headwaters researcher, said Folkman's map provides important information for communities that have been hit repeatedly by fire. Planners should consider that when asking whether there are certain areas people should not live.

"These recent disasters are really begging that question, and the answer probably is yes. There's probably areas not safe in relation to wildfires," Pohl said, referring to the historical map of fires in the Paradise area. "I think that's all really important information for communities to look at when deciding where to allow homes."

That being said, such communities can be rebuilt much more safely and resistant to fire by designing subdivisions with good escape routes, fuel breaks and fire-resistant materials and design features, she said. A Headwaters study released Tuesday found negligible cost differences in adding wildfire-resistant materials and design features to homes.

Such measures are all the more critical as climate change extends fire seasons and brings less rain and drier vegetation. Burned acres per wildfire has doubled since the 1990s, and the fire season in the West averages 84 days longer than the 1970s, according to Headwaters.

#### Recurring debate

The debate over whether it is safe to rebuild is not a new one for Butte County.

Over the summer of 2008, the Humboldt, Lightning and other fires burned about 100,000 acres in the Paradise region, more than 400 homes were lost or damaged and two people died. It could have been much worse, and it prompted the Butte County civil grand jury to issue a report.

"By some miracle, the Humboldt Fire incident did not cross the West Branch of the Feather River," the jury reported. "Had this occurred, property damage could have been huge and thousands of lives could have been threatened in Paradise and the Upper Ridge."

The panel recommended a moratorium on home building in fire-prone areas and specifically cited the general plan's forecasting of 3,400 additional units, or about 15,000 people, in "foothill fire-prone areas," including a 330-house development, which would have placed the homes on the canyon rim.

But in September 2009, the Butte County Board of Supervisors replied to the grand jury's recommendation, calling it "not reasonable." The supervisors noted building code improvements and fire prevention requirements for new housing.

Such land-use questions are being asked across the country and particularly in California, Oregon and Washington, where 84 percent of the wildland urban interface is undeveloped, according to Headwaters.

Butte County supervisor Doug Teeter — who lost his Paradise home to the Camp Fire, along with the homes of his mother and sister — wasn't on the board when it rebuffed the grand jury report but said his community is safe to rebuild.

"Absolutely, it's a ridge. I feel it's defensible and the reconstruction will be to modern building standards," Teeter said, adding the historical fire map is misleading as many of the fires listed burned in uninhabited areas. "When Paradise gets rebuilt, it's going to have different standards. It's got to have that."

Paradise Mayor Jody Jones, who also lost her home, said Paradise has grown responsibly, mostly rural residential homes on large lots, not large subdivisions.

"They didn't abandon New Orleans after Katrina, they're not abandoning Hawaii although there's a volcano going off, they're not abandoning San Francisco despite the earthquake dangers," she said. "Anywhere you go, there's some risk of a natural disaster."

"We're not going to abandon our town."

Staff writer David DeBolt contributed to this report.

Contact reporter Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026.

Para más detalles llame al 1-800-660-6789 • 詳情請致電 1-800-893-9555

## NOTICE OF PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY'S REQUEST TO FURTHER REDUCE RATES FOR AGRICULTURAL CUSTOMERS (A.18-11-013)

### SUMMARY

On November 20, 2018, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) filed its 2019 Rate Design Window (RDW) application with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). The application is focused on agricultural customers. Its goal is to reduce the number of customers highly impacted by previously approved rate increases by offering new and modified rate plan options.

### BACKGROUND

In PG&E's 2017 General Rate Case Phase II application, the CPUC approved simplified default and voluntary rate plans for agricultural customers. These rate plans are currently scheduled for implementation on a mandatory basis by March 2021. If approved, this application would modify rate plans even further to reduce bill impacts. If approved, the changes included in this application will replace previously approved rate plan changes. Customers will be able to evaluate and choose from modified rate plan options. In addition, PG&E will provide online tools to help customers decide which rate plan is best for them.

### HOW WILL THIS APPLICATION AFFECT AGRICULTURAL CUSTOMERS?

There is no request to increase rates in this application. However, if approved, the new rate plans will impact bills for agricultural customers as rate design changes are implemented and customers make decisions about their rate plans. The new rate plans will reduce the number of highly impacted customers estimated to receive bill increases. Highly impacted is defined by both a percentage and a dollar amount. In order to fall into this category, bill increases would have to exceed both 7% and \$100 per year. The new rate plans will also provide flexibility for agricultural customers to select a rate plan that works best for them.

Bill impacts will vary based on how much energy customers use, when they use it, and which rate plan they select.

### HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT PG&E'S PROPOSALS?

If you have questions about PG&E's filing, please contact PG&E at 1-800-743-5000. For TTY, call

## CAMP FIRE

# DISPLACED STUDENTS RETURN TO SCHOOL



PHOTOS BY KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Brian Slater, a third-grader from Concow returns to school excitedly on Monday for the first time since the start of last month's deadly Camp Fire. The Golden Feather Union Elementary School District reopened Spring Valley Elementary School, a shuttered facility in Oroville, to replace Concow Elementary, which survived the fire but remains closed.

**By Risa Johnson**

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**OROVILLE** » Destiny Hamlett stole one last look at her kids on the playground before leaving Oroville's Spring Valley Elementary School.

"It's like the first day of school for them," Hamlett said. "They seem pretty excited."

She snapped some pictures before dropping them off. It almost felt like a normal first day, but of course, it wasn't.

Monday marked the first day back in classrooms for thousands of students displaced by the Camp Fire. Students are now spread across Butte County from fairgrounds and churches to the Chico Mall.

Some parents drove from as far as Sacramento to drop their kids off on Monday, including Destiny Hamlett, who has been unable to find a hotel locally. After making the one and a half hour drive to drop the kids off, she was headed to search for housing in Oroville.

"I'm just nervous, 'cause I don't know where we're gonna be," she said.

Most kids were all smiles as they arrived at the school on Monday and caught up with their classmates.

Fourth grader Emily Chung said she was mostly excited to be back with friends and to get to make art in her class.

"I got to see a couple of my best friends and I got to see one of my BBFs and that's the lunch lady," Chung said.

A few more than the 30 kids expected showed up at the small school on Monday, almost all of whom were enrolled at Concow School which was damaged in the fire, said Josh Peete, Golden Feather Union Elementary School District superintendent. Peete is also the principal of Concow School, and now, Spring Valley Elementary School.

The school was a logical temporary location as it had been vacant for a few years due to low enrollment. Two classrooms are now in use, one for K-4 and another for grades 5-8. There are



Destiny and Brandon Hamlett drop their children off for school with their teacher Miss Chenoweth at Spring Valley Elementary School. The children had missed three weeks of school since the start of the deadly Camp Fire. The Hamletts made the hour-and-a-half drive up from Sacramento from where they are staying, the closest FEMA-provided motel room they could find.

three teachers for the former and two for the latter.

"Part of that is the hope that cross-age groups are gonna be helpful for the students to heal," Peete said.

Jennifer Dogey, one of two co-teachers for the grade 5-8 class, began her first teaching job since getting her credential in August. After a couple

## Education

FROM PAGE 1

of months, the 27-year-old transitioned from having a multi-grade class to just eighth graders. Then the fire happened.

She planned to ease into things on Monday, doing crafts and “circle time,” where the kids sit in a circle and answer questions from the teacher, crafted to elicit only positive responses.

“Even though the kids are excited to see their teachers and the kids are excited to be out of their houses, what they need most right now is they need that peer connection,” Dogey said.

She went through a training last week with other teachers to prepare to teach kids who have experienced trauma. There were counselors on site on Monday.

After her co-teacher introduced a graphic novel, Dogey was going to have the students make snowflakes and put them up in the classroom.

“I really want them to feel like, you know, this is their home since a lot of them don’t have homes right now,” she said. “That decorating piece was such a ritualistic thing and now that they can’t do it I wanted to provide a space where they could.”

At a press conference on Monday morning, Tim Taylor, Butte County Office of Education superintendent, said that affected students and staff would need long-term help. He asked someone to display handmade cards from Cordova Meadows Elementary School in Sacramento.

“These are the types of things we need not just this week, not just in a couple weeks, but through the rest of this year so the kids feel that love,” Taylor said.

Michelle John, Paradise Unified School District su-



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

perintendent, said that the majority of district teachers lost their homes. Counselors have been brought in from across the nation, and there is one for nearly every classroom, John said.

“Our kids are traumatized,” she said. “Their families are traumatized. They drove through flames three weeks ago.”

She acknowledged the bravery of teachers and bus drivers who got all students down the hill safely. John said four of the district’s nine schools were destroyed and all but one had major damage.

She said the district was “very close” to securing a high school site for all secondary students. After the school year, the district is looking to build a school community in Chico, John said.

Mary Sakuma, Butte County Office of Education superintendent-elect, said 151 staff members lost their homes. Two school districts, six charter schools, three preschools and two private schools became homeless, Sakuma said.

“The entire educational delivery system for these entities had to be recreated from scratch,” she said.

Nearly 5,000 public school students and 379 public school staff were displaced by the fire, Sakuma said. The only school resuming Monday in its original location was Cedarwood Elementary School in Magalia.

The district’s primary goal was to reunite students with their teachers.

“I’m pleased to report that we have classroom placement for every student that stayed here in Butte County after the fire,” Sakuma said.

Tim Taylor said leadership at the state level had been “second to none.” Both Tom Torlakson, state superintendent of public instruction, and Tony Thurmond, his newly-elected successor, were there and pledged support for Butte County schools.

“We’re going to help find the money to rebuild the schools, money for mental health and counseling for post-traumatic (stress) syndrome,” Torlakson said.

Tony Thurmond, his newly-elected successor, said he would continue Torlakson’s efforts to ensure students and staff had the resources needed.

Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 530-896-7763.

**CONCOW**

# Family escapes second fire, awaits evacuation lift

**By Thomas Peele**

*Bay Area News Group*

**CONCOW** » The first place Dorothea and Ron Morgan wanted to go when access was allowed to this mountain community Monday was home. They had to settle for their church.

There, down a gentle hill from the Golden Feather Seventh Day Adventist Church, was a small metal building called Grandma's Basement that serves as a thrift store. In addition to that, it will soon be a place for residents to get water and other supplies as they return nearly a month after fleeing the camp fire.

Somehow, the church and Grandma's Basement, survived the massive blaze. "We'll be open every day for few hours, Dorothea Morgan — for all intent and purposes, Grandma — said. Her husband noted the irony of its sur-

## Concow

**FROM PAGE 1**

vival. A previous structure was lost in the 2008 Humboldt Fire.

The Morgans can't get to their home because it is an area being called Zone B where access hasn't been restored. Their house made it through the fire, but they lost numerous outbuildings. Still, within an hour of the California Highway Patrol and Nation Guard opening Highway 70 at noon Monday they were parked outside Pines Yankee Hill Hardware talking with others.

Across the highway, Bill Lui was busy loading hay and animal feed onto his truck.

He was among a handful of residents who stayed through the fire and said he

was glad to see Highway 70 reopen. Law enforcement had escorted a small number of residents into the area on Sunday.

Monday, he said he saw lines of cars both entering and leaving Concow, many finding their homes destroyed. "I'd say it was about 50/50," he said. "A lot of people turned around and left."

Back at the church, Dorothea and Ron Morgan told a harrowing story of how they and family members escaped the fire on Nov. 8, Dorothea pointing to portions of the couple's van that burned and melted. Both in their 80s, they made it out alone while their daughter, son-in-law and grandson stayed. Those family members asked to be identified by their first names.

The Morgans said they made it through the Hum-

boldt Fire, losing a home in 2008. The Camp Fire “was hotter and faster moving. This was a different fire,” Ron said.

Dorothea described it with a single word: “Satanic.”

It quickly began to overcome the four family members who stayed. The Roads were blocked. So the four got their dogs, a cat and a few suitcases of belongings and headed for nearby Concow Reservoir.

Then they remembered Bruno — a neighbor in his 90s who lived up the hill. Dorothea’s eldest grandson, Michael, ran for him, she said.

Bruno was outside trying to find his cats. He wouldn’t leave until Michael raked leaves away from his propane tank. Soon Michael was helping Bruno down the hillside, his arm around the old man’s shoulder.

The party of five fled to the reservoir, fighting their way through heavy reeds at its edge. The fire was behind them. They made it to the edge. The reeds were aflame.

Michael saw two small boats the size of a dingy nearby and swam for them. They had to lift Bruno, now shivering from the cold water into one. Michael, his mother Renne and younger brother climbed in along with the pets and bags.

There was no place for Scott, the boy’s father. He told the family to make for a nearby Island, Dorothea said. Bruno began showing signs of hypothermia. The water was cold and there were fears Bruno — and maybe others — would, for all intent and purposes, freeze to death in the middle of the most destructive wildfire in California history.

Michael was eventually able to make it across the lake where he found a family whose home had survived. They raced back to the island and got the others.

Bruno was put in a hot shower, and then covered in warm blankets. He was taken to a hospital and survived, Dorothea said. Across the lake, Scott survived too, saving Ron and Dorothea’s house and his own.

The family will reunite when Zone B opens and all of Concow is accessible, perhaps later this week.



# Investigators examine PG&E tower part

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**By Matthias Gafni  
and Thomas Peele**

*Bay Area News Group*

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**PULGA »** Cal Fire investigators removed a cross arm from the PG&E transmission tower that malfunctioned minutes before the Camp Fire ignited, an attorney said Wednesday, raising questions about whether the tower's age may have caused the failure and possibly sparked the state's deadliest wildfire.

Attorney Frank Pitre said the arm, attached to a "jumper line," which helps transition power on the 115,000-volt transmission line, was removed by investigators as part of their probe into what may have ignited the Camp Fire on Nov. 8.

The utility notified state regulators that its Caribou-Palermo transmission line malfunctioned about 15 minutes before the fire was first reported at 6:33 a.m. underneath high-tension wires near Poe Dam. The California Public Utilities Commission and

Cal Fire has said they are investigating whether PG&E equipment played a role in the blaze.

"The physical evidence taken by Cal Fire will reveal the mechanism of failure," Pitre said.

In December 2012, a fierce winter storm, with winds reaching 55 mph at times, toppled five other lattice-steel towers that support the same transmission line. The utility rebuilt those towers in 2016, but did not replace the rest of the aging towers on that line, Pitre said, adding that the structures are at least 50 years old.

The Caribou line was originally built in 1919, according to CPUC records. Pitre said corrosion, in conjunction with high winds in the area the morning of the fire, could have contributed to the malfunction.

"Given the age of the equipment that failed in 2012, a thorough evaluation of the integrity of entire line should have been done in order to decide if additional equipment along the

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line should have been replaced,” Pitre said. “It could have corroded from the inside out, like a cancer.”

A PG&E spokeswoman declined to comment about what Cal Fire confiscated and details of the investigation.

“PG&E has provided two Electric Incident Reports to the Safety and Enforcement Division of the California Public Utilities Commission related to equipment in the area of the Camp

Fire,” spokeswoman Melissa Subbotin said. “The information provided in these reports are preliminary and PG&E is fully cooperating with the investigations.”

The cause of the fire is under investigation, but firefighter radio transmissions and the utility’s self-reporting of power line issues near possible first and second ignition points have indicated PG&E’s equipment may have played a role. A Cal Fire spokesman on Wednesday said he could not comment on the ongoing investigation.

PG&E first reported

damage to the transmission line around 6:15 a.m. Nov. 8. A distribution line in nearby Concow also malfunctioned a half hour later, possibly sparking a second fire.

Pitre and other attorneys have already filed lawsuits against the utility representing fire survivors who lost their homes. Eight-five people have died and thousands of homes were burned down, including most of the town of Paradise.

The utility has a history of equipment problems in the Feather River Canyon area. PG&E paid millions of dollars in settlements in September 2001 and October 2017 from trees or vegetation coming into contact with power lines.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 12-8-2018

CAMP FIRE PROBE

# What failed on PG&E tower?

A broken power line would have sent molten aluminum and metals spraying all over bone dry vegetation

By Matthias Gafni and Thomas Peele

Bay Area News Group

**PULGA** » With winds gusting around 50 mph in the morning hours of Nov. 8, portions of a PG&E steel lattice transmission tower — exposed to the elements high on a ridgetop and originally built when Woodrow Wilson was president — failed.

As high-voltage lines got loose and whipped around, striking the metal tower, molten aluminum and metal sprayed across tinder dry vegetation, igniting the brush. Arriving firefighters could only watch as the blaze underneath the power lines quickly spread to wild timber and brush.

That's the horror story about the ignition of the Camp Fire that attorneys, sources and experts have begun to construct after visiting the tower and re-

viewing records, fire transmissions and other data.

Now a month after the blaze first roared to life along the North Fork of the Feather River, near the resort town of Pulga, sources familiar with a Cal Fire probe say investigators are zeroing in on this "transpositional" tower that helps switch power among transmission lines on the Caribou-Palermo circuit, originally built in 1919. The focus is on whether a tiny O-ring that holds up rows of disc-shaped insulators, or possibly fatigued steel from one of the tower's arms, caused the accident.

"It's there that the likely (O-ring) connection failed," said Dario de Ghetaldi, an attorney suing PG&E on behalf of dozens of residents who lost their homes in the Camp Fire. "It could also be corrosion on the support extension. This is high in the

mountains, you get very strong winds and they had extreme winds that night."

PG&E has reported to state regulators that at 6:15 a.m. Nov. 8, a 115,000-volt transmission line malfunctioned. About 15 minutes later, fire radio transmissions indicate someone at Poe Dam, a little more than 1,000 feet away from the tower and down a steep canyon wall, reported the fire underneath the power lines amid high winds.

Within hours, the town of Paradise was nearly wiped off the map. At least 85 people died in the fire, and it's destroyed more structures than any other wildfire in this flammable state's history.

As investigators narrow their focus on the cause, California Public Utilities Commission members next week will revisit policies involving emergency power shutdowns in advance of dangerous fire weather. PG&E had for two days repeatedly warned customers in Butte County it might shut off power the morning

of the Camp Fire but decided to keep the power on.

Cal Fire also is investigating a possible second ignition point in the fire, near a PG&E distribution line that failed about half an hour after the Pulga tower malfunction, according to filings with the CPUC.

Numerous lawsuits have been filed against the utility, and its stock price has imploded. CPUC investigators also have begun investigating if PG&E's equipment and the company's maintenance of its equipment played a role in the fire, and how it arrived at the decision to keep electrical power on that morning. Simultaneously, a federal judge overseeing PG&E's probation in the San Bruno pipeline explosion case is working to determine if the utility committed any crimes that may have caused the Camp Fire.

PG&E repeatedly has said it is cooperating with the investigation, but it could not comment on specifics as the cause of the fire was still being determined.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 12-10-2018

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## Camp Fire, Stanley Avenue before Supervisors Tuesday

By Steve Schoonover  
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**OROVILLE** » A number of actions relating to the Camp Fire are on the agenda of the Butte County Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

But in addition, the board is supposed to make a final decision on a controversial subdivision south of Chico.

The meeting begins at 9 a.m. Tuesday in the Board Chambers in the County Administration Building, 25 County Center Drive in Oroville.

### Camp Fire

Supervisors will be asked Tuesday to pass an

ordinance outlawing price gouging in the aftermath of the Camp Fire. State law already bans the practice for 30 days after a disaster declaration. Local agencies are allowed to extend that, and the item before the supervisors would be for 180 days, through May 7.

It would limit price increases for rentals, motel and hotel rooms, and other goods and services to 10 percent above what they were prior to the declaration of the emergency. There are also restrictions on evicting tenants in order to raise rents, and limits on increased charges for building construction and repairs.

Another issue before the board is relaxation of zoning rules to allow longer-term occupancy of recreational vehicles and auxiliary buildings than would ordinarily be allowed.

The board will also be asked approve an ordinance to prohibit removal of fire debris until a hazardous materials inspection has been performed.

Two contracts are on the agenda for firms to handle the management of as much as 600,000 cubic yards of fire debris that is expected at the Neal Road Recycling and Waste Facility. A third contract will be to repair the storm drains at the

landfill, that were damaged by the fire.

The board will also be asked to allow development of payroll rules to compensate the several hundred county employees who were impacted by the fire and couldn't work for a number of days.

And finally, some relief is being requested for residents of Concow who've been burned out twice. After the 2008 fire the county got grants to allow rebuilding 25 of the homes that had been destroyed. Those residents received seven-year refundable loans. A number of those home were destroyed, and supervisors are being asked to re-

lieve the loan obligations in those cases.

### Stanley Avenue

A final decision on a controversial housing development on Stanley Avenue, about a half-mile south of Chico is also back before the board.

The project that would have put 21 homes on an 18-acre parcel was approved by the county Planning Commission in September, but was appealed to the supervisors.

Neighbors primarily objected to the design that would cluster all the homes on 6 acres of the parcel, keeping the other 12 acres in open space. Most of that

12 acres lies within the 300-foot agricultural setback from a commercial orchard to the south, and cannot be developed with residences.

On Nov. 6, the supervisors asked the developer to cut the project to 18 homes and come up with a draft plan for managing the 12 acres of open space.

That's what will be before the supervisors Tuesday. The public hearing is a time-specific item, set for 10:20 a.m.

The full agenda can be seen on the county's website, [www.buttecounty.net](http://www.buttecounty.net).

Contact reporter Steve Schoonover at 530-896-7750.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 12-13-2018

### CAMP FIRE

## PG&E confirms damage to tower at blaze's origin site

By George Avalos  
Bay Area News Group

PG&E's equipment in Pulga and Concow was damaged before the disastrous Camp Fire began, including with bullet holes, a fallen hook and a broken tower arm, the utility company disclosed in a new letter to state regulators.

The latest revelations from PG&E confirmed prior suspicions that a damaged transmission tower caused a power line to fail in the origin area of the blaze. The letter also said it was a PG&E worker who first noticed the fire and called 911.

Cal Fire is investigating the cause of the lethal blaze, which broke out Nov. 8, killed at least 86 and effectively destroyed the town of Paradise. The probe's focus includes PG&E's Caribou-Palermo electrical transmission line and a power pole that's part of the company's Big Bend circuit, both in Butte County.

A power outage was reported on Nov. 8 at 6:15 a.m. in the service area of the Caribou-Palermo line and a separate electricity outage was reported the same day at 6:45 a.m. in the Big Bend service area, according to the letter submitted to the state Public Utilities Commission by Meredith Allen, a PG&E regulatory executive.

In between the times of these power failures, at



KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

PG&E transmission towers, including the one at right that reportedly malfunctioned minutes before the Camp Fire was first reported above Poe Dam, stand on a ridge above Pulga. Investigators have taken equipment from the tower as evidence.

about 6:30 a.m., a PG&E employee observed a fire near one of its transmission towers on the Caribou-Palermo line and the worker placed a call to 911.

In addition, on Nov. 9, a PG&E employee arrived at a second location where a power pole was located "on the Big Bend 1101 Circuit and observed that the pole and other equipment was on the ground with bullets and bullet holes at the break point of the pole and on the equipment," Allen wrote to the Public Utilities Commission in a letter made public Tuesday evening.

Separately, crews deployed by PG&E detected multiple instances of damage and failure — including indications of worn-out

equipment — on a portion of the Caribou-Palermo transmission line during a patrol on Nov. 14. Workers noted a broken C-hook, a flash mark and other problems.

In yet another observation, this one by a utility worker on Nov. 12, additional evidence of damage was discovered on a section of Concow Road in Butte County.

"At this location, the PG&E employee observed several snapped trees, with some on top of the downed wires," PG&E told the PUC Tuesday.

San Francisco-based PG&E is already under pressure because its equipment was found to be the cause of multiple lethal wildfires that scorched the North Bay Wine Country and nearby regions

in October 2017 and killed 44. Cal Fire has yet to determine the cause of the destructive Wine Country Tubbs Fire that was one of the worst of last year's infernos.

Separately, a federal jury in 2016 found PG&E guilty of crimes it committed before and after a fatal natural gas explosion in 2010 that killed eight and destroyed a San Bruno neighborhood. In January 2017, PG&E was sentenced for its crimes and is now a convicted felon.

PG&E's shoddy maintenance and flawed record keeping were determined to have caused the San Bruno explosion. In the wake of the infernos of 2017 and 2018, some have criticized PG&E for inadequate maintenance and repair efforts on its electricity system.

**CAMP FIRE**

# Sheriff releases log of emergency calls received on day fire started

**By Andre Byik**

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*@andrebyik on Twitter*

**MAGALIA** » The Butte County Sheriff's Office on Thursday released a written log of emergency calls it received the day the Camp Fire erupted, showing dispatchers were flooded with calls as the fire marched through Concow, Magalia and Paradise.

The log also included two eyebrow-raising reports suggesting a fire may have sparked in Magalia around the same time investigators have said the Camp Fire started under windy conditions in Pulga.

Cal Fire said Thursday the reports were investigated and not related to the Camp Fire.

The Sheriff's Office received the two Magalia reports at 6:33 a.m. Nov. 8, which is when, according to Cal Fire, the Camp Fire started in the area of Pulga Road at Camp Creek Road near Jarbo Gap.

One of the reports originated from Wildlife Drive in Magalia, with a caller reporting "a power line transformer sparked and there is a fire," according to the

Sheriff's Office's log. The call was transferred to Cal Fire.

The other report originated from nearby Imperial Way in Magalia and details included in the log indicated the call was transferred to an unspecified "fire department."

Cal Fire-Butte County Chief Darren Read said Thursday that firefighters responded to the calls on Wildlife Drive and Imperial Way, finding a tree limb had fallen onto power lines that were arcing.

There was no fire, and firefighters left after utility officials arrived on the scene, Read said. He added that the incident in Magalia did not result in a wildfire and was not connected to the Camp Fire.

The cause of the Camp Fire remains under investigation, Read said.

Cal Fire has said investigators have identified two possible origin points for the Camp Fire, including points in Pulga and in the Concow area. Officials said

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Thursday they were not aware of any additional origin points.

The log of emergency calls released Thursday by the Sheriff's Office included minimal details for each log entry. But the log did show a department inundated with calls Nov. 8 about the fast-moving Camp Fire.

Many callers were told to evacuate as the fire approached their homes. Other callers reported being unable to flee because they could not drive or required help.

At 10:35 a.m., a caller at Skyway and Creston Road in Magalia reported "cars are at a standstill and haven't moved since" 9 a.m., according to the log.

At noon, a caller reported that "her father went back to house after the evac warning." At 12:08 p.m., a caller reported talking to a friend near Indian Springs and Neal roads who "was trying to put out fire all around her."

The Camp Fire destroyed nearly 14,000 homes and claimed at least 86 lives. Investigators have focused on a PG&E transmission tower in Pulga that sustained an outage about 15 minutes be-

fore the Camp Fire started.

PG&E has reported that one its employees saw fire in the area of the tower about 6:30 a.m. Nov. 8, and employees subsequently called 9-1-1 to report the sighting.

The California Public Utilities Commission announced Thursday it would "examine its rules allowing electric utility de-energization of power lines during severe wildfire threat conditions as a preventative measure of last resort."

"California is experiencing an increase in wildfire events due to several factors, including climate change," the commission said. "Through the proceeding opened (Thursday), the CPUC will examine how de-energization has affected the state so far and will refine the de-energization practice to ensure public safety while minimizing unintended consequences."

Questions have been raised regarding PG&E's policies and procedures of de-energizing power lines in the wake of the Camp Fire.

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*Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.*

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## **YANKEE HILL**

# **Clothing and other items giveaway**

Clothing and other items will be given away between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sunday at the Golden Feather SDA Church at 3861 Detlow Rd. and Highway 70 in the foothills of Yankee Hill. For further information or questions, call the church at 533-3594.



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## In the zone

### Hard work and isolation for those who stayed despite the evacuation order



Roger and Spencer Cates and their dog, Kona, on their Yankee Hill ranch.  
PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

Spencer Cates steered the four-wheeler through a herd of cattle. Many of the animals—34 in total—trotted alongside the vehicle, hungry and hoping to be fed. Cates would get to that—but right now, his goal was to show this reporter just how close the Camp Fire had gotten to the buildings on his family's ranch.

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He didn't have to go far from the main house before coming upon traces of fire—scorched grass and blackened tree trunks. In his area of Yankee Hill, the Camp Fire stayed low to the ground, in many places not even reaching tree canopies before moving on. All the trees there were new, he explained, having taken root after the Humboldt Fire in 2008.

For Cates and his father, Roger, fire is a fact of life, one that comes with living on a large ranch in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The family settled here in 1936 and Roger still remembers, as a boy, watching the fields be set alight once a year or so to create pasture and eliminate fire danger.

"You know it's going to happen," Roger said. "That's how a lot of the old-timers [avoided wildfires]—you know, it was based on Native American ways."

The Cateses chose to stay put when the Camp Fire roared through, defending their property. They corralled the cattle—if they hadn't, Spencer said, they likely would have gotten spooked and started running, increasing their chances of injury or even death.

"The last fire took every fence," Roger recalled of the Humboldt blaze. He wasn't at home that time to fight it off; this time was different. "That one took seven buildings; this one took none."

Yankee Hill was spared the onslaught of the Camp Fire when it broke out on Nov. 8. By the next day, however, it had crept down the canyon and began to threaten that community. With a minimal amount of time for preparation, the Cateses said first responders flooded the area with bulldozers to cut fire lines and burn brush around properties. While remaining in place during an evacuation order is never recommended—for safety reasons—Roger maintains his knowledge of the terrain allowed him to direct firefighters and other personnel to nearby properties better than their paper maps could.

Nearby, Dan and Ronna Worcester got their horses to safety and then returned to their home, which they said was saved by Cal Fire. Dan protected their property for hours afterward, with his 40-foot fire hose and above-ground pool.

What peeved the Worcesters was the inability to leave their home to go to the store or get on with life after the fire was long out. The evacuation order was still in place as of press time, though Yankee Hill residents were offered a 24-hour reprieve, during which they had in-and-out privileges, this past Sunday.

"We've been to [Doug] LaMalfa, to [Jim] Nielsen, and nobody gives a shit—it's up to Cal Fire and the sheriff," Ronna said. "We are being played here. We have nice houses—we're not in the brush. And they refuse to lift the evacuation order and let us have access to buy groceries. People don't belong in the evacuation centers when they have homes."

**Unlike the Cateses and Worcesters in Yankee Hill,** people in other communities received no warning of fire. Daniel Hill, just 14 years old, was leaving his house in Concow for school when he looked outside and saw smoke coming from the direction of Pulga, just one ridge over. Within 15 minutes, he said, the plume had grown and he could see fire on the mountain. After ensuring the rest of the family evacuated, he and his father, Brandon Hill, headed to his grandparents' neighborhood off of Concow Road. Armed with hoses and a tractor, they fought the flames. Hill's parents, Pete and Peggy Moak (the Butte County tax collector), had battled blazes before and were prepared to do so again.

"After it all settled, we walked up the road and heard someone screaming for help," Daniel recalled last week from his grandparents' house, where he'd stayed despite the evacuation order. He and a few others loaded into a golf cart and headed down to the reservoir, where people who'd been fleeing the fire were stuck on a small island. They grabbed a canoe and paddled out to rescue the survivors, one of them a 90-year-old man suffering from hypothermia (he survived).

Stewart Nugent, like the Hills, had little opportunity to flee his house when the Camp Fire struck. His wife left their home in her car 10 minutes ahead of him, as he gathered a few final items and tried to wrangle one of their cats. When he got outside, the fire had already reached his neighborhood in central Paradise. Rather than try to drive through the flames, he pulled out the sprinklers and the hoses and started defending his home.

"After about 45 minutes to an hour, I was just pecking away at the edges, raking away leaves under my neighbor's deck, and it was real smoky," Nugent said, pointing to the house just next to his on Williams Drive. "I thought, 'I'm outta here.' I grabbed the cat and when I got to the truck, the wind had shifted again, so I went back at it. Most of it was gone by that point, so I was putting out embers on the roof, putting out hot spots."

After the threat was gone, he saw no reason to leave. With plenty of food, propane to run his generator and wood for his stove, he chose to stick it out, though a few weeks in, he was relying on the kindness of tow-truck drivers and others working on the Ridge for food and water for the neighborhood animals. And random drop-ins from those workers and this reporter, for conversation.

Though he saved his and his neighbor's homes, he was adamant: "Just don't paint me as a hero." □

# Chico Enterprise Record

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## **Possible dangers:** PID customers advised to not drink tap water pending tests

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*Staff reports*

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**PARADISE »** Residents moving back into Paradise are being advised to not drink the tap water, pending results of testing for possible hazards.

Wildfires like the Camp Fire can introduce contaminants into a water supply. The Paradise Irrigation District said in a press release that it and the state Division of Drinking Water have taken samples from

throughout the district to be tested.

The testing is expected to take two weeks. Until the results are in residents should use only bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, making ice and food preparation. Pets and livestock should not be allowed to drink tap water either.

Boiling water will not remove some of the contaminants that might be present, according to

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## Water

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PID.

Tap water can be used for showers and washing clothes, but use of hot water should be limited. Dishes can be cleaned in a dishwasher on an air dry setting, according to PID. Do not take baths, or use hot tubs or swimming pools.

Avoid using water for property cleanup, as that

could spread possible contaminants.

PID customers are asked to promptly report any noticeable odors or smells in the water supply by calling 877-4971 or temporarily 342-3101.

The district will share the test results as soon as they are received and will adjust the advisory accordingly.

Updates and information can all be found at: [www.PIDWater.com/recovery](http://www.PIDWater.com/recovery), or on Facebook @PIDWater.

REBUILDING PARADISE

# Residents allowed back despite ash

**Paradise:** Citizens urged to be mindful of hazards when reoccupying property

**By Steve Schoonover**

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**OROVILLE** » Butte County residents who had their houses burn in the Camp Fire will be allowed to move recreational vehicles or tiny homes onto their properties, even before they've been cleaned up.

The ash left after a wildfire burns a home can be toxic, and normally residents aren't allowed to reoccupy a property until the dangerous materials have been removed.

But there is a shortage of other options due to the magnitude of the Camp Fire, which destroyed about 14,000 residences.

That's why the Board of Supervisors approved an emergency ordinance Friday morning during a special meeting dedicated to Camp Fire matters. The vote was unanimous. The measure goes



CARIN DORGHALLI — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Coloradan James Faircloth gives an RV to the Wood family on Nov. 23 in Chico. An emergency ordinance allows people to move RVs or tiny homes onto their burned properties despite the presence of hazardous materials.

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# Paradise

**FROM PAGE 1**

into effect immediately.

However the ordinance also includes the warning: "Exposure to hazardous materials may lead to acute and chronic health effects and may cause long-term public health and environmental impacts." The danger increases the longer one is exposed to the materials.

"Persons moving back into the Camp Fire affected area do so at their own risk and should be aware of the health hazards," the ordinance says.

The measure further says the safest approach is to wait until a property has been certified clean, and emphasizes it is not encouraging people to move back to their property before a cleanup is done.

The measure was amended to allow administrative discretion over a rule that the temporary structure be 100 feet from a home's wreckage.

Staff was also directed to come back with amendments that would allow mobile or manufactured homes to be used as temporary housing, rather than just homes with wheels.

The measure is in effect until Dec. 31, 2020.

## Other action

The board also heard that the Neal Road Re-

cycling and Waste Facility was preparing to accept up to up to a million cubic yards of fire debris and ash. Some improvements will be needed at the landfill to accommodate the materials. A budget will be brought to the board later.

The board also approved five contracts to aid in mitigation of the Camp Fire impacts, some budget staffing changes required by the response to the fire, and picked a law firm to handle a potential lawsuit against PG&E.

Supervisors also approved immediate replacement of some Public Works Department equipment that was destroyed when the fire scorched the Paradise equipment yard. Lost were two five-yard dump trucks and a pull broom, sprayer, four sand spreaders and seven snow plows. Insurance will cover all but a \$10,000 deductible.

And finally a contract was approved to begin right-of-way acquisition to repair storm damage to Centerville Road that happened during a storm in January 2017. Federal Emergency Management Agency officials here for the Camp Fire got a first-hand look at the damage and agreed more work was necessary than they had originally agreed to, ending a long-standing deadlock.

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Contact reporter Steve Schoonover at 530-896-7750.

**CAMP FIRE**

# PROPERTY OWNERS UPSET OVER TREE REMOVALS



PHOTOS BY KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Fallen logs spill onto Pearson Road in Paradise earlier this month as crews work to remove trees killed by November's deadly Camp Fire.

**By Laura Urseny**  
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**OROVILLE** » Trees have mysteriously disappeared off property burned during the Camp Fire, discovered when the property owners return.

But according to disaster relief and recovery agencies, there's nothing mysterious about it.

Agencies like California Governor's Office of Emergency Services can remove trees during the course of clean-up after disasters like wildfires and hurricanes.

Also in that category is PG&E, which is mandated by the California Public Utilities Commission to protect the integrity of its power lines.

There may also be some not-so-legal activity occurring, as some see financial opportunity with logs sitting on unattended property.

But none of that makes property owners feel better, according to a litany of complaints voiced Thursday during a gathering hosted by the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council at the Spring Valley School.

If nothing else, it gave the property owners a chance to better understand the process of disaster recovery.

Within days, PG&E crews were on ridge roads, surveying the damage and seeing what had to be done, including removing trees. So too were other utility service providers.

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A shattered tree hangs precariously on Honey View Terrace in Paradise, five weeks after the Camp Fire.

## Trees

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### California taking

Ron Quigley of Cal OES noted that trees have been removed prior to and during the Phase 1 segment of post-wildfire clean-up to make sure conditions are safe for the work crews. While Cal OES and Cal Recycles are removing household hazardous waste, like paint cans and car batteries, any situation in which their crews were in danger from a tree or branch that could fall warrants removal.

Removal will likely continue during Phase 2 in which ash and other debris will be managed.

According to spokesman Paul Moreno on Friday, PG&E arborists were examining trees near the power lines. They were able to access the area because of easements the utility has with property owners.

Arborists marked trees "P1" for immediate hazards or "P2" for ones that could fall within a year.

Regarding the latter, Moreno said, "A tree can be damaged by the fire, but not expected to continue living, posing a hazard." Even trees outside the easements can be removed if they are tall and could fall on lines or against power poles. Arborists, he said, use their training to determine the tree's future.

Following the arborists' marks, tree contractors — roughly 1,500 of them — go to work.

Moreno noted that trees can be marked "NC" for new construction, meaning the tree can be removed because a power pole is being relocated and in range of dangerous trees.

Moreno said PG&E will ask if the property owners want to keep the wood, and may cut it into smaller chunks for them. It will also chip branches that are 4 inches in diameter or less, but will leave larger limbs.

A Concow resident complained that downed trees and branches were left on her property after the 2008 fire, and it took help from



PHOTOS BY KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

While Debbie's Quilt Shop managed to survive the Camp Fire flames in Paradise, it was pierced by a falling tree that remained wedged in the store's roof more than a month later.



Debbie's Quilt Shop in Paradise, damaged by a tree that fell into it during the deadly Camp Fire, remains a mess a month later.



Debbie Andres, owner of Debbie's Quilt Shop in Paradise, sweeps up the damage caused when a tree crashed through her roof during the Camp Fire.



A tree trimmer braves the heights to remove a tree in Paradise on Dec. 13.

the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council to chip or remove the wood.

Moreno said in the case of Camp Fire, PG&E will remove all the wood without cost through Feb. 28, 2019.

"PG&E will leave a flier on the site. The property owner must consent to have the wood removed."

A toll free number has been established for property owners to make arrangements through PG&E for wood removal at 1-888-421-1700, and to check if they qualify.

Other agencies or com-

panies that may be removing trees include Caltrans, Cal Fire, or communication companies like AT&T.

Moreno said the wood removed from private property is being taken to a variety of sites, with use to be determined. One of the sites is on Pentz Road, near the Clark Road intersection.

PG&E may be returning to certain properties, Moreno said, to take care of larger stumps left by the contractors.

### Questionable

At least one property

owner who spoke during the meeting said he had found two men on his property with a flat-bed truck who were looking to remove cut trees. Asking about their access, he said he was told they were "subs of subs" and were basically harvesting cut trees illegally.

"We'll come on the property, identify any trees we feel are possibly a hazard to the crew, we take them down," said Cal OES' Quigley.

Quigley said if a property owner pays for trees to be taken out, they should keep

the receipts as part of the accounting for debris removal.

"We're not in the business of cutting trees, other than hazardous ones," Quigley told the group.

PG&E's Moreno said that PG&E will try to reach property owners first before cutting, if there is a way, such as a door hanger or phone number, and that property owners can appeal a tree marked for cutting.

Brenda Rightmyer from the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council said another meeting is planned at 1 p.m. Jan. 5 at the Spring Valley

School, 2771 Pentz Road. Butte County Supervisor Bill Connolly is expected to attend.

Butte County public information officer Callie Lutz noted, "We have also just added some frequently asked questions regarding tree removal on the website (<https://buttecounty-recovers.org/tree-removal>). The note at the top of that page includes an important note for people with burned structures."

Contact reporter Laura Urseny at 530-896-7756.