

Chico Enterprise Record  
1-2-2019

**CAMP FIRE**

# Recovery meeting planned near Oroville

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*Staff reports*

**OROVILLE** » Another Camp Fire recovery meeting is being hosted by the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council at 1 p.m. Saturday Jan. 5 at Spring Valley School, 2771 Pentz Road.

The meeting will provide Camp Fire victims an opportunity to get information and ask ques-

tions of representatives of FEMA and the state Office of Emergency Services.

Butte County Supervisor Bill Connelly, who represents the Concow and Yankee Hill areas, will be in attendance, according to Brenda Rightmyer, Butte County Fire Recovery Team ombudsman and managing director of Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council.



## *Help for Camp Fire survivor*

The Rotary Club of Oroville, due to donations made to Rotary District 5180, has formed a Camp Fire Relief committee to help meet some immediate and long-term needs of Camp Fire survivors who apply for assistance. Larry Hopper lost two homes in Concow and had no insurance. He is starting over on his property and expects clearance on his well shortly. He needed storage and with donations, the Rotary Club of Oroville was able to purchase a 1,200-gallon tank. At a recent meeting are Rotarians Ed Gredvig, Amy Jernigan, Bruce Spangler, Camp Fire survivor Larry Hopper of Concow; Dean Gurr, president, Rotary Club of Oroville; and Bryan Flicker, Rotary Camp Fire Relief Committee chairman.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 1-16-2019

### WEATHER

# Evacuation warning issued for Pulga

#### *Staff reports*

**PULGA »** The Butte County Sheriff's Office has issued an evacuation warning for the community of Pulga because of the potential for flooding in the area.

The Sheriff's Office said the warning will stand from 10 p.m. Tuesday through 7 a.m. Thursday.

Residents in the Pulga area are advised to head for higher ground beforehand, the Sheriff's Office said.

The evacuation warning comes after the National Weather Service issued a flood watch for Butte County, including in the areas affected by the Camp Fire.

The flood watch is in effect from 4 p.m. Wednesday

through Thursday morning.

A flood watch indicates the possibility of flooding, which could become life threatening.

People in the affected areas, or those who are near waterways downstream from affected areas, should be prepared to flee toward higher ground in the event of heavy rainfall, an evacua-

tion notice or evidence of soil instability.

The Sheriff's Office said residents, utility workers and others in the Camp Fire burn area should be prepared to take immediate action to reach higher ground if necessary. People should call 9-1-1 should they see any evidence of soil instability or debris flows.

CAMP FIRE

# EVACUEE CREATES SURVIVOR MURALS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Rob Fogle poses with his phoenix mural in Concow which he created as a symbol of hope for Camp Fire survivors.

By Risa Johnson

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**CONCOW** » Rob Fogle, a 38-year-old artist from Wilmington, North Carolina, packed up his van a few months ago after his home was majorly damaged by Hurricane Florence and headed for Butte County.

His main goal was to create some murals in major California cities including L.A. and Oakland to get more exposure, but quickly his mission changed when the Camp Fire broke out on Nov. 8.

"I came out and tried very hard to paint in a very populated city so everybody could see it because, you know — giant murals, big street art — it works for me as a billboard," Fogle said. "But then when this came about, all of a sudden, it was like, 'It looks like my purpose is different.'"

Fogle consulted with his longtime friend, Concow resident Anthony Colombo, and the two settled on an



A mural of a phoenix created by Rob Fogle, an artist from Wilmington, N.C., says "Rise Again!" Fogle, a survivor of Hurricane Florence, wanted to create something to inspire Camp Fire survivors.

image and a location. Fogle would spray paint a colorful phoenix on the wall of a dilapidated train bridge in Concow, a popular swimming spot for locals in the summer.

This was a place likely few people would see, but

the piece would be for them — the community members — not for him.

"I like to think that art is a kind of healing art form, if used right," he said.

The small, rural community of Concow in Butte County was devastated by

the Camp Fire, along with the towns of Paradise and Magalia. More than 18,000 structures burned and at least 86 people were killed in the wildfire.

Colombo described his community as one that is tight-knit, resilient and full of "mountain folk." His home and farm survived unscathed, but most of his friends and neighbors lost everything.

"It was one thing we could do for them," Colombo said.

Fogle said he generally takes a few months out of a year to do an East Coast road trip, painting murals along the way, and that he wanted to replicate his tradition in California for a long time. He said he usually makes an effort to get the approval of the property owner when he wants to do a mural but admitted that he did not get permission in this case.

"I felt like the intentions were good, so I went for it," he said.

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## Murals

FROM PAGE 1

Fogle said he has received an outpouring of support from people who have seen the phoenix either in person or on social media. He got an offer from the owner of Scooter's Cafe in Oroville, which is temporarily closed due to fire damage, to do another Camp Fire-inspired mural inside which he just wrapped up.

That one features a motorcyclist with a phoenix on his jacket, with a forest fire in the rear view mirror.

"I kind of wanted to signify that the fire's behind us and we're moving forward now," he said.

Fogle said he camped in his van near the phoenix mural for about two weeks until it was finished. It was cold, but things went smoothly for the most part — besides a run-in with poison oak.

"It got to a point where I had to tape my eyes open, because they swelled up so bad," he said. "We'll just leave it at that ... that was a journey."

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Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 530-896-7763.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rob Fogle, an artist from Wilmington, N.C., recently finished a mural inside Scooters Cafe, which is temporarily closed due to damage from the Camp Fire.

# 'Severely impacted:' barriers to housing

By Risa Johnson

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**CHICO »** It was obvious from the first days of the Camp Fire that finding housing for the victims in Butte County was going to be a nightmare.

Before the fire broke out on Nov. 8 and spread through the communities of Butte Creek Canyon, Paradise, Magalia and Concow, leaving devastation in its wake, the housing vacancy rate was just 1.5 to 2.5 percent. Now it's basically zero, says Ed Mayer, executive director of the Butte County Housing Authority. That is compounded by hotels and apartments being filled up as well.

At least 50 people remain inside at the Red Cross shelter, though the county and state tried to get everyone out by Thursday, because they don't have another immediate, stable housing option.

"We've gone from impacted to severely, severely impacted," Mayer said.

The housing situation in the county is so bleak, that Mayer refers to it as "the second disaster" after the wildfire which killed at least 86 people and destroyed over 14,000 homes. While support in terms of donations and volunteers has been overwhelming, the one major need isn't being met.

"We need housing units," he said. "We need a lot of housing stock. That's the one thing we need

that we don't have."

Housing affordability is also a different story in Chico, the largest city in the area, and the closest to Paradise. The town of Paradise was home to a significant population of older people and people with low or very low income levels.

"If you lived on edge, you could edge around in Paradise," he said.

As for affordable housing development, obviously needed now more than ever, there isn't likely to be a mass of developments to meet the high demand anytime soon. Mayer said that on average, it takes 3-7 years to complete a project 50-100 units in size.

He said the amount of state regulations are a big hindrance, but noted that some proposals from new Gov. Gavin Newsom should help.

"It's really hard to build housing in this state," Mayer said. "Everything is stacked against you."

When it comes down to it, people in temporary housing situations like a friend's couch or family member's spare bedroom will probably be forced to leave the area, he said. Many of the Hous-



DAN REIDEL — ENTERPRISE-RECORD FILE

Xena relaxes on a bed at the Red Cross shelter as people try to figure out what's next for them Jan. 23. At least 50 people remain inside at the Red Cross shelter at the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds in Chico.

ing Authority's clients from Paradise have relocated all across the western states, Mayer said.

### What's being done about it

While new housing developments can't go up overnight, it's not all doom and gloom.

The Chico City Council has approved development impact fee reductions and is working to accelerate the production of accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, also known as "granny" or in-law units. Adding to that inventory can help address the need for low rent,

one- or two-bedroom rentals, said Chico Mayor Randall Stone.

"That still is a sweet spot for units," Stone said.

He acknowledged this would only make a small dent in the demand for housing — maybe an additional 100-150 ADUs built this year — but it could help.

Stone said one of the major challenges currently is identifying land appropriate for temporary housing such as trailers and mobile housing units.

"We have a real estate problem," Stone said. "That's the tightest bottleneck."

So far, one possibility in north Chico was shot down by residents, but Stone said negotiations for other loca-

tions are continuing with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"They're fruitful discussions," Stone said.

Up to 350 FEMA trailers in Gridley are being made available to Camp Fire evacuees. There are also 12 trailers at Rolling Hills Casino near Corning.

Housing prices have risen, but the county and cities in Butte County have been able to protect renters by passing ordinances placing a moratorium on rental rate increases exceeding 10 percent.

Caseworkers are working with the people remaining at the Red Cross shelter to identify the next best stable, safe housing option for them. A \$1 million donation from the Butte Strong Fund is helping remove barriers to finding that next best option, by helping with rent, for example.

While the city of Chico, sort of a big sister to Paradise, can be influential — after all, public backlash against processing debris in the city stopped the state's plan in its tracks — the city is only in control of its own jurisdiction, Mayor Stone noted.

"We are not in the driver's seat," Stone said. "We are not even in the back seat quite yet."

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Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 530-896-7763.

# Chico Enterprise Record

2-4-2019



## *A nationwide effort*

Jim Matus, Pacific Central No. 2 Area director, presented Jay and Louise Nicholson with a \$3,000 check from the Vintage Chevrolet Club of America, California Fire Relief Fund during Sierra View Region's January meeting. Shortly after the Camp Fire and the Southern California fire, the VCCA National President, Jim Gebhardt and area directors, Jim Matus and Jim Karras, formed the Fire Relief Fund for members that lost homes. Members from throughout the country donated to help their Vintage Chevrolet Club families. The Sierra View Region had six members affected and each received, or will receive, \$3,000. The group is still searching for fellow member John Miller, who lost his home in Magalia.



CAMP FIRE

# \$17B in FEMA funds in jeopardy

**New rules:** No RVs or temporary housing on property until cleanup is complete

By Robin Epley  
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**PARADISE »** Emotions and tempers ran high Monday morning as the Paradise Town Council held an open, emergency meeting before voting on a new ordinance that would make it illegal for Camp Fire survivors to live in recreational vehicles on property with burned debris.

The decision comes a little more than a week after the Town Council and the Butte County Board of Supervisors were informed that the previously-passed ordinances that allowed residents to live in RVs more than 100 feet from debris could jeopardize the \$1.7 billion in Federal Emergency Management Agency funding earmarked for debris removal.

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**AT A GLANCE**

**What happened:** The Paradise Town Council and Butte County Board of Supervisors made it illegal for fire survivors to live in RVs on property with burned debris.

**What it means:** Residents who live in RVs on their property will have to move.

**Why:** FEMA told Paradise and Butte County that having residents on properties could jeopardize \$1.7 billion in federal money.

**Similar decision:** Unincorporated areas face same rules as Paradise property owners

By Robin Epley  
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**OROVILLE »** The emergency meeting at the Butte County Board of Supervisors on Monday afternoon was different in nearly every way from the earlier emergency meeting at Town Hall in Paradise though the result was the same.

It was also no less important to the people of unincorporated

Butte County who showed up to express their frustration.

The crowd was much smaller, with fewer outbursts, and generally a note of sadness hung over the proceedings in Oroville, where anger, frustration and yelling had been dominant in Paradise.

The second meeting of the day was held to address much of the

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## Decision

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same issue — the Paradise Town Council and the Butte County Board of Supervisors were recently informed that the previously-passed emergency housing ordinances (that allowed residents to live in RVs more than 100 feet from debris) could jeopardize the \$1.7 billion in Federal Emergency Management Agency reimbursement money that has been promised for debris removal — totaling 75 percent of the more than \$2 billion cost of cleanup.

Butte County Health Officer Dr. Andy Miller was present, and spoke regarding the announcement he made back in late November, warning that the fire debris and ash was unsafe to live near. Miller and the Butte County Office of Public Health have continued to stand by this statement

since then; Communications Manager Lisa Almaguer said Monday, “That has been the health department’s stance this whole time.”

It’s this warning from a local official that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is using as the hinge upon which the funding rests — as the Board of Supervisors explained today, FEMA’s reasoning is that if people return to a disaster area, then the hazard to their health from the debris must not be bad enough to require their reimbursement money.

“My empathy is with everyone who had been impacted by this, it’s awful,” said Supervisor Bill Connelly. “None of us on this board, we’re not like this; we don’t like to put people out.”

“It’s just one of those awful things that’s forced upon you when you’re elected, you have to do a job, looking at the overall picture

and that’s a great deal of money that FEMA’s going to reimburse us,” he said.

Several residents of Magalia, Concow and other affected areas spoke, many were concerned with the health risks associated with moving back — even though new rules and regulations allow for people to live in unaffected homes on property with burned debris.

Susan Clinton was one of several speakers, she asked the board why people can’t live on a large parcel, far from debris, but her daughter’s school has reopened, surrounded by ash, debris and other destruction.

“We’re not gonna notice this in a year from now,” Clinton said. “We’re gonna notice this in 30 years from now. If our kids are exposed to that, what then?”

Supervisor Tami Ritter said that she would like to see the county ask charities like the North Valley Community Foundation to help

residents who will be displaced again.

“They did what they were supposed to do. They followed the rules. They applied for the permits,” Ritter said. “(They’re) now being penalized and I think this is a really appropriate use of those funds that have been donated.”

Despite the evident misgivings and frustration the board had with the situation at hand, the vote to amend the urgency ordinance passed with four out of five votes, with Supervisor Doug Teeter phoning in from Port St. Lucie, Florida, for the vote, and Supervisor Debra Lucero absent.

The portion of Butte County Code Chapter 53 that allowed residents to reside in temporary dwellings on residential property has been removed, all other portions will remain as they were.

Contact reporter Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.

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### Ruling

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The new urgency ordinance, No. 575, replaces Urgency Ordinance No. 573, and changes who is allowed to be on property with burned debris before removal and when.

Under Ordinance No. 573 passed in December, residents living in temporary housing — RVs and trailers — with a qualifying destroyed structure for debris removal would be able to live on the property up until the time of clean up, then leave during debris removal, and then be allowed to return.

The new ordinance, No. 575, passed Monday, says no one living in temporary housing can live on property with a qualifying burned structure until the debris is removed — they can only return to their property with an RV or trailer after it's certified clean.

Paradise Town Manager Lauren Gill said she was hesitant to put a time stamp on it, but that cleanup and soil samples could take anywhere from several weeks to a few months to be completed.

The issue at hand stems from a warning Butte

County Health Officer Andy Miller made back in late November, warning that the fire debris area was unsafe to live near.

The Paradise Town Council says it made the emergency ordinances with that knowledge, and the original urgency ordinance was given the OK by a FEMA representative.

Less than two weeks ago, FEMA's Federal Coordinating Officer David Samaniego told California Office of Emergency Services Acting Deputy Director Eric Lamoureux that if Paradise and Butte County allowed residents to reoccupy their property prior to fire debris and hazardous materials being removed, they would be contradicting the county's own health officials.

That contradiction could nullify the terms of FEMA's reimbursement offer of \$1.7 billion.

Lamoureux, in turn, notified the town council and the board of supervisors, and both bodies immediately stopped issuing utility pull permits the next day.

However, approximately 100 residents in Paradise, and about 30 in the unincorporated county area, had already been issued pull permits for their RVs and trailers before then.

Town Manager Lauren Gill said they are hoping

to have those 100-plus residents be the first to receive debris removal services, and the town is in the process of negotiating with the Paradise Alliance Church and with nearby state parks to house the RVs until that process is completed.

"I hate making this decision," said councilor Mike Zuccolillo, calling the situation "illogical and quite frankly, stupid."

"We've got to get our town cleaned up, and I feel like we have a financial gun to our head," he said.

Tensions ran high at the podium too, as resident after resident took to the stand to voice concern, anger, frustration and sadness at yet another roadblock in front of their recovery — with many asking why a FEMA representative was not present to answer questions. More than 200 residents and concerned citizens were present, filling the small chambers and spilling out into the hall.

Part of the confusion and frustration with FEMA's requirement is that RVs are not allowed to be on hazardous properties until the property is cleaned, but residents with houses that survived can remain living there, in any proximity, while debris cleanup occurs. Additionally, residents with RVs may re-

turn once their property is cleaned, but the status of their neighbor's property has no bearing — even if they are living closer to that debris than their own.

"I'm asking you not to throw the people of this town into the cold in the middle of winter," said resident Ben Walker. "If the option is to choose federal money to rebuild the town, or the people to rebuild the town — choose the people."

Several members of the audience demanded the right to speak after the official public comment period was over, and with the encouragement of councilor Steve Crowder, Paradise Mayor Jody Jones allowed additional time to hear from several more. One audience member was asked to leave toward the end as he shouted, "They don't dictate us!" and "Make the right decision!" as he was escorted out.

Each of the five council members seemed deeply conflicted and emotional about the vote, many spoke on the verge of tears and anger with the decision that was in front of them, but ultimately, the repeal and replacement ordinance passed unanimously.

Contact reporter Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 2-6-2019

# NVCF grants nearly \$180K for Camp Fire relief

## Money will go to schools, the town and local organizations

**By Risa Johnson**

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**CHICO »** The North Valley Community Foundation is granting approximately \$178,394 to several groups providing relief to Camp Fire survivors.

Funds are going toward everything from schools, to the town of Paradise, to a group hosting non-denominational celebration of life services on Nov. 8 for the people who died in the fire. The latest round of grants bring the total of Camp Fire relief funds distributed to more than \$1.6

million.

More details on the allocation of the money in grants awarded on Friday:

- The group hosting celebration of life ceremonies: \$11,432.
- From the Ground Up Farms to provide gift cards and cash cards to fire victims: \$25,000.
- Yankee Hill Historical Society to provide a portable toilet and hand-washing station for a facility to house community meetings in Yankee Hill and Concow: \$3,712.
- Sierra View Elementary School to offset costs of supplies for new and existing students displaced by the fire: \$3,750.
- Town of Paradise for a roadway condition assessment: \$24,500.
- Butte County Fire Safe Council to "develop and publish the California Native Plant Society Wildfire Recovery Guide to help with wildfire prevention": \$15,000.
- Throwing Starfish Foundation for direct assistance for survivors: \$20,000.
- Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council for direct assistance for survivors: \$25,000.
- RV4Campfirefamily for

purchasing and repairing RVs to benefit those affected by the fire: \$25,000.

- Chico Community Scholarship Association for scholarships for graduating seniors for survivors: \$25,000.

The foundation also recently granted \$965,000 to Butte County schools through a donation from Ken Grossman and Katie Gonser.

A complete list of grants can be found at [nvcf.org](http://nvcf.org).

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*Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 530-896-7763.*

# KRCRTV.COM

2-10-2019

CONCOW, Calif. – Scooter's Cafe, a popular Concow restaurant is reopening its doors this month after having to close during the Camp Fire.

Dan and Bonnie Salmon, the owners of Scooter's Cafe, are two hard working restaurateurs who've survived more than one disaster over the last year. Now, they're ready to give back to the community.

The restaurant used to be an old gas station, but was taken over by the Salmons more than 20 years ago. Since then, it's become a popular spot with locals and bikers for food and drink.

After narrowly surviving the Camp Fire, the cafe is almost ready to open once again, but with some slight changes.

"We're gonna scale it back a bit because it's just gonna be a mom and pop place again. Me and Bonnie are gonna run it all by ourselves," Salmon said.

Excited locals have already shown up to the café in person, wondering when it will reopen. The grand reopening is set for February 27.

"They're calling, they're Facebooking, they're saying when-when-when. It's like, we're trying! But, you know like Dan said, the community supported us and we're just ready to support them," Salmon said.

It's been an emotional journey for Dan and Bonnie. Dan recently survived a battle with prostate cancer. He took the last of his medication in December of 2018. Between cancer and the Camp Fire, he and Bonnie are just happy to be alive.

The feeling is mutual for many in the surrounding community, who haven't forgotten Dan's delicious food, or he and Bonnie's commitment to their neighbors.

The Salmons are still waiting to get their alcoholic beverage license transferred back to them, and for AT&T to restore phone service to the restaurant. After that, they said they'll be ready to serve their customers again.

# Chico News & Review

2-14-2019

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## Recovering naturally

Permaculture project greens Camp Fire restoration

By Evan Tuchinsky

This article was published on 02.14.19.

On a recent morning, the ground still wet from overnight rain and the air chilled but still, Matthew Trumm surveyed a straightaway of Honey Run Road. The Camp Fire had whipped through this part of Butte Creek Canyon three months earlier; some houses burned, others remained.

Trumm, a local designer certified in the ecological principles of permaculture, strode toward a property fronted by bamboo, where he'd met the owner previously. Several clusters stood tall—some rods green, some tan, some yellower; none singed. Back and to the side, heat-mangled metal lay piled amid the remnants of a home.

Through the canyon, throughout the Ridge and Concow areas, Trumm has seen such juxtapositions of survival and destruction. He can cite a reason in cases like this: Bamboo is naturally flame-resistant, so stalks planted in rows can act like a fire break. Indeed, a neighboring structure with a wood fence behind a wall of bamboo appeared untouched.

So, as residents in Butte County's burn zones recover, he firmly believes in environmentally rooted solutions.

"It's so important if we're going to rebuild these areas that we give everybody all the tools that are available to them," Trumm said.

Toward that end, he's spearheading the Camp Fire Restoration Project, an effort to help private property owners and public agencies apply permaculture to restoring damaged lands.



**Matthew Trumm shows a spot in Butte Creek Canyon where bamboo acted as a fire break.**

**PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY**

### **Get connected:**

For more about the Camp Fire Restoration Project, visit Treetop Permaculture's Facebook page (@ttpermaculture), which includes links to events and a project group page.

Trumm—who's based in Berry Creek with a business, Treetop Permaculture, in Oroville—has prominent environmentalists on board, including soil biologist Elaine Ingham. The Soil Foodweb School, an agricultural cooperative she pioneered, confirmed Ingham's involvement, replying to the CN&R that she's "definitely endorsing" the project and "giving some advice," though "her direct involvement on the ground is pending."

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The endeavor itself is in its infancy. Ultimately, Trumm envisions experts such as Ingham and permaculturist Penny Livingston-Stark, of the Regenerative Design Institute in Bolinas, training local citizens and public officials—first in classrooms, then at a base camp built in a burn area. Organizers would deliver the resources required to restore the landscape in a sustainable way, such as seed, biochar, mushroom spawn and trees.

Construction and supplies cost money, of course. The Camp Fire Restoration Project launched a GoFundMe campaign Nov. 13, five days after the fire, to raise \$100,000; as of early February, 53 people had contributed a total of \$3,225. Nonetheless, Trumm and his group have embarked on phase one: setting up three staging areas for deploying restoration materials and helping residents on properties.

The staging areas, each around a quarter acre, are in Butte Creek Canyon, Paradise and the Concow/Yankee Hill area. Teams currently are distributing waddles (for erosion-control fencing), straw bales (gardening) and wood chips (ground cover); Trumm hopes the offerings expand when supplies get replenished.

"Creating the model is the most important thing with all this," he said. "I tell everyone, 'We're late to the party.' We're coming in on the back end—we're scrambling to try to get things done here...."

"We're basically calling for this area to be a hub, a melting pot, for all of the world's technologies in sustainable design and ways to think about rebuilding in a way where we're rebuilding with nature and the climatic realities we have."

Permaculture centers on designing with ecosystems in mind. Practitioners—another locally is Rosa Maicas, founder of the Permafunk Institute in Chico—incorporate features that mimic natural systems. (See "Integrated living," *Greenways*, March 15, 2015.)

Trumm pointed to fire safety, food security, water supply and climate as four major considerations in planning a wildfire rebuild. In permaculture design, those translate to—among other things—natural fire breaks, plant selection, irrigation and shade.

Trumm's interest transcends land restoration, even if that's a considerable focus of the Camp Fire Restoration Project. He's invited Miguel Elliott from Living Earth Structures in Petaluma, specializing in cob and adobe construction, to visit and discuss ideas for the local rebuild. Cob building combines clay and straw into a plaster that becomes a ceramic when exposed to high heat.

"I would welcome a fire for one of my houses," Elliott said by phone. "Some people intentionally burn their [cob] homes to make them stronger."

Coating wood with the earthen material is another option for fire resistance. Elliott plans to demonstrate his techniques locally at a workshop in August. For this and other sessions, Trumm hopes to secure classroom space at Butte College.

"Our biggest thing," Trumm said, "[is] we're looking at alternative, sustainable design models for homes."

Whatever the choice, he hopes it's made with ecology in mind. Trumm has a detailed explanation of the cause of California's wildfire epidemic: Boiled down, it's that we've separated animals—fuel-reducing grazers, but also ourselves—from traditional interactions with the wild environment.

"We've been able to tidy up the world to a point where we don't feel [as if] we're a part of nature," he said. "Unfortunately, we stay so disconnected most of our lives that we live in that comfort zone, we become compartmentalized from it."

"But it's events like this that wake us up, [show] that nature is right there and if we don't start thinking about how to design ourselves into nature, she's going to come with a fury."

# 100 DAYS AFTER FLAMES: WHERE WE ARE NOW



MATT BATES — ENTERPRISE-RECORD FILE

A mural is painted on a wall standing in the ruins of Paradise as snow covers the town on Feb. 5. In the 100 days since the Camp Fire destroyed Paradise and much of Magalia, Concow and Butte Creek Canyon, survivors are finding ways to express themselves and look toward rebuilding.

**By Robin Epley**  
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As the one month anniversary to the Camp Fire loomed in December of last year, the Chico Enterprise-Record looked at impacts of the fire that included the donations and help pouring into our community, re-population, the shelters (both official and unofficial) that had sprung to life seemingly overnight and, of course, the nascent plans and hopes of the community to rebuild.

Months later, many of those issues are still at the forefront of recovery efforts, with ever-shifting goals and roadblocks to recovery and success. Survivors have learned to take each day as it

comes, changing plans with each new challenge.

Now, 100 days after the worst fire in California history, we're revisiting those same eight topics, to evaluate where our community is in the recovery process — and just how far we have to go.

## Search for missing

At its peak, the list of missing issued by the Butte County Sheriff's Office was more than 1,300 names long. Now, there are just the two people unaccounted for.

So far, the death toll stands at 85, and the Butte County Sheriff's Office has conclusively identified the remains of 73 people. Those names have already been

released to the public, and their lives and legacies are chronicled in an ongoing project in the Enterprise-Record — a project that aims to honor every life lost with a front page obituary.

Until every last victim has been named, many feel as though the trauma of the fire continues.

## Repopulation

Though thousands of survivors have chosen to say goodbye to their homes (or what remained of them), many have also chosen to stay and rebuild.

All evacuation orders in the burn scar were lifted by mid-December. Survivors who chose to return found themselves faced with a

new conundrum — to stay on their property during cleanup, or to find other accommodations until it was feasible to live there again. Very real fears of toxicity in the ashes and environment have plagued Butte County's residents, with some in nearby cities like Oroville staging protests at the possibility of moving contaminated debris to sites in their cities for sorting and removal.

Thousands of people signed up for debris removal services through the California Office of Emergency Services and the Federal Emergency Management Agency with the understanding that they could live on their prop-

# Camp Fire

FROM PAGE 1

erty before and after (but not during) debris removal.

That process hit a snag nearly two weeks ago when FEMA announced the town of Paradise and Butte County may not be eligible for more than \$1.7 billion in reimbursement if homeowners live on debris removal-eligible property in temporary housing (but not if they're living in a house, to the confusion and frustration of many survivors) before removal occurs.

The Paradise Town Council and the Butte County Board of Supervisors scrambled to adjust emergency ordinances and to make plans for the more than 130 people who had received utility pull permits and were already living on their former properties, to the dismay and anger of hundreds who showed up to protest at a Town Council meeting in early February.

## Shelters

The last Red Cross shelter in Butte County closed Friday at the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds, where it moved in January, consolidating what was left of several official Red Cross shelters across the county.

As of Tuesday, 63 RVs were still parked at the fairgrounds, and those living in them will be transitioned soon to paying a \$40 daily fee to stay there, though some will be eligible for financial assistance through FEMA.

The 130-plus residents who were living on debris removal-eligible properties in Paradise and unincorporated Butte County have been invited to move to one of a few dozen available spots for RVs in Oroville or at the Paradise Alliance Church at 6491 Clark Road, said Shelby Boston, director of the Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services, at a recent supervisors meeting.

It's unknown how many residents will take advantage of the offer, since some will have found alternate options, Boston said.

The Silver Dollar Fairgrounds is also making ready to take in 61 FEMA trailers to house evacuees, though it will not be ready for several weeks. The fair board signed an 18-month contract with FEMA effective Feb. 1 that includes a 6-month term and month-to-month extensions for up to an additional 12 months.

## Federal and state aid

As of today, both the Chico and Paradise Disaster Recovery Centers will be closed on weekends, staying open only Monday-Friday, in Chico from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and in Paradise from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. They are both slated to close March 1, though the Small Busi-



LIPO CHING — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Karen Frost, 76, of Oroville speaks to a reporter after looking at the message board for missing Camp Fire evacuees at The Neighborhood Church in Chico on Nov. 15, 2018. In the days after the fire, thousands were reported missing, but just two people still unaccounted for as of Wednesday, according to the Butte County Sheriff's Office.



KARL MONDON — AREA NEWS GROUP

Crosses commemorate the 85 victims of the Camp Fire, the deadliest wildfire in state history, at Skyway and Skyway Crossroad in Paradise.

ness Administration will open a Disaster Loan Outreach Center in both Chico and Paradise, planned for sometime in the next four to eight weeks.

The last day for property owners to sign up for the government-sponsored Camp Fire debris removal program was Friday.

Property owners who hire a private contractor for debris removal can sign up for the "alternative program" by completing an application and submitting a work plan to Butte County Environmental Health by Feb. 28.

The SBA has also approved more than \$300 million in loans for Camp Fire survivors, including \$11 million for businesses and private nonprofits, and 2,452 loans totaling more than \$287 million for homeowners and renters.

And in January, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced his plan to allocate \$305 million as part of his first state budget to expand the state's ability to fight wildfires and better alert systems during future disasters.

## Donations

The North Valley Community Fund remains one of the largest, long-term recovery fundraisers. The group has distributed more than \$2.2 million to community organizations serving evacuees and first responders. A recent donation of \$25,000 went to the Inspire Foundation, to help cover the costs of 70 SAT and PSAT exams for affected high school students, and 100 AP exams.

Other groups, such as

the Fire Angels Network, the Butte Strong Fund, and Facebook groups like Paradise Fire Adopt-A-Family, continue efforts to help families and individual survivors directly with gas and gift card giveaways, tools and more.

## Schools

The Paradise Unified School District found sites to relocate students to in Chico, Durham, Oroville and Magalia before schools reopened in early December.

Paradise Elementary students and staff are getting back to the business of education at Bird Street School in Oroville while Ponderosa Elementary students and staff have set up shop at Durham Elementary School in Durham, and the Paradise Unified school board voted unanimously in December to reopen Cedarwood Elementary School in Magalia.

Oroville City Elementary School also helped out by relocating its own students, so that more than 150 students from Paradise could use the facility. In Durham, the Durham Unified School District offered nine classrooms for up to 250 Ponderosa students.

700 students from Paradise High School started school again last month at a temporary campus near the Chico municipal airport. Paradise High administrators said they hope they can return to their own campus, which mostly escaped the fire, by August.

## Lawsuits

More than a dozen lawsuits had already been filed

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by early December against utility giant Pacific Gas & Electric that involve more than 430 plaintiffs. One of the first to file was retired Chico Police Chief Kirk Trostle and his wife, Patricia Garrison, a retired elementary principal, who are suing PG&E for negligence.

A Camp Fire lawsuit on behalf of 51 people and the Paradise Community Guilds was filed against PG&E in San Francisco on Jan. 30. The Paradise Community Guilds lost its headquarters, Norton Buffalo Hall, in the fire. Most plaintiffs in these lawsuits are suing the company over damaged or destroyed property, as well as injuries sustained in the fire.

PG&E filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on Jan. 29.

## Rebuilding

It's hard to see daily, small steps as success in any situation, but 100 days on, Butte County has certainly made significant progress toward recovery.

Paradise, Magalia, Concow, Butte Creek Canyon and the surrounding areas will never look the same way they did on Nov. 7, the day before the fire, but the indomitable spirit and determination that got the community through the first 100 days will inevitably get us through the next 100 — and the 100 after that.

Contact reporter Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.



**BIDWELL PARK**

# Maidu village proposed for former Chico deer pen

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**By Laura Urseny**

*lurseny@chicoer.com*

*@LauraUrseny on Twitter*

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**CHICO »** For decades, a fenced area to the east of the Chico Creek Nature Center held deer, but now there's a plan to build an interactive exhibit of a Maidu village there.

An application has been made to the state for about \$1 million in Prop. 68 funding to cover the cost of the project.

Representatives of the city, the Chico Area Recreation and Park District and the local Mechoopda tribe have been working for months on the project. The concept design and budget was submitted to the state last week, and if the project makes the cut, the city can expect a visit by state representatives for further information.

It's an exciting concept, according to Sandra Knight, vice chair of the local Mechoopda tribe, which sees the educational

benefit to be multi-layered.

To have what project coordinators call a "living village" allows young tribal members a deeper understanding of their culture, helped along by tribe elders, Knight said, along with giving the community another resource for furthering local history and cultural tourism.

According to the concept design, the exhibit would include a meandering trail that would connect aspects of the exhibit, including a shelter — a plank house — a native plant nursery, and interpretive displays about the tribe. Possible displays relate to housing, food, acorn processing, basketry and more. The project also includes a new bathroom, better lighting, and improved parking area for the area adjacent to the Chico Creek Nature Center on East Eighth Street.

While there are many examples of John and Annie Bidwell's legacy — like the

**EXHIBIT » PAGE 8**

#### FROM PAGE 1

Bidwell Mansion — there is little in the way of remembering and recognizing the Maidu, Knight said.

“There is very little to remind people about the tribal roots.”

### Partnering

What makes this significant, according to City Manager Mark Orme, is the collaborative nature of the project, which has involved the Mechoopda tribe, CARD, the city, Bidwell Park and Playground Commission, and others.

The city would oversee the funding and would construct the project, which is on city-owned Bidwell Park property.

As an affiliated tribe, the local Mechoopda would oversee the cultural direction and educational aspects. The Mechoopda are one of several local tribes that are Maidu.

CARD would organize the programming and schedule events and tours, as well as leasing the exhibit from the city. CARD already leases the neighboring Nature Center from the city.

In addition, the California Conservation Corps would help with clearing the overgrown area, which lost the last deer in 2005.

### Meetings

Several community meetings about the project are planned, according to Herman, including one at 6:30 p.m. March 7

at the Nature Center, 1968 E. Eighth St.

The project has already received support from the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission, and CARD’s board, but would need to go through environmental review and city permitting.

Park and Natural Resources Manager Linda Herman noted that Bidwell Park’s master plan includes a section on Cedar Grove and the Nature Center area.

“We’ve talked about improvements here,” said Herman.

### Tourism

According to CARD General Manager Ann Willmann, the recognition for the Nature Center is growing, and a Maidu experience would be an additional

draw. Willmann said that over 2018, the Nature Center hosted 110 field trips, including schools from Placerville and Redding.

At one time the pen contained 15 to 20 deer, primarily rescued or collected by government agencies. In the ‘90s, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife (then called Fish and Game) decided the pen should be shut down. In 1995, the agency relocated some of the deer to a wildlife preserve, and directed a veterinarian to sterilize the remaining males, allowing the other deer to live out their lives. The last deer died in 2005.

At one time, there was a request to the Park Commission to turn the empty pen into a small-size dog park.

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Contact reporter *Laura Urseny* at 530-896-7756.



A map of the proposed Maidu Living Village shows a plant nursery and shelter along a meandering trail. The proposed village would be in the now-empty Bidwell Park deer pen on East Eighth Street in Chico.

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PHOTOS BY LAURA URSENY — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

A bench built by the Chico Kiwanis Club provides a convenient resting place Feb. 4 to view the Bidwell Park deer pen on East Eighth Street in Chico, which is now empty.



Injured or captured deer once ran in the Bidwell Park deer pen on East Eighth Street, visible Feb. 11 next to the Chico Creek Nature Center in Chico.



Among the partners proposing a Maidu village in the former Bidwell Park deer pen in Bidwell Park are (left to right) Shane Romain and Linda Herman of the city, Ann Willmann of Chico Area Recreation and Park District, and Sandra Knight of the Mechoopda tribe, pictured Feb. 13 at the Chico Creek Nature Center in Chico.

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### Building a village

Mechoopda, city and CARD collaborate on plan to create an interpretive exhibit

By Patrick Evans

This article was published on [02.21.19](#).



**Sandra Knight says an interactive exhibit dedicated to the Mechoopda Indian Tribe, of which she is vice chair, would offer insight into current traditions as well as those from times of pre-European contact. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA MCHENRY**

There are plenty of public parks, buildings and monuments that celebrate the history of Chico's settlers and founder Gen. John Bidwell. But there isn't a single park or monument named for the original inhabitants of Chico, members of the Mechoopda Indian Tribe—at least none that Tribal Vice Chair Sandra Knight can think of off the top of her head.

"None of our aboriginal names for the territory [are used], none of our tribe's names. Our members feel kind of invisible," Knight said.

The Mechoopda are looking to end that omission by building a cultural exhibit on a 3-acre plot of unused city land within Bidwell Park. The tribe is working with the city of Chico and the Chico Area Recreation and Park District (CARD) on the project, which is dependent on grant funding from the California Natural Resources Agency.

"It's been something we've wanted to do for a long time," Knight said, "to build some kind of cultural center where visitors could find out about the real story of the first people in the area, which is not in textbooks."

The Maidu Living Village is proposed for the fenced-off and unused deer pen next to the Chico Creek Nature Center. The plan is to create an interactive experience to teach visitors about the Mechoopda, a tribe of Maidu people, and provide a space for cultural activities like basket weaving and acorn processing.

Knight said the vision is for visitors to take a trip through the tribe's history, from precontact with settlers to the contact period and into the present. They would first assemble in an arbor area, and then take a guided tour through a native plant garden, a replica of a traditional precontact native home, and a replica of a wooden shack like one tribal members would have lived in at the rancheria. Visitors also could partake in hands-on experiences.

"We have some mortars and pestles, some very large mortars we could put there. It would be a good spot for people to actually touch them and grind acorns in them," Knight said.

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The project is contingent upon funding available through Proposition 68. Passed last June, it allowed the state to sell \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for grant programs for parks, water infrastructure and other environmental projects. It also authorized the state Legislature to appropriate \$40 million for a grant program administered by the Natural Resources Agency to fund projects that protect, restore or enhance California's cultural, community and natural resources.

Eligible projects must fulfill at least one of five requirements, which include protecting or restoring Native American cultural resources and developing visitor centers that educate the public about natural landscapes or the contributions of California's ethnic communities.

"The grant seemed like it was written for this project," Knight said.

The Chico Park Division is handling the grant proposal. The first phase of the process includes submitting a conceptual proposal with a rough estimate of the cost of the project and a sketch of the planned development. That was completed last week, according to Park Division Manager Linda Herman.

"The estimated costs and funds we are requesting for the project are approximately \$750,000, which includes a 10 percent contingency amount of \$68,156," Herman said in an email.

The city has contracted with North-Star Engineering to help put together the proposal and concept, but actual blueprints for the village won't be drawn up unless the grant is awarded. If the Natural Resources Agency approves the concept, the city will be invited to a second round of proposals later this spring, at which point City Council approval will be needed.

Herman said the city had long been looking for a use for the property, formerly an enclosure for injured deer rescued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

A key component of the village would be connecting it to the Chico Creek Nature Center next door. As part of the three-way collaboration on the project, CARD would oversee day-to-day operations and maintenance. The center is also perfectly situated to coordinate field trips to the village, CARD Director Ann Willmann said.

"Our focus will be on the kids coming through. We already have field trips that come through the nature center; this will add the opportunity for kids to learn about the Mechoopda tribe," Willmann said.

Operational costs could be covered by the fee the Nature Center would charge for field trips, Willmann said.

The center includes Mechoopda and Maidu history in its field trip curriculum, but the village project would offer a completely new learning opportunity for students, she added.

Knight said that the idea for the village's interactive exhibits was inspired by the exhibits at the Gold Nugget Museum in Paradise, which burned down in the Camp Fire. Instead of focusing on the lives of white settlers brought to Chico by the Gold Rush, the village would teach students how the Mechoopda lived and worked as stewards of the environment, Knight said. The living village also would differ from the Maidu exhibit at the Lake Oroville Visitor Center by focusing specifically on the culture and history of the Mechoopda.

"We want to convey why we love this land so much, that everything here is sacred; the water, the land, the salmon, we're family with those things," Knight said. "We want to convey that to young people, so they can respect the land like us."

CAMP FIRE



## Cal Fire releases initial 911 calls from the day the inferno broke out

By Risa Johnson and Robin Epley » [rjohnson@chicoer.com](mailto:rjohnson@chicoer.com) and [repley@chicoer.com](mailto:repley@chicoer.com)

**O**n the morning of Nov. 8, hundreds of 911 calls from Pulga, Concow, Magalia, Paradise and Butte Creek Canyon began pouring into dispatch centers across the county. Paradise Police and Fire departments, as well as the Butte County Sheriff's Office and Cal Fire fielded calls from terrified residents first in the path of the smoke, and then in the flames.

Last week, Cal Fire released two hours of their recordings. Together, the story they tell recreates just a sliver of that morning's panic and confusion. Throughout it all, the handful of dispatchers handled hundreds of calls calmly and quickly, with limited resources, in a rapidly changing situation. Below are some of the calls that stood out.

### 7:16 a.m.

*In the first call released, a woman driving from Chico to Paradise calls and asks if she should be worried.*

"Should I turn around, or...?" she asks.

*The dispatcher tells her there is a fire in the Jarbo Gap area, but nothing in Paradise. A moment later, the Butte County Sheriff's Office calls to say it's hearing reports that the fire may be moving toward the Concow area. The staff person asks if evacuations should be ordered.*

"I don't have information on that," the dispatcher says. "It is big. It is moving. They said rapid rate of spread."

*The dispatcher checks for an update and adds the fire is "past Pulga, moving toward the reservoir and threatening the community." The dispatcher says someone is being sent out to reassess the fire threat and will get back to dispatch in about 10 minutes.*

911CALLS » PAGE 2

### BY THE NUMBERS

**266**

calls from residents

**2 hours**

worth of calls (7:16 a.m. to 9:22 a.m.) That's about 2 calls a minute, on average

**18,804**

destroyed buildings, according to CalFire's estimates

**153,336**

acres burned

**85**

fatalities



**+** Listen to the Camp Fire unfold: The audio for all of these calls and more are available at [CHICOER.COM](http://CHICOER.COM).

## 911 Calls

FROM PAGE 1

**7:22 a.m.**

The Chico Fire Department reports that it's getting "all kinds of 911s."

The operator says the fire is in the Pulga area around Highway 70 heading west and that it is "fairly large."

The Chico Fire Department staff person says that callers are reporting smoke between Forest Ranch and Paradise.

The operator says the column of smoke is blowing in that direction.

"Unless they see an actual fire, it's probably the smoke from that," the operator tells them. — One minute later, the official order to evacuate Pulga is given.

**7:25 a.m.**

A woman calls from her home on Honey Run Road. She can see orange smoke across the sky. The operator tells her the fire is only in Concow, and it's probably just the sunrise behind the smoke that she sees.

**7:33 a.m.**

A woman by the name of Louise calls — she's not even dressed for the day yet and the fire is already moving through her yard and into her neighbor's. Her location is redacted. The operator encourages her to get out, to evacuate while she still can.

"There might not be engines that make it to that area though, so if you feel threatened, you need to get out, OK?" the operator tells her.

"I gotta go!" she says, panicking.

"You need to get out of there, OK?" he asks.

The call cuts out.

**7:35 a.m.**

The first call about a downed power line on Skyway is reported. Ten minutes later, a woman who works at the Paradise Unified School District calls to say one of their school buses is being blocked by it, but she's advised that it will be "a while" before anyone can send help. — Multiple calls come in for fires in the canyon. Hun-



dreds of residents in Paradise can see flames across the canyon in Concow, and the town is now directly in the path of a large column of smoke.

**7:51 a.m.**

A woman who lives on Lowry Lane on the west side of Paradise calls, sobbing.

"It's just getting big by the second. It's like ... my whole backyard is smoking, it's coming up to my house!" she tells them.

She says she'll be waiting on nearby Pentz Road for help to arrive.

"Ma'am, we have engines coming from everywhere, OK?" the operator tells her.

**7:52 a.m.**

A minute later, a man in Concow calls.

"Sir, are you reporting the fire on Concow or are you reporting a new incident?" the operator asks.

"Completely engulfed!" he shouts.

"Sir is there any way you can evacu—"

"No!" He interrupts her. "No there's no way, I'm surrounded by flames!"

**7:53 a.m.**

Another minute later, and a woman is calling — a spot fire has started on Jordan Hill Road, "and it's spreading super fast."

"Ma'am, we have fires everywhere from this major fire, we're doing everything we can and we're getting resources mobilized," the oper-

ator informs her.

"All right, well I-I can't put it out," she stammers.

"I know," the operator says. "I know."

**7:58 a.m.**

The Butte County Sheriff's Office calls. Some of the office's deputies along with a handful of evacuees are trapped in an area south of Concow, surrounded by fire. Dispatch advises them to stay in their vehicles if they are safe there.

**7:59 a.m.**

Paradise resident and former Butte County Sheriff Scott McKenzie calls.

"We have major, major flames right behind (redacted) Stark Lane," he tells the operator.

He goes on to narrate exactly what he's seeing to the operator — new spot fires starting every second on the hills across the Feather River, in Concow. Multiple calls are coming in for spot fires in Paradise.

**8:02 a.m.**

Minutes later, a spot fire has started in the fields behind a church in Paradise. The man calling says they are evacuating.

"We're trying to get people there it's just, it's really just blowing up very rapidly right now," the operator tells him. "It's overwhelming us."

**8:09 a.m.**

Another neighbor on Lowry Lane calls, panicking

about his elderly neighbors whom he can't reach.

"I need you to just evacuate," the operator says. "Try to knock on their door and wake them up, but you need to evacuate."

"We haven't seen anybody go over there yet! Not one person!" He starts to panic.

"Sir, we have this fire everywhere, we're doing our best to get to all of it," the operator says. "Please just evacuate."

**8:11 a.m.**

A slew of calls from neighboring emergency departments start to come in. They are told to direct people to the emergency information line. At 8:22 a.m., someone asks about shutting down eastbound traffic on Clark Road. "We're just concerned about Pentz right now," the operator says.

**8:30 a.m.**

The Butte County Sheriff's Office calls with a transfer: A woman in Paradise named Ann says she cannot evacuate because she doesn't have a car. The operator asks if she has neighbors who can take her to safety instead.

"Yeah, but they don't want to take my dogs!" Ann starts sobbing. "I won't leave without my dogs!"

"Ma'am you need to save your own life," the operator tells her, firmly but gently. "I understand that your dogs are precious, but you need to save your own life, OK?"

She tells Ann to leave the dogs inside with water and food, close all the doors and windows, and go with the neighbors while she can.

"Ann, do you understand me?" the operator asks.

The only answer is sobbing.

"Ann?"

"... Yes." Ann finally says, quietly.

**8:33 a.m.**

A woman in Concow calls — she is surrounded by fire in her neighbor's yard on Coniston Loop. The operator advises her to leave the area, but she simply says, "How? It's all around us. Where do I go?"

## 911 Calls

FROM PAGE 2

Suddenly, there's a crackling and whooshing sound over the phone.

"Do you hear that noise?" the caller shouts.

"What?" the operator asks. After a few seconds of silence, "You there?"

"That was the propane tank blowing up!" she says.

### 8:35 a.m.

Multiple calls come in reporting a spot fire at the corner of Skyway and Clark roads.

Paradise resident Ashley Joyner calls; her address is redacted. "Get the kids in the car and go!" she screams at someone in the background. The fire is in her yard now and growing rapidly.

"Alright Ashley, we have help on the way, OK?" the operator tells her, but the family is already evacuating.

"It's huge ..." Joyner says, breathlessly. "It's huge."

### 8:39 a.m.

A woman calls, she's not in the area but her son is, and she says he's home alone, sick and paralyzed.

The operator tells her she'll pass the information on, to try to get someone up there to help him.

The mother asks if they'll go help him right away.

"I don't know that they will, ma'am," the operator tells her, honestly. "We have fire and multiple evacuations, we'll do the best we can."

"Well, my god! Don't tell me that!" the mother yells.

"Ma'am, that's the best I can do." — Approximately 26 calls came in requesting help with evacuations, or stating that they were trapped and unable to leave. Many of them were transferred to the Paradise Police Department, the Butte County Sheriff's Office, or the California Highway Patrol.

### 8:44 a.m.

California Highway Patrol has a transfer call from a Paradise homeowner. He says his neighbor called and said his fence was on fire.

"Sir, there's fire all



Firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service watch the Camp Fire burn south of Paradise on the evening of Nov. 8, 2018.

KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP



Flames consume a home as the Camp Fire tears through Paradise on Nov. 8, 2018.

NOAH BERGER — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

through Paradise," the operator says. "We're getting resources into the area as fast as we can."

"OK, so are there any units that could possibly respond to hopefully save my home?" the man asks.

"Sir, we're doing the best we can and we're getting resources, like I said, into the area as fast as we can," the operator says. — Seconds later, someone calls to report hospice patients who are stuck at a property on Carver Drive in Magalia and need help getting out. The operator says there are no evacuations currently for Magalia.

California Highway Patrol has a transfer call from a Paradise homeowner. He says his neighbor called and said his fence was on fire.

### 8:52 a.m.

A transfer call comes in, with a woman who is evacuating via the nearby bike trail reporting a fire on Moore Road behind the fire station in Paradise. The caller describes the fire as about ¼ acre in size moving at a moderate speed.

"Ma'am, we have resources coming in as fast as we can, OK," the operator says.

### 8:55 a.m.

A caller asks how close the fire is to Magalia.

The operator's advice: "I would recommend you leave. Evacuation warn-

ings are in effect so it may not be out there yet but I would leave, if you feel threatened."

### 9:04 a.m.

An operator receives a call about the need for air support. The operator says he is so overwhelmed by calls — receiving "over 500" — that he hasn't been able to get to it. They coordinate to make an order for aircraft.

### 9:07 a.m.

Operators get a call from a woman who says five people are trapped by a fence somehow at Ponderosa Elementary School in Paradise, surrounded by fire on Pentz Road.

The operator tells the woman she needs to do whatever she can to get out.

"There's no one to help you right now," the operator says. "If you need to drive through a fence, then do it."

### 9:10 a.m.

A transfer call comes in about someone unable to evacuate in Paradise. The operator asks the other agency to call Paradise Police Department for assistance. — Moments later,

a woman in the employee parking lot at Feather River Hospital on Pentz Road reports a fire nearby.

"Yeah there's fires all over Paradise right now," the operator says. "They're doing the best they can."

### 9:11 a.m.

A caller reports a fire above the Honey Run Covered Bridge.

"I'm not aware of that spot fire but if there is fire near you, you need to go," the operator says. — One minute later, there is another report of fire near Honey Run Road.

"It's not too big," the caller says. "I think if you get a helicopter on it now you could probably put it out."

### 9:17 a.m.

The Butte County Office of Emergency Services reports one ambulance on fire and another trapped near Pentz Road and Chloe Court. The operator says that resources are "pretty thin" but fire rescue is doing its best.

### 9:19 a.m.

Warning: This call is particularly distressing.

A woman says she needs help evacuating. Her location is redacted. The operator tries for several minutes to get her to find a way out.

"I'm gonna get you some help, OK," the operator says.

The woman is breathing heavily and begins coughing. There is screaming in the background.

"We can't breathe," the woman says. "Please help us."

The operator tells her to take some blankets and leave. The woman says her family made it out onto the porch. The operator says help is coming.

"Don't leave me," the woman says, repeating "please" and saying that she can't breathe.

The operator asks if she is out of the house. This time she says no.

The woman becomes increasingly difficult to understand. She says it feels like her skin is burning. It sounds like she asks if they are going to die.

The operator again asks if she is in the house, but she doesn't respond. The call ends.

### 9:20 a.m.

An Enloe Medical Center, staff member reports two ambulances on fire at Pentz Road and Chloe Court.

"We have patients on board and staff with us and they actually are on fire," she says. "We need a unit, soon, now, like 15 minutes ago."

"I can't give you anything else but that we will send a response," the operator says. "That's the best I can do."

Listen to all of the Cal Fire calls released at [tinfoilurl.com/campfire911](http://tinfoilurl.com/campfire911).

Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 530-896-7763 and Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.



# S1 Camp Fire images

Wednesday,  
February 27, 2019  
CHICOER.COM  
FACEBOOK.COM/CHICOER  
TWITTER.COM/CHICOER



DAVID LITTLE — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

The massive plume from the Camp Fire, burning in the Feather River Canyon toward Paradise, wafts over the Sacramento Valley as seen from Chico early Nov. 8 less than two hours after it was reported.

## November 8

What was initially reported as a brush fire in a remote area of Butte County grows at an unprecedented pace and quickly becomes the fire long feared by every resident of Paradise.

# PARADISE LOST



KARL MONDRIJN — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Cars burn at a home on Neal Road in Paradise as the Camp Fire sweeps through the neighborhood.

# Chico Enterprise Record

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### Multiple deaths feared and up to a thousand homes lost as fire levels town

#### Fire tears through Concow, Paradise and into east Chico

Staff reports

**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.

"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 Fawcett Lane, said they fought for two hours to save their home until the water 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.



A vehicle evacuating Paradise is on fire along Skyway below Tuscan Ridge Golf Course

BILL HUSA — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

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 (2288 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 at <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.

Andre Byik, Risa Johnson, Steve Shoover, Laura Urseny, Tang Lor, Mary Nugent, Will Denner, Dan Reidel, Sharon Martin, Rick Silva and Carin Dorghalli contributed to this report.

# Chico Enterprise Record

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November 9

### Fast-moving flames make hospital evacuation harrowing

By Steve Schoonover and Tang Lor  
*Chico Enterprise-Record*

PARADISE — Darrel Wilken thought he was going to die. He thought the three patients in his car were going to die. "I'm a survivor," he said, "but there was nothing I could do to save us."

Wilken is a nurse at Feather River Hospital in Paradise. He was working Thursday morning when word came that the Camp Fire was seven miles away. "Fifteen minutes later, it was on the grounds," he said.

The fire came on so quickly that there were no ambulances available for an evacuation. So he and other hospital employees pulled their private cars up to the ambulance bay, and the patients were loaded in to be taken to different hospitals.

Wilken said he had three patients in his car, two of whom were critical. As soon as he pulled out onto Pentz Road he was immediately gridlocked. Gridlocked, with fire on both sides of the road.

"It was so black and so dark we couldn't see anything. We were completely surrounded by flames and explosions. I thought we all were going to die." He called his family to say goodbye.

He described "slaloming" around cars afire in the road in front of him, and seeing other cars burning behind.

"I've done a lot of things but I've never been scared like this. Five years in the Army was nothing," Wilken said. "This was the most helpless I've felt in my life."

As he weaved through Paradise to avoid closed roads, he came upon two ambulances that were staged, and had them take one of his patients that he thought was going to die. The patient depended on life-support equipment that couldn't work in Wilken's car, but the ambulances were equipped to handle it.

It took four hours to make it to Enloe Hospital in Chico. Late Thursday afternoon as he left the hospital he was still shaking, he said. "It was the most horrific experience imaginable."

He said he had feared his tires would melt on the way out of Paradise, and when he got to Chico he noted they were low. He stopped by a tire shop and they said no, the tires were fine. However they pointed out parts of his car were melted — plastic tail lights, trim pieces and such. "We were really close to catching on fire."

Adventist Health tweeted that all the patients were safely evacuated from Feather River Hospital. Enloe Director of Advancement and Communications Jolene Francis said the Chico hospital had taken in 49. "This is some-

thing we plan for, something we drill for," she said. "Yes it has an impact but we're prepared for this."

Other patients went to Oroville Hospital, including Paradise resident Francine Knowles, who was having gallbladder surgery Thursday morning. When the order to evacuate was announced, she was still asleep from the anesthesia, according to her husband, Cody Knowles.

Knowles said when he and his wife went to the hospital around 6 a.m., they were unaware that there was a fire burning. He had to step outside to see for himself.

He was greeted by darkness and smoke, but could see the flames coming up the backside of the hospital, he said. He called 9-1-1 and was told help was coming.

That was probably around 11 a.m., he said. But he's unsure of the exact time.

"I can't explain every little detail," he said. "Everything was just so crazy."

Knowles said he and his wife were probably among the last patients to be evacuated as she couldn't be moved until she was awake. When they tried to jump into the last ambulance, it was already full. Knowles also had his car ready to go, but they decided to get into an employee's car — a surgeon, he believes.

Even then, they were stuck in the parking lot for 15-20 minutes, he said. By the time they got onto Pentz Road, the fire felt close.

"You could just feel the wind blowing and could feel the heat in the car," he said. "We're just so lucky we made it out alive."

The Knowles are currently at Oroville Hospital where Francine is recovering.

Cody Knowles said, "I just have so many different emotions right now. It felt like a movie and we were surrounded by fire."

He's unsure if his home on Boquest Boulevard is still standing. But he's thankful for the hospital staff and the emergency responders who stayed to help.

"It's just a bad situation. I don't even know if the hospital is still standing, but those people, they didn't have to stay but they did anyway."

Adventist Health Administrative Director of Marketing and Communication Jill Kinney said the main hospital core is still standing, though some outbuildings burned, mostly small offices.

"At this stage, we are still assessing the damage," she said.

*Paradise Post reporter Amanda Hovik contributed to this report.*

November 10

The fire destroys an iconic covered bridge while roaring through Butte Creek Canyon.



Nothing but supports remain from the historic wooden Honey Run Covered Bridge in Butte Creek Canyon on Friday after the Camp Fire roared through the canyon. The bridge, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in the 1890s.

STEVE SCHOONOVER — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

# Chico Enterprise Record

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November 10

The first report of PG&E possibly being linked to the ignition of the fire.



Fire smolders under high voltage towers in Pulga near the reported start of the Camp Fire blaze that destroyed the town of Paradise.

KARL MORDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

## Power lines may have sparked Camp Fire

By Matthias Gafni and Andre Byik

Bay Area News Group and Chico Enterprise-Record

**PARADISE**—Downed PG&E power lines, amid high winds, may have sparked the deadly Camp Fire that has destroyed the town of Paradise and killed at least five people, according to firefighter radio transmissions reviewed by Bay Area News Group.

At about 6:33 a.m. Thursday, firefighters were dispatched to a vegetation fire “under the high tension power lines” across the Feather River from Poe Dam, where Cal Fire officials have pinpointed the fire’s origin on the agency’s incident page, according to hours of radio transmissions reviewed by this news organization. The first fighters arrived there at 6:43 a.m. and noted the fire was being buttressed by 35 mph winds.

“We’ve got eyes on the vegetation fire. It’s going to be very difficult to access. Camp Creek Road is nearly inaccessible,” one firefighter told dispatch. “It is on the west side of the river underneath the transmission lines.”

The utility, which has already been criticized and sued in a number of other large and deadly fires across California, had announced beginning Tuesday that it might shut down power to the impacted parts of Butte County amid forecasts of high wind and low humidity. But it never did.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said Friday that his office has been in discussions with Cal Fire to preserve the fire scene and any potential evidence for a possible criminal investigation.

Ramsey said he had no information that the Camp Fire was intentionally caused. He also said it was too early to know whether the cause of the fire could have been negligent in nature.

Cal Fire, Ramsey said, will investigate and determine the cause of the fire. Should a criminal case arise from the investigation, the District Attorney’s Office would be the prosecuting agency. The district attorney said it was not unusual for his office to become involved in fire investigations where there is loss of life.

Cal Fire spokesman Scott McLean emphasized the cause is still under investigation, but added that probe would include “electrical equipment.”

PG&E spokesman Jason King said no cause of the fire had been determined.

“We can’t speculate on the cause of the fire, there will

be an investigation,” he said.

After the first radio call, an immediate, multi-alarm response was sent to the area by Pulga and

Camp Creek roads, near the dam which is popular with kayakers and one of PG&E’s 10 hydroelectric stations along the north fork of the river. Google satellite images show PG&E transmission lines above Pulga and Camp Creek roads.

“The (reporting party) is calling from Poe Dam looking across under the high tension power lines. There’s a possible power line hazard,” a dispatcher alerted responding crews, including six engines and a number of more personnel.

At 6:34 a.m. and about eight miles west, another fire crew was dispatched to a report of a branch taking down residential power lines in the neighboring town of Magalia. During last year’s Sonoma and Napa county fires, within the first 90 minutes of the fires’ origin, Sonoma County dispatchers sent fire crews to at least 10 different locations for downed wires and problems with the electrical system amid high winds.

As firefighters rushed to the Poe Dam fire early Thursday morning, each truck acknowledged over the radio, “Copy, power lines down,” as part of safety protocol for firefighters.

The first firefighter at the scene quickly recognized the seriousness of the situation and called for an additional 15 engines, four bulldozers, two water tenders and four strike teams and hand crews.

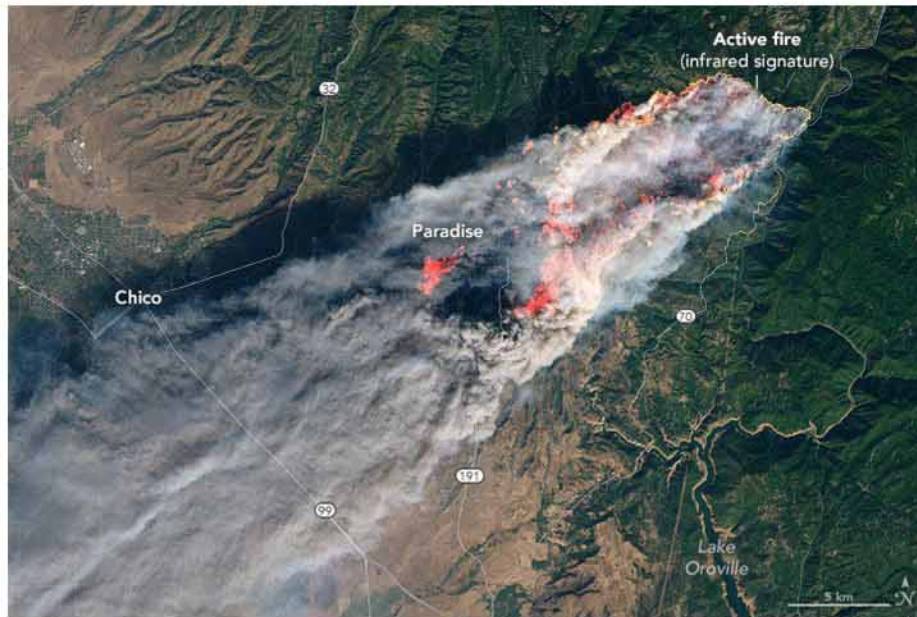
“This has got the potential for a major incident,” he told dispatch, alerting them to evacuate Pulga, the town immediately southwest, and to find air support.

On Tuesday night, PG&E first tweeted that power might be shut down to certain counties, including Butte County and about 26,500 customers in cities and towns including Berry Creek, Forest Ranch, Magalia and Paradise.

Over the next 48 hours, the utility tweeted out 17 different warnings of an impending Thursday morning shut-off. It even tweeted out a warning at 7:56 a.m. Thursday, more than an hour after the fire was reported under one of its downed power lines, that the shut-off was still an option.

PG&E released a statement Thursday afternoon, almost nine hours after the Camp Fire first sparked, calling off the shut down “as weather conditions did not warrant this safety measure.”

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Satellite image of the Camp Fire taken at about 10:34 a.m. on Nov. 9, 2018.

"We want to thank our customers for their understanding and for their actions in preparation of a possible Public Safety Power Shutoff," Pat Hogan, PG&E senior vice president of Electric Operations, said in the statement.

"We know how much our customers rely on electric service, and we will only consider temporarily turning off power in the interest of safety and as a last resort during extreme weather conditions to reduce the risk of wildfire."

On Friday, King declined to get into specifics about why PG&E called off the shut down, saying only: "We chose not to implement the public safety power shut off in any location."

In its warnings, PG&E had warned of sustained winds of 20 to 30 miles per hour, with gusts of 40 to 50 mph forecasted overnight Wednesday into Thursday, lasting until late afternoon.

When implementing a Public Safety Power Shutoff the utility factors in strong winds, very low humidity, critically dry vegetation and on-the-ground observations.

PG&E's stock plunged Friday by almost \$8 a share, a more than 16 percent drop amid the fires blazing across the state. The decline wiped out PG&E's entire gains for the year and was the biggest one-day decline for the stock since 2002.

November 11 | Editor's column

## Butte Creek Canyon can't dodge this bullet

By David Little • Chico Enterprise-Record

I remember as a child sitting on the back porch at Grandma's house, watching smoke billow above the rim of Butte Creek Canyon, wondering just when we should evacuate.

This was before reverse 9-1-1 calls, before an emergency broadcast system, before Twitter and Facebook. Before computers even. We didn't even have a television because there was no reception in the canyon anyway. So you had to be self-sufficient and decide for yourself when it was time to escape.

The canyon dodged many bullets over the years.

There was no dodging the Camp Fire.

Firefighters were spread thin on a fast-moving fire. They weren't firefighters at first, not in that descriptive sense of the job title. They were rescuers, just trying to get people out alive. There were precious few resources left for the canyon by the time the fire swept in.

Two days after the blaze swept through, the canyon was still smoldering. Power lines were on the roadway. Power poles burned until they fell. Trees were still on fire. Old homes that I knew from my childhood were gone. Some were miraculously spared for no apparent reason.

I drove through with Bay Area News Group photographer Karl Mondon to get photos and video for our on-going coverage. I only cried three times. I thought I did pretty well.

Where the Honey Run Covered Bridge stood for 132 years, there was a heap of metal siding and burned wood forming a dam in the creek. Mondon and I were all alone, until Rep. Doug LaMalfa appeared out of the smoke. LaMalfa just looked at the bridge and shook his head.

There is no other reaction.

We saw just one canyon resident. He was standing in his driveway. No residents have been allowed back in, so I knew he had been there the entire time. I asked him why he stayed.

"Like everybody else up here, I'm underinsured," he said. When his insurance company reduced coverage years ago because of the fire danger, he consulted with Cal Fire and created what firefighters call "defensible space."

He removed fire-hazard trees hanging near the house, grew lawn, eliminated dry brush and bought a generator to run the sprinklers for when the eventual fires came. And Nov. 8 it came, a storm that he said was shooting hot embers sideways in the air.

All around him were burned homes as the man told the harrowing story. Behind him was his green lawn, his dogs yipping at the two strangers on the property — and a house, untouched by fire.

The homes still standing mostly had that defensible space. The ones that burned were often tucked back into shady oaks that provided respite from the canyon's summer heat but fuel for a November fire.

Not many people have lawn in the rural country setting, but several who do were wise enough to park vehicles or RVs in the middle of the lawn before they evacuated. Those vehicles were fine.

In many other places, there were reminders of the random nature of the fire. Near the old mining community of Diamondville, a beautiful classic car and a pickup were parked in dry grass. Somehow the dry grass didn't catch fire. The vehicles were fine.

Two hundred yards away was a home burned to the foundation.

We drove to Grandma's house, the place where I grew up. It stood untouched. Then we went to my brother's home. The fire burned his guest cottage, a trailer and a lawnmower all to nothing. The lawn and ivy were scorched as the fire traveled up to his back porch — and then for some reason, stopped. The house was still standing.

My brother died 12 years ago. His partner still lives there and had no idea for 48 hours whether his home was still there.

I don't know why the fire stopped right there at the back door. I'd like to think my brother had something to do with it.

# Chico Enterprise Record

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November 12

# 'This is when I die'

## Tales of escape from the Camp Fire



An abandoned vehicle sits in a ditch on Pentz Road in Paradise after the neighborhood was evacuated in the wake of the Camp Fire.

KARL MONDOR—BAY AREA NEWSGROUP

**"When you're contemplating death, you say, 'Am I ready to die?'"**

— Zetta Gore

**By Julia Sulek and Annie Sciacca**  
*Bay Area News Group*

PARADISE: It's the terror, the sheer terror of being stuck in a vehicle in bumper-to-bumper traffic with flames closing in and nowhere to go that haunts them most.

On the main road that locals affectionately called "the Skyway to Paradise," many of those trapped in the nerve-racking slow-motion evacuation Thursday morning said their goodbyes, whispered their prayers and wondered, "Is this the end?"

"I thought, this must be what hell's going to be," said 87-year-old Beverly Fillmore, who drove out of Paradise with her 91-year-old husband, Jim.

"We were going to be cremated when we die, but I thought, this is it, I'm going to be cremated right now. This is when I die."

The inferno has claimed at least 23 people so far — six in vehicles, another just outside one — as the Camp Fire roared to life Thursday morning, decimating this town of 27,000 people in a wildfire that has become the most destructive in California history.

More than ever, it seems, those trapped by wildfires aren't just the stubborn few who refuse to evacuate. California wildfires are increasingly wicked fast — with year-round fire season colliding with late-autumn near-hurricane strength winds — giving people little time to think straight, much less escape.

The identities of the ones who died in Paradise and exactly how they died are still unknown. But those who barely made it out alive tell stories of paralyzing fear and harrowing panic, of trust, of love, of loyalty.

Richard and Zetta Gore abandoned their vehicle and, with the fire bearing down, decided to slide down a deep canyon, clinging to bushes, and hike out about seven miles to safety. Angie Van Blaricon and Jessie Smith, a school bus driver and teacher's aide, hunkered down for seven hours with a 7-year-old autistic boy in a Save Mart parking lot, while his mother feared he was dead. The Fillmores, married for 67 years and sure the end had come, ran out of gas — but, thankfully, piled into their son's car and got away.

The photos alone of abandoned, incinerated vehicles strewn across Skyway give a sense of the chaos that preceded them. In many ways, they look like scenes from the town of Oroville just a year-and-a-half earlier. There was no fire then, but people fled fearing that a damaged Oroville Dam spillway could unleash a wall of water into nearby towns. It forced residents into an epic traffic jam with the threat of being overrun at any minute.

On Thursday — with fire, not water — that nightmare came true.

### The precipice

Richard and Zetta Gore stood on a rock outcropping at Bille Park, on the west side of Paradise, overlooking the deep canyon below. The wind shifted and the flames were closing in, as they looked into the ravine.

"I said, Zetta, it's time," Richard said. "We both prayed together and asked for God's protection and took off."

"This was the moment we knew it was do or die," Zetta said.

Minutes earlier, they had been stuck in the interminable traffic on Oliver Road, just a couple blocks from their Paradise home. They hadn't moved for a half hour. Cars sped along the shoulder. People ran by with bandanas on their faces. One man said he had a gun — and although he confided in the Gores that he had fled without ammunition — he was ready to threaten anyone who tried to steal his vehicle.

"We were sitting ducks to be burned in our vehicles and if I was going to die in a forest fire," Richard Gore said, "I would rather die with my wife, trying to get away, than sitting in a vehicle dying."

They headed to an overlook at Bille Park. As the flames came within 400 feet, they called their 32-year-old son in Ukiah.

"Zach, this is it. We're going to make a run for it on foot," Gore said. "This could be the last time we ever talk to you."

Into the deep ravine they went, each holding bags with lap blankets and water bottles they could douse if the fire overcame them. They grabbed for vines and bushes as they slid. A family of deer and turkeys cobbled by.

The couple have been married 39 years. They met when they were teenagers working at a summer camp in Southern California. For years, they volunteered for the Riverside County fire department.

They made it to the bottom of the canyon, waded through the creek, then followed the dirt road for 5 miles before they hitched a ride out.

"When you're contemplating death, you say, 'Am I ready to die?'" Zetta said.

A peace had come over the couple as they descended the cliff. "We both were ready to die," Richard said, "but we were not going to die without putting up a fight."

### Unsung heroes on the bus

The fire started at the most chaotic time of day for school bus drivers — just as they were dropping off students at school. When the Camp Fire roared into town, Paradise Unified School District transportation director Rubina Hartwig couldn't reach some of the bus drivers because the radio system was undergoing maintenance.

She was frantic when she couldn't contact Angie Van Blaricon, who along with aide Jessie Smith, was driving the mini school bus that normally carries 12 children with special needs.

"I started worrying right away. Where are they? What are they doing?" Hartwig said. "I didn't know if her bus was full. I didn't know if her bus was empty."

She also didn't know whether most parents had picked up their special needs children from Van Blaricon's bus at Ponderosa Elementary — or that Bethann and Joseph Jauron were stopped at roadblocks from reaching the school to get their 7-year-old son, Liam, who is autistic.

"Please, you have to let me get my son!" she pleaded with an officer at a blockade. "He's on the spectrum. He needs his mommy."

Liam's mom raced back home and received a call from Jessie, the teacher's aide.

"Bethann, I've got him. I promise you I won't let anything happen. I promise," Jessie told her. "Then the phone lines went dead and the power went out."

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RAY CHAVEZ — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Vehicles sit burned on a dirt road at the end of Edgewood Lane in Paradise.

Ponderosa Elementary was burning. But Van Blaricon had moved the minibus to a safer spot at a Save Mart parking lot. Still, for another several hours, they couldn't be reached.

"We knew that everything was burning around them and initially I thought the worst," Harwig said.

Liam's parents wouldn't find out until later that firefighters were protecting the mini school bus and others stranded in the Save Mart parking lot, or that Van Blaricon and Smith were keeping Liam entertained with granola crackers and stories.

"Our little guy, our special needs boy, was happy as could be, keeping us all in high spirits," Van Blaricon, 74, said.

It was until 6 p.m. that Liam and his guardians were united with his mother. "I held both of them and kissed them and thanked God for them," Jauron said.

#### View from a dead end

On Edgewood Lane, Gabriel Fallon was trying to save his parents' house and barn and 14 horses, when four vehicles drove by, their drivers in a panic. A woman and a teenage boy were inside one. An elderly couple in separate cars following each other were in the others.

"Is this a way out?" drivers would ask him, one after another.

"No," he would say, "it's a dead end."

He didn't know what happened to them. He didn't know if they escaped. But on Saturday, a half dozen vehicles were smoldering carcasses on the end of Edgewood Lane. Three of them were touching, as though they had collided. Who can know what really happened in those final moments of fear when there's no one left to tell the story?

Fallon saw the coroner arrive, but he didn't know how many bodies were retrieved. Authorities would only say that four people had died in their vehicles, some on Edgewood Lane. Another was found outside a car, presumably trying to run away.

The fire just moved so fast, Fallon said. "Everyone started grabbing stuff and trying to go," he said, "but it was almost too late already."

The Fillmores, the elderly couple struck on Skyway who were certain they would perish, passed Edgewood Lane as they escaped. When they ran out of gas, their son was nearby and picked them up.

"You couldn't see where you were. All you could see was flames," she said.

They finally made it out, passing the "Welcome to Paradise" sign. It was burning.

"I don't ever want to see a tree again, ever. I know it's going to catch on fire," Beverly Fillmore said. "We're not going to rebuild in Paradise."

November 28

# Inside the Camp Fire

## repopulation effort

'We don't want a tragedy upon a tragedy'

By Andre Bylk a Chico Enterprise-Record

PARADISE — A group of some 20 officials, including Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea, huddled Monday around a large paper map of communities that remained evacuated in the aftermath of the Camp Fire.

The group, which includes representatives from local fire and law enforcement agencies, utility companies, public health workers, water officials and more, was meeting in Chico for a daily 3 p.m. repopulation meeting.

The meetings are held to gather information about pending and completed work that could lead the Sheriff's Office to lift evacuation orders that still cover thousands of residents nearly three weeks after the deadly fire sparked, including orders for the town of Paradise and communities of Concow, Yankee Hill and portions of Magalia.

On Monday, officials targeted evacuated areas above Magalia toward the Stirling City area, working through a checklist of safety precautions undertaken to allow residents to return home. Were compromised trees checked? Were downed power lines removed or rewired? Could a wall somewhere fall over and kill someone? Has the area been searched for human remains? How could lifting an evacuation order for one area affect another?

Officials for PG&E, AT&T, the Sheriff's Office and multiple other public officials chime in, detailing the work their crews have done or are expecting to complete, tasks involving hundreds of workers.

"It's all about managing risk, guys," Honea said. "We can never say with 100 percent certainty that anything is safe. It's about mitigating risk."

Satisfied that an area is OK for residents to re-enter, an "O" marking the evacuation zone on the map is crossed with an "X" and shaded in with blue marker. On Monday officials marked as safe the Stirling, North Coutu-

lenc, Lovelock, North Firhaven and Nimshew C evacuation zones. The Sheriff's Office lifted evacuation orders for those areas Tuesday, allowing residents back in starting at noon.

"We have to check with our partners here to make sure that it's safe for people to go back in," Honea said, understanding the frustration of those who still have not been able to see what remains of their homes. "That's when we say it's safe, because if we don't do this, people could die. People could die."

The number of people killed in the fire remained at 88 Tuesday when no human remains were found. The number of people still unaccounted for after the fire dropped from 203 to 158.

At a press conference Monday, PG&E officials said thousands of burned trees in Paradise were a hazard and still need to be removed, one of the biggest problems associated with repopulation. The ravaged town of 26,000 residents has been closed to the public since officials ordered residents to flee wind-whipped flames Nov. 8. The sheriff, in public statements at news conferences and in interviews, has not offered a time frame for when evacuation orders there could be lifted.

During the repopulation meeting Monday, the sheriff did brainstorm and craft a statement regarding work being done to open an important artery connecting such communities as Magalia and Stirling City to the valley floor — Pentz Road.

"There is an effort to focus along the Pentz Road area so that we can provide access up into Magalia," Honea said. "And good progress is being made, but we're hoping to do that as soon as it's safe."

When the upper ridge zones opened Tuesday, residents could not take the usual route through Paradise. They had to travel up Highway 32 to Butte Meadows, then over to Inskip and Stirling City down the Skyway. It's a long commute but the only route that's open.



ANDY CHU — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
Cal Fire Butte County Capt. John Gaddie, standing near a low-hanging power line, describes some of the hazards that still exist following the Camp Fire in Paradise.

Officials have avoided providing specific time lines or estimates on when evacuated areas might be reopened, they say, because plans could change by the hour. An unexpected problem could pop up, such as plastic culverts throughout the town of Paradise that may have melted, or inclement weather could shut down work, delaying progress.

"As the fire is now contained, it provides some degree of certainty, but there's still a lot of unknowns," Honea said. "Like the culvert issue. The culvert issue popped up on us."

John Gaddie, a fire captain for Cal Fire-Butte County, facilitates the daily repopulation meetings, and on Tuesday he guided this newspaper through the town of Paradise, noting the hazards that remain there and the work that continues to be done before residents can be allowed back in.

Gaddie, maneuvering his white Cal Fire pickup around tree removal and trimming crews and utility workers, pointed out low-hanging phone lines, utility poles that have been sheared at the base but remain suspended in the air by wires, and small sinkholes and "stampoles" that dot properties and roadsides.

"There are just so many hazards after a fire goes through," he said. "And so all these people are working tirelessly. They were here almost immediately after the fire. PG&E trying to clear the roads, first and foremost, and then dealing with the subsequent power line issues afterwards."

Gaddie stopped his truck at a hard roadblock at Pentz Road, where multiple crews were trimming trees. He said work along Pentz Road was emphasized during a repopulation meeting Tuesday.

"Really trying to get Pentz Road open so that we have an access route from the valley side to upper Magalia and Stirling City and all those areas so residents don't have to go up and around" through Butte Meadows, he said.

Gaddie said he's been in the fire service for 22 years, and he did not believe he would ever see devastation to the extent that the Camp Fire brought. He called the scope of the work being undertaken to clear the area for residents to return "unprecedented" and "monumental."

He noted utility crews that have been called in from Florida, Texas and other states to help the effort.

"We've lost almost a whole town," the fire captain said.

"It destroyed 18,000-plus structures. That includes the county area. I mean that's over three times more than what happened last year in the Santa Rosa, Sonoma and Napa fires. And it happened within 12 hours."

Gaddie said he feels for those who haven't yet been able to see what remains of their homes, in Paradise or elsewhere.

"They want closure. I get why they want to come," he said. "They want to see it with their eyes and close that chapter and move forward, hopefully. Whether they want to come back or not, I get it. But we want it safe for them. Period. We don't want a tragedy upon a tragedy."

December 4

## Law enforcement couple from Paradise recounts dispatch to Camp Fire

**"It's not like I was questioning whether we were going to do it. I knew we were going to do it. There was no question of us doing it. But I'm like, how many more lucky chances do we get?"**

— Tiffany Larson

By **Risa Johnson** of *Chico Enterprise-Record*

going to die" an estimated 15 to 30 times.

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Chico» Butte County Sheriff's deputy Bobby Larson has been shot at before. He would take that any day over returning to a scene like what he experienced on Nov. 8.

That day he saw the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California state history destroy his home and his hometown.

"After being through that, I'll take being shot at any (expletive) day," he said. "I'll go out the door right now and be shot at if I don't ever have to go back to something like up on that mountain ever again."

Larson is one of the dozens of Sheriff's Office employees who lost their homes in the Camp Fire, continuing to serve the community through it all.

That morning, Larson had just about an hour of sleep after working a night shift when he received a call from his wife of 11 years, Tiffany Larson, a special victims unit detective with the Sheriff's Office. She told him there was a fire in Palga. It was all hands all deck, and he might get called in.

He went back to sleep. Shortly after, another call came — he needed to pack up the animals and get out of the house.

Larson rounded up their four dogs and got them in harnesses, threw on sweats and grabbed a pistol. He was only able to get one of their three cats. The others bolted.

Like nearly everyone else fleeing, Larson got caught in gridlock traffic and witnessed cars ablaze. Knowing the town well, he was able to take a bike path to speed up his route to Chico. There he dropped their animals with a friend.

Then he got ready to work.

By the day's end, Larson would think to himself "I'm

While her husband headed toward safety, Tiffany Larson was en route to evacuate a retirement home by Feather River Hospital. At this point, she knew this fire was an exceptionally bad one.

"We've always said we're fine because they're never going to let the flames get to the hospital," she said. "They can't. Our hospital can't burn down."

Larson arrived to a chaotic scene, with fire right up against the retirement home. She started running to get the residents into vehicles.

"It was crazy," she said. "It was so loud. It was windy. We got stuck in the wind vortex."

Larson tried to get out of town in her unmarked SUV headed northbound but couldn't make much headway. She was directed to turn around and go south.

"This sounds like a cliché but I see the wall of fire that we're going to have to drive through, and I know that my car's not that great, and I don't know if we're going to get through it," she said, her voice growing quieter.

Larson had an older man, an evacuee from the retirement home, in her backseat. She turned around to face the stranger who had been riding with her for just five to 10 minutes.

"I'm like, 'Hey I know I don't know you and you don't know me, but I don't know if we're going to make it out, so can you just hold my hand?'"

She briefly told him all of the "little things" she has been taught to do — turn off the air, roll up the windows, keep breathing, avoid touching metal because of downed power lines and have water ready. It was pitch black. She guesses she had about two feet of visibility.



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RAY CHAVEZ — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

A charred vehicle was left Friday in the middle of Honey Run Road in Butte Creek Canyon.

"The embers are popping off my car," she said. "My windows are getting hot. We probably go. I don't know, it felt like 10 miles but it was probably only maybe a quarter mile, and we got through the flames. It kind of opened up. It was super surreal."

There she saw her partner, standing with her sergeant. They were out of the worst of it.

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When Bobby Larson dropped his dogs and cat off at his coworker's house, he found that his friend, also a deputy sheriff, was suited up. Neither of them had orders but they decided to go to Paradise on their own accord.

They drove through driveways, ditches and yards lining Neal Road to get to the Larsons' home. Larson needed his uniform. When they got there, they found the neighborhood on fire.

"It was hot," he said. "It looked like lava."

With the power off, Larson ran his hands over the familiar walls of his home to find the flashlight he knew was in the bathroom. He grabbed his belt, two pairs of boots and his lunchbox out of habit. He could see his lawn on fire.

He paused to collect himself.

"Yeah I didn't think we were going to make it," Larson said.

They made it to a clear parking lot, and he called his wife. The house was gone.

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When she got the call, Tiffany Larson was on traffic control.

"I could hear in his voice that things weren't good," she said.

She almost threw up. She told her partner the news. Then she had to get back to the job.

One of Larson's colleagues asked her to drive his car to Oroville to gas it up. When she got to the gas station, she broke down. She started dry heaving — something she had never done before but has found herself doing over the past three weeks.

After exchanging cars, she helped her partner evacuate one of his family members. Then, they went to evacuate the remaining patients and staff at the hospital.

They were going back into the fire. Larson was slightly incredulous.

"It's not like I was questioning whether we were going to do it," she said. "I knew we were going to do it. There was no question of us doing it. But I'm like, how many more lucky chances do we get?"

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It was still bad. Power lines and trees were down. Transformers were in the middle of the road. But there wasn't a "fiery tunnel" like there had been before.

It was around 2 or 3 p.m. when they got to the hospital. With other law enforcement officers and nurses, Tiffany Larson and her partner loaded up a transport bus and personal vehicles to get the last people out. The nurses were covered in soot.

"They're amazing," she said. "The nurses are their own set of heroes. Their boots are melted. Their name tags are melted."

After giving everyone a quick briefing to prepare themselves, Larson and her partner led a caravan of over 10 vehicles away from the hospital and headed south for Oroville Hospital. The fire started to flare up again.

"You didn't know how bad it was until you were already too far into it," Larson said. "You didn't have a choice to turn around. You had to just chance it and hope that there wasn't something on the other side that was going to stop you and get you pinned."

They made it through the flames and pulled off to the side before running out to catch the attention of the other drivers, so they would keep coming. Counting each car, there was just one left, driven by a nurse who just wasn't coming out. Finally she made it.

"Within 30 seconds, the flames overtook the road," Larson said.

Around 10:30 p.m. she finally "tapped out" and went to her friend's home where her dogs were.

Larson was back at work at 6:30 a.m. the next day. She was assigned to the coroner's unit and has lead crews searching for bodies. So far, a total of 88 people have been confirmed dead.

Bobby Larson was assigned to the Magalia area for his night shift.

"It was like a war zone," he said. "That's the best I can describe it. Stuff you see on TV. These guys fighting overseas ... they drop a bomb and it just wipes (expletive) out."

Driving through town, he said he "could not comprehend" what he was seeing. His hometown was being wiped out. He saw flames that seemed to be 300 feet tall.

While in Magalia, Larson received an assignment to evacuate the small unincorporated community of Stirling City which has just a few hundred residents. He headed north, but then fire blew over the road. Voices on the radio kept telling him to go north but he couldn't. He turned around to go south, but the fire had crossed that exit, too.

"I'm like (expletive) we're trapped," he said. "We're going to die."

Suddenly, a clearing appeared. He was able to evacuate the communities of Lovelock and Stirling City.

Throughout the night, Larson evacuated people and updated the command post. He loves the adrenaline of being a sheriff's deputy, but he has never thought he would die so many times in one day.

His colleagues who have served in combat told him that their experience in war "had nothing" on this fire.

"Knowing that people didn't make it, that we could not get to them and save them, is horrible," he said. "It was horrible."

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Now, Bobby Larson wishes he had taken some videos or pictures. He was wearing his body camera but didn't turn it on.

"I never even thought to roll it at all," he said. "I don't think there was very many guys that did. I know one guy that did because he thought he was gonna die."

Throughout the day and night, Bobby and Tiffany Larson heard their colleagues calling out for help. Their cars had caught fire. Officers were loading evacuees into fire trucks and bulldozers. Others were forced to shelter in place with citizens.

"None of us were thinking about us," said Tiffany Larson. "We're thinking about how many more people can we get to the other side of this. We're going to take these people and save them. And if we don't, I'll be going down with 'em."

Larson remembers hearing her partners in Concow on the radio screaming for air support because they were with about 50 citizens trapped by flames.

"We know we're dealing with some (expletive) but we know that our partners are very close to being killed," she said, getting emotional. "We can hear it all on the radio while we're working. At that point I'm not worried about me."

Another voice that sticks with her is that of an officer from a nearby city who was on Skyway.

He was stuck with about 30 people surrounded by flames and was yelling for water. No one could get to him because he wasn't familiar with the town and didn't know where he was on the roadway. Thinking about it still gives her goosebumps.

"The amount of terror that I would have, having to be in that (expletive) and not knowing exactly where I was, I couldn't even imagine," Larson said.

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Nov. 8 was the most traumatic day of Tiffany Larson's life. Right now, she is grateful just to be alive and for her work.

"We're pushing forward," she said. "For me, a body in motion stays in motion."

The couple's days off are spent getting their lives back together. They are in escrow on a house in Chico.

"I will say, throughout all this, I'm homesick, and it's not just for my home," she said.

Larson worked for the Paradise Police Department for five to six years before transferring to the Sheriff's Office about two years ago. She has lived in Paradise from age 3.

Bobby Larson was born at Feather River Hospital and has lived in Paradise his whole life. He married his high school sweetheart, who he met at Paradise High School. The couple is in their early 30s.

Tiffany Larson has some survivor's guilt. Throughout the interview, she stopped herself several times, when talking about what they lost. She doesn't want anybody to feel sorry for them.

"How do we even have the audacity to be upset or complain when we have these people who lost their lives?" she asked. "They didn't just die of old age. They had the most hellish death you could ever imagine."

Larson said she still couldn't believe that her colleagues all made it out.

"Everybody prepared themselves for dying that day," she said.

The two just celebrated their 11th wedding anniversary. Bobby Larson delivered flowers and chocolate to his wife's office for her to find when she came into work. They went out to dinner with friends.

"I tried to make things halfway normal," he said. "It was perfect," she said.

December 18

# Warning system failure

## In disasters such as the Camp Fire, high-tech communities reduced to 1940s-era responses

By Lisa Krieger *a Bay Area News Group*

Residents of Paradise bitterly complained in the wake of the Camp Fire that Butte County's early warning system failed them, and now a detailed Bay Area News Group analysis shows just how thorough that failure was.

The review revealed that thousands of critical cellphone messages were missed, delayed or lost — a disturbing reminder of the fragility of our electronic notifications systems, even as more of our lives move online.

"The system failed. Technology, the thing I trust most, failed," said Lisa Parr, an accountant who had signed up to get the county's emergency alerts but never received one. Hard at work on her computer and phone that fateful morning, she was unaware of approaching flames and escaped with just moments to spare. "The system that was supposed to help save us — it didn't."

This news organization's review found problems at every level — many residents didn't sign up for the system, officials didn't trigger warnings for every neighborhood, and overloaded or damaged cellular networks often failed to deliver warnings to the intended recipient. Meanwhile, flames engulfed the region with stunning speed, leaving little room for error.

A Butte County spokeswoman said Sheriff Kory Honea will conduct an analysis and issue a report when time allows.

"I wish we had opportunity to get more alerts out, more warning out," said Honea during a community meeting on the third day of the fire. "We try to use as many systems as we can. ... But in the heat of this, it was moving so fast, it was difficult to get that information out."

To better understand how the failures occurred, this news organization requested evacuation alert records from the Paradise and Chico police departments and from Butte County, as well as cell tower information from the California Public Utilities Commission.

A review of alerts issued by the county and Paradise police in the hours after the fire started on Nov. 8 shows that no evacuation orders were issued by the county to one six-square-mile swath of the city. Another four-mile stretch of town received merely a warning; the actual order to flee came 7.5 hours later, long after homes were reduced to ashes.

Prior to the Camp Fire, only an estimated one-quarter of the region's residents had signed up to get emergency messages — but even when they signed up, many calls didn't reach them. Success varied from geographical zone to zone, generally deteriorating as the fire spread and the infrastructure was damaged or overwhelmed. Even in the best-performing zones, 25 percent of alerts did not make a connection to the resident's phone. In the worst zone, the call failure rate was 94 percent.

Seventeen cell towers burned that first day, according to records obtained from the CPUC. During the first two weeks of the fire, a total of 66 cell phone towers were damaged or out of service, causing phones to go silent or calls to be dropped as surviving towers became overloaded by traffic.

"We really need to get better at this," said disaster expert Kelly McKinney, author of the book *Moment of Truth: The Nature of Catastrophes and How to Prepare for Them*. McKinney urges the creation of a state system to provide a notification template and backup help for local responders.



RYAN CHAVEZ — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP  
Krystin Harvey, left, comforts her daughter Ariya Cipolini, 19, as they look at the remains of their property on Grinding Rock Avenue in Paradise. Harvey along with her husband, their three girls, 19, 17, and 16, her cousin and two dogs survived the fatal Camp Fire even though they didn't evacuate.

"The public needs to understand what to expect — what will happen, when it will happen and who is accountable for making it happen," said McKinney, who is senior director of emergency management at the medical center NYU Langone Health and former deputy commissioner at New York City's Office of Emergency Management. "If you don't have those three things, it is wishful thinking. And wishful thinking always fails you in a disaster."

Paradise and its surrounding communities — where 86 people perished in the fire — is not the only place where planning has not been up to the task. In other California disasters, alerts and evacuations have fallen short, including the 2017 flooding of downtown San Jose and Tubbs Fire of Sonoma County, which killed 22. In last January's mudslides in Montecito, a message was issued while hillsides already were collapsing, killing more than 20 people.

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In the San Francisco Bay Area, the public warning systems are a patchwork of technologies, personnel, media, vendors and policies, and there are both duplications and gaps in their coverage, according to a 2017 report by Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative, a federally-funded project to improve the region's capacity to respond to catastrophic events. As a result, the messages people receive in one city are often different than those in another.

"California's alert system is, in reality, 58 county alert systems duct-taped together, with 58 different processes and capabilities," McKinney said. "If we're going to remove the duct tape and bolt and wire it together, so it's all one machine, the state has to do it."

California counties' individual warning systems sprang up ad-hoc to address various threats. While there's been a trend toward integrating systems at the federal level, local systems are still fragmented, driven by competitive marketing among commercial vendors. Almost all of our warning tools must be activated one-by-one and do not support simultaneous activation using a tool called Common Alerting Protocol. The protocol, adopted by the federal government, allows warning messages to be sent all at once across many platforms.

This creates otherwise avoidable delay, additional workload, and opportunities for error for warning originators, according to the report. And there are few explanations of different warning methods, what those methods mean, and what steps should be taken when a warning is issued.

New state laws aim to improve notification in the future. One mandates statewide guidelines and training programs for local governments. Another authorizes counties to automatically enroll residents into emergency notification systems, gaining access to phone numbers through utility bills and other services.

In Paradise, only residents who had registered for CodeRED, the county's alert system, had any chance of knowing what was happening during the Camp Fire. County logs from Nov. 8 show that messages reached 16,683 phones but failed to reach another 10,869 despite repeated attempts. Paradise Police reached a total of 4,855 phones but did not reach 4,099. Combined, authorities also sent more than 6,000 texts and 6,700 emails that first day, with additional alerts issued in the days following. An estimated 38,702 people lived in the towns of Paradise, Magalia and Concow, with others scattered in more rural parts of the county.

Butte County used a commercial system similar to those used in most Bay Area counties, connecting to landlines, cell phones, emails and social media.

There is a second type of alert system, also available to Bay Area counties, where notifications such as Amber Alerts can be sent to cell phones regardless of whether residents have opted-in. This system, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA), blankets an area with a warning.

But WEA's geographical targeting, based on a labyrinth of cell towers and a honeycomb of tower signal "sectors," is not terribly precise. Any WEA alert will likely overshoot or undershoot the desired alert area.

Both systems are vulnerable. They rely on local officials, who are inevitably overwhelmed in the early hours of a catastrophe, scrambling to save lives and get resources to the danger, according to McKinney. As the fire consumed Paradise, thousands of calls poured in to 911 —

where only two dispatchers were working.

In Paradise, officials issued evacuation alerts for 10 different zones in the city in just one hour, between 7:47 a.m. and 8:43 a.m. But alerts were not sent in four other zones, equally at risk. The Butte County Sheriff's office, which issued the alerts throughout the county, referred questions about the four zones to Paradise Police, who did not respond to a request for comment.

"It'll never be perfect, when there's limited time," said Daniel Gonzales of the RAND Homeland Security and Defense Center, who led a 2016 study about warnings for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. But with review and more pre-planning and practice, "it should be possible to do much better than what happened in Paradise ... to minimize errors that might happen during a very stressful set of conditions."

To improve matters, officials will have to solve one weakness of any electronic alert system: its dependence on electricity.

Even during a power outage, messages that are sent to a landline have a better chance of landing. That's because power is sent to the phones through copper wires, which are more heat-resistant. Phone company offices have extensive battery systems, as well as backup generators, according to Santa Clara University School of Law professor and former CPUC commissioner Catherine Sandoval.

But cell phone coverage is less reliable. Cell towers need electricity to operate, but there is no requirement to have backup electrical power at cell towers. Also, cell service relies on fragile glass fiber optic networks to route calls from the base stations to switching stations, then to customers. And because the systems are designed in a straight line, when one tower goes down, incoming calls reverse direction and bounce back.

Rural areas are especially vulnerable, with more limited networks, said RAND's Gonzales. And emergency officials are not told which towers are down or which carriers have lost service.

"The current technology gives us ubiquity, but not great resiliency," said Jamie Barnett, former chief of the Public Safety & Homeland Security Bureau of the Federal Communications Commission.

"Cellular networks allow us to have voice and data communications nearly everywhere now," he said. "But cell phones are really just little radios, and they are dependent on the viability of the cell tower and the viability of the 'backhaul' into the network."

In the eastern Paradise neighborhoods first hit by fire, about 56 percent of the 4,272 emergency alert calls failed due to what CodeRED manufacturer OnSolve calls "operator intercept" or "timed out," meaning that the phone has been disconnected, the number changed or no longer in service, or — most likely — the network didn't find sufficient signal strength or bandwidth to make the call work, due to cell tower failure.

By 1:30 a.m. next morning, evacuation orders were nearly futile for residents of the old logging town of Stirling City and other rural communities up on Paradise Ridge, north of Paradise. Records show that a stunning 98 percent of the phone calls made to that area to evacuate never reached a person.

"This has been a growing issue with emergency communications — fostered by transition to more and more people using cell phones and other systems that are reliant on fiber," said Sandoval.

# 'I want my mom back'

## Survivor recounts final moments with mother

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By Blanca Qullantan • Chico Enterprise-Record

**PARADISE** » They fought about everything that morning. They argued about the neighbor, showering, paying the phone bill, packing the safe, talking to a woman named Mary, the bumper-to-bumper traffic outside, the severity of the fire and God.

They argued over evacuating. Christina Taft fled Paradise with tens of thousands of others who managed to escape the path of deadliest and most destructive fire in California's history. Her mother, Victoria Taft, stayed.

It was the last time they would see each other. The Camp Fire roared to life on Nov. 8 around 6:30 a.m. near Pulga. By 8 a.m., the inferno had ripped across the Concow Valley and burned into Paradise, consuming the earth at the rate of a football field each second. Alice Blair, the only neighbor Christina and Victoria knew, knocked on their apartment door around 8:30 a.m. to warn them to get out. Blair's granddaughter had seen flames approaching while driving to work and called to urge her to evacuate.

There were no official calls, door knocks or evacuation alerts — just Blair's warning. Elliott and Copeland roads, where the duplex they lived in sat, were quiet. Christina said she saw police drive by, but they didn't say anything to anyone.

She hopped in the shower. Her mother stayed in her pajamas, picked up the phone to talk to a friend named Mary who lived in town and wasn't evacuating, and sat down to pay the AT&T bill.

Thirty minutes later, cars congested the streets, and smoke consumed the sky.

"It was pitch black — like night in the day," Christina remembered.

Her mother began to lightly pack then stopped. Christina told her to look at the traffic and darkness outside.

Victoria took a quick glance.

"Well, you took a shower," she replied facetiously. Christina packed the car, cursed and talked about the gravity of the situation. Victoria didn't like that, so they fought.

"She just wanted me to be quiet," Christina said. "She was recoiling... in denial... Didn't think it was going to be that bad and said I needed to calm down."

Christina continued packing. Victoria still wanted to wait until noon — or until they heard word from an official.

She handed Christina a jacket, some squash soup, pillows, an umbrella and her phone book. Christina grabbed photos, tabs with documents in them, clothes and the safe.

Victoria looked for her birth certificate to give to Christina, but couldn't find it. Instead, she handed her an ID that expired nearly 10 years ago — before she partially lost her vision and had to stop driving.

Then the power went out.

Victoria lit candles and Christina blew them out. Her mother just lit more and stayed on the phone with Mary.

Feeling defeated, Christina left. She turned on her headlights and drove away around 10 a.m. She later learned the blaze had ravaged her home and claimed her mother's life sometime between 11 a.m. and noon.

### The drive

Much was said within those 90 minutes. Christina replayed the fight in her mind as she drove to Chico. She was angry and frustrated, yet the overwhelming feeling that she should've turned around to force her mother out of the apartment and into the car consumed her.

"I didn't give enough time, I was seriously packing up the car with all of this stuff — it was completely full and not enough of her stuff really," she said. "And then she didn't want me to take her laptop, like 'No don't touch that...Don't touch the suitcase!'"



Christina Taft holds a photograph of her mother, Victoria Taft.

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She blasted music in the car so she wouldn't think, but there was one thought she couldn't shake.

"I probably wouldn't see her again," she said as her voice broke. "... And that was it."

She drove from Copeland Road to Nunneley Road to Pearson Road to Skyway. Vehicles crawled in gridlock traffic. She couldn't turn the car around.

"I had a chance to save her and I just didn't do it," Christina said.

### The Tafts

They lived their whole lives together — just them two.

Christina, 25, is a business major at Chico State University and is expecting to graduate next fall. Her mother, though listed as Victoria Taft in reports of those who died in the Camp Fire, was known as Vicki by everyone.

Vicki, 66, was a stay-at-home mom. She was born Nov. 11, 1951 in Pennsylvania, but grew up in Los Angeles.

Her family was immersed in the entertainment industry. Vicki's mother did some modeling and her father was a cameraman. Her half-brother was a screenwriter.

She attended UCLA but never finished. She worked in real estate, and was actress and a stunt double until she got injured on the set of "Dick Tracy" around 1989.

Her IMDb page says she is known for her roles in the 1991 film "Checkered Flag" and the 1981 film "Malibu Hot Summer," which also featured Kevin Costner. But, Vicki often wouldn't share the details of her past life with Christina. She would simply say she didn't remember.

When they moved to Paradise in 2008 after spending 12 years in Arizona and three in Southern California, Vicki joined the Lions Club for a time and enjoyed making friends at the free church lunches in town.

Vicki liked to watch old sitcoms — mainly comedies and romances, anything lighthearted. She was the type of person who would draw smiley faces on the manager's rent envelopes.

She would research things online and could talk for hours on the phone. Often, she would leave notes around the house of things she had to do or even just thoughts. She wrote a book called "Tara" once, Christina remembered, and enjoyed writing cards.

"We may have our ups and downs and all arounds but deep in my heart I'll always love you and cherish you!" Vicki scrawled in a card to Christina for her 23rd birthday.

It now hurts to see her mother's handwriting on cards and the backs of photos she managed to save.

For Christina's 25th birthday — less than a month before the fire — Vicki ordered a Hawaiian pizza and stuck a candle in it because Christina didn't like cake.

It would've been Vicki's birthday three days after the fire started.

They were never apart for long periods of time. Christina tried to move out once for six months in the fall of 2013 — it didn't work for Vicki. She missed her daughter, so Christina moved back in.

They would sometimes fight, especially when Vicki would rearrange things in Christina's room or when Christina would suggest they move to Southern California, but she had never seen her mother recoil the way she did when they argued over evacuating.

Especially because it wasn't the first time they had to do so.

In 2008, the Humboldt Fire swept through southern Paradise and burned on Highway 32 across Skyway. It scorched 23,344 acres and destroyed 87 homes, but no

one died. It was the same year Christina and Victoria had moved to Paradise into a place on Skyway.

"The first time it was her getting me out," Christina said. "But it was 10 years ago and she could drive and could see and we had calls to leave."

There were no calls this time.

While her mother was social outside the house, they mainly kept to themselves. They didn't have any family in Paradise to call and warn them like their neighbor's granddaughter had.

"By not having many friends or family, we were more at risk of dying," Christina said. "It was all on us to find out what was going on."

### The search

The drive to Chico took nearly two hours. Once in the city limits, Christina pulled over to the side of the road and frantically started calling 9-1-1 to get help for her mother.

The Butte County Sheriff's Office logged her call at 1:26 p.m. It listed that her mother was on Copeland Road, blind, unable to drive and would need to be transported out.

Christina said she tried calling 9-1-1 for six hours.

"I told them she had disabilities and they were like, 'Why didn't she leave?'" She said. "She didn't know it was a mandatory evacuation and they were questioning me on why she didn't go."

Every time she would explain why her mother didn't go with her, Christina would become more frustrated. She began to text her friends to say that her mother was probably going to die.

She soon met up with a friend she had made at the university. With her mother's expired ID in hand, Christina went searching for Vicki at the evacuation shelters and put her on the missing list.

Around 6 p.m., on the way to the Oroville Nazarene Church shelter, they saw a California Highway Patrol officer on the side of the road. She pulled over to ask him for help. He called her evacuation request into the command post.

"I didn't realize you could only do it in person or they wouldn't care," she said. "I realized that too, but you know too late...Hours too late."

They checked the last shelter around 10 p.m. — nearly 12 hours after Christina had left Vicki behind. There, Christina said she could feel her mother's waves of energy around her.

She knew her mother was dead. Her friend told her to keep looking.

Christina received a call a few days later from Alhambra County officials to go in for a DNA swab — remains had been found on the property.

### The call

Thanksgiving morning was when Christina was told the remains found on the property matched her DNA. But officials wouldn't tell her if they were found inside or outside of their apartment.

There were two calls.

She was driving to Nevada City to spend Thanksgiving with a Paradise adopt-a-family when officials first called her to confirm the DNA match. The second call — though Christina doesn't fully remember it — was to confirm Vicki's time of death.

Officials told her they suspected the fire had hit Copeland Road between 11 a.m. and noon.

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"I only had one to two hours to get her out," Christina said. "When I was calling it was pointless because it was too late anyway."

Vicki's name was released on the fatality list the Monday after. Christina still didn't know if her mother had died inside or outside of their apartment.

It was only in person that she saw the caution tape roping off a block of the space where her mother's body was found. It was where their living room once was, Christina said. Probably by the window.

"She probably couldn't get out," she said. "It was disgusting imagining her dying."

### The return

Vicki liked Paradise. After living there for 10 years, she didn't want to leave.

"She would've been fine with just me and her, her whole life and I was getting to be fine with that too and then this happened," Christina said.

She went up to Paradise twice to see the remains of their two-bedroom apartment and doesn't want to go back.

"There's nothing there," she said.

All that was left in the rubble of the apartment they had lived in for seven years were broken cups — including one that had "love" written on it. Christina had given it to Vicki as a gift for her birthday or Mother's Day.

There was also the caution tape.

"Twice is enough," she said.

### The life after

Christina's memory of Nov. 8 and her conversation with her mother a month later is sparse. But, she thinks about it constantly and runs through scenarios of what she could have done to get her mother to evacuate.

She could've disconnected the phone. She could've called 9-1-1. She could've said, "I love you, I don't want you to die — begging her."

The first two weeks she was angry with law enforcement officials for not doing enough. The second two weeks she began to blame herself.

"Eighty percent of me was saying no and then that 20 percent that wanted to just run away and think about myself won," Christina said. "Now it's just that 80 percent of me that's just dying inside every day."

Days following the fire, Christina watched and read reports of people fighting off the fire with hoses and surviving. She saw videos of people driving through raging flames and surviving. She said she didn't know she could do that.

"I thought if fire got in the street, you'd die right then, but apparently not with all these other people staying with fire in their yards," she said. "It's my fault that I didn't stay."

"Everyone says no, but I was responsible for her...They got their people out — their family out — and I just left."

Christina now spends most days getting to know her mother. She reached out to her estranged half-uncle in Arizona, Vicki's friends, and searched for movies she was in. Most recently, she watched "Malibu Hot Summer."

"I had asked her before and she said no she wasn't in it," Christina said as she cracked a half smile. "I watched it and it was her — just thinner and younger, you know?"

Christina is staying at University Village until May — thanks to a donation from a Chico State business program alumnus — but she will need to find a place to stay

**"I left my mom there and she died, that is the worst thing I could have ever done. I'm going to regret this my entire life."**

— Christina Taft

while she finishes her degree in the fall.

After graduation, she wants to move to Southern California or Arizona and maybe work to develop an emergency communication platform prototype to improve centralized communication during emergencies. She wants to name it after her mother.

Often, she is busy gathering resources or going to school. At first, her financial situation made her feel insecure, she said, but now she mostly feels guilt.

"I left my mom there and she died, that is the worst thing I could have ever done," Christina said. "I'm going to regret this my entire life."

### The memorial

They never talked about what Christina would do if her mother died.

"It was just her and me," she said. "She didn't have insurance or any of that stuff — we thought it was creepy. She didn't expect to die."

A memorial is scheduled for Jan. 12, 2019. East Lawn, a memorial and mortuary service in Sacramento, donated their cremation and memorial services. Cremation was always what Vicki's family had done and Christina doesn't want to leave her mother in Butte County when she leaves after graduation.

Many people have been helping her plan the services, but it is difficult for her to process the details.

"That was really hard for me to look at and finalize it," she said. "I want my mom back all the time constantly and I can't do anything — it's a nightmare."

Christina doesn't know who will come to the memorial — her half-uncle and some adopt-a-family friends in Sacramento might. Vicki's phone book is full of first-name-only entries, making it difficult to find her friends. Some aren't in the phone book, including Mary, the last person Vicki probably talked to on the phone that day.

The memorial in Sacramento will be a tribute to Vicki's life. Christina also wants to have one in Chico in the spring for her mother's friends in Paradise to attend. She wants her mother to be remembered through photos and stories — even though it won't bring her back.

"She'd rather be alive than sit in articles, she'd want to just be with me — alive," Christina said. "She had things to do, she had a life."

If the Camp Fire hadn't happened, Vicki Taft would have turned 67 that weekend. She would have seen her daughter graduate, get married and have grandchildren — she had already bought the baby clothes.

Christina's eyes welled with tears. She had forgotten about the baby clothes — but now they were gone too.

"She didn't deserve that ending," Christina said.

# Survivors' 'rough road' after evacuating

By Amanda Hovik

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Kailey Elliott, a 31-year-old cancer survivor from Paradise, and her husband are Camp Fire survivors with two children who lost their home, their belongings twice and are housing a family of six on their property in Chico.

The couple escaped the fire and spent the first couple nights after the fire sleeping in their truck. They then moved from house to house until they saved enough money to buy a new house.

Despite finally getting a roof over their heads, the family's journey since the fire has been full of challenges.

Elliott went to the hospital the day after the Camp Fire for treatment because a falling tree branch that was on fire struck her back and her husband lost his truck in the fire.

Her husband, who was at work the day of the fire, was hit by another car on his way home and left his car at their home in Paradise.

Elliott helped evacuate four Paradise Elementary School students on the day of the fire.

"I was at home (that day) and I had friends that had kids there that were on the other side of town that couldn't get to them," she said, adding it was scary because the power was down at the school and it was dark.

"I went into each classroom and I had wet rags with me, I covered the (four children's) faces because the smoke was so bad you couldn't see your hand in front of you," she said. "I filled up my truck with a bunch of kids and just said get in and we all just left."

She said her Dodge Durango's front end melted coming down Neal Road while evacuating the elementary school students.

But they soon started getting help from the public. A Toyota Matrix was donated from Paradise's CMA Church and about a month and a half after the fire, a 20-foot trailer was donated by a friend.

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The couple owned property in Concow and used their GoFundMe money to replace her husband's tools lost in the fire and generators for their Concow property.

They went on a retreat to Danville and when the couple returned home on Christmas night they found everything was gone.

"Somebody smashed my car, ripped out the trailer, stole everything down to our underwear," she said. "We lost everything twice."

They stayed in a trailer in a parking lot off the Esplanade in Chico for about two months after their belongings were stolen. However, the trailer belonged to a shop worker and they had to return it. Then the couple found a house.

Now that the Elliott's have their place they're helping a family in need by letting them stay in a trailer in the backyard. Mandi Moon, a 39-year-old single mother and her children are living on the property.

"We all went through a horrible thing and there is no reason to put somebody else out when you have the opportunity and the chance to give them something once you gain something," Elliott said.

She added they don't have everything they need but they get what they can and come together as a team.

"There's 12 of us all together with a dog, we always figure something out," she said.

UNITY » PAGE 4

Elliott added they are taking it one day at a time. Her family along with her friend's family of six children are living on the one-story mobile home property.

Her husband has been the only person bringing in income.

"He almost prefers to live in a trailer and we've lived off the grid for years and it wasn't bad," she said. "But as of now I have to have a stable home for my kids because we have no other choice."

"It has been a rough road stressing to try to pay to move in, to make sure we get power turned and how are we going to pay water," she added. "And repaying bills again."

Before the fire, she worked as an at home care provider and owned a cleaning business but she lost her clients after the fire.

She is a third time cancer survivor and says both of her children, ages 7 and 9-years-old are disabled. She also said that her hus-

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AMANDA HOVIK — PARADISE POST

Kailey Elliott, Camp Fire survivor, is living in Chico with her husband, two children and helping a family of six who are staying on their property.

band has disabilities.

“A lot of people look at me (and ask) why are you smiling? (and I say) because we made it,” she said. “We made it. There’s no reason to be upset all the time, we made it out( of the fire) and that’s what counts at this point.”

Elliott said her children and the support from the community help her to keep her spirits up.

“When we got robbed, I lost all of my medication. The cancer I just went through in August, I had surgery for ovarian cancer

and the cancer had spread throughout my stomach,” she commented. “They stole all of my medication.”

She said she has no hormones in her body and she has no idea how she’s keeping it together.

“I think it’s my kids and the positive energy people (are) giving to us and saying that they’re praying for us,” she said. “And the notes I get in our mailbox, things like that has been keeping us alive and our spirits up.”

The couple did not receive any funding or insurance after the fire because they were renting the house they has been living in for two months.

Elliott said they are not planning to return to Paradise and the couple is currently living in their house in Chico month to month.

“It’s hard on me to know that’s where my kids grew up and that’s where they recognized that was their home,” she said. “To see something like that I can’t do it. Every time I go up there I come down and I’m sick.”

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Contact reporter Amanda Hovik at 530-876-3071.



# Plumas News

The online edition of Feather Publishing's newspapers  
Feather River Bulletin, Portola Reporter, Indian Valley Record, Chester Progressive

News

2-27-2019

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## Re-starting the Rock House Café and the community of Concow

February 25, 2019 Ken Donnell, Special to Feather Publishing

The Rock House Café was originally constructed in the 1930s at the time when the Feather River Highway was built. The Rock House served as a "roadhouse, restaurant, and entertainment venue" for persons working on the Feather River Highway during the seven years required to complete this roadway.

After the highway was completed, the Rock House continued as a private business, but the operation fell into decline in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s, the facility was in decline and not operating on a regular basis.

Karen and Dave purchased the property in 2014 and slowly began to repair and remodel the property. They opened their small café — next to the larger, original Rock House — in 2015 to serve food to the local community, and hosted musical events on the patio behind the café. Restoration of the larger Rock House building was almost complete when the Camp Fire tore through Concow and Yankee Hill on Nov. 9, 2018, destroying the larger building.

Fortunately, the smaller café was left intact, although in need of a thorough cleaning to remove the grit and odor of smoke from the fire. Having been a friend of Karen's since 2016 (she makes a great cappuccino), I was drawn to help them recover as soon as Highway 70 reopened after the fire.

Simply stated ... everyone in Butte County is exhausted, and every resource in Butte County is strained to the breaking point.

The impacts of the Camp fire to every city, every community and every citizen of Butte County is inestimable. Persons displaced by the fire, including those trying to return to and live on their properties, need help from persons living in nearby regions outside of Butte County. This help needs to take many forms:



The historic Rock House located on Yankee Hill on Highway 70 was a familiar site to anyone traversing the Feather River Canyon. It was built in 1937 using horse and wagon to locally source the rock. The walls are 18 inches thick and are all that's left of the main structure. The owners lost not only the business, but also their home as the Camp Fire swept through the area the morning of Nov. 9, the day after the fire began. Photos by Victoria Metcalf



This garden statue was left untouched, along with the thick rock walls of the Rock House.

# Plumas News

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- Strategic equipment and supplies to help residents clean and re-build their properties.
- Friendship and encouragement to help deal with the emotional impacts of the fire.
- Professional consulting to deal with issues of legally re-building, dealing with FEMA, insurance claims, obtaining necessary permits from Butte County, etc..
- Financial assistance.
- Entertainment, food and artistic expression to help Concow rebuild itself as an active community.

With all of the above needs pointing towards the most important need of all ... HOPE.

At the present moment, the residents of Concow and all of Butte County are running critically short of HOPE ... hope for an improvement in their current situation, hope that someday their communities will again be functional and happy places to live, hope that somebody "out there" cares enough to help a stranger in need.

Recovery from a disaster such as the Camp Fire is often not a linear process. There is no simple road map to success. But there are some basic steps, which those of us living "out there" can take to contribute to getting the Rock House Café re-started, and helping to re-build the communities of Concow and Yankee Hill.

### **Start food preparation**

Get the Rock House Café operational so that food can be prepared in this facility and served to nearby residents. Karen and Dave have made a lot of progress toward cleaning the Café and removing the odor of smoke, but cleaning a facility after smoke intrusion often takes more than one cleaning.

One or two appropriately sized generators would be helpful as service from PG&E is currently not available. Karen and Dave will post a short list of other items needed, which will soon be sent out via public media websites and Plumas News.

Get food being served on the patio. FEMA has withdrawn from any further involvement with helping to clean up the Rock House property due to it being "a commercial business in an unincorporated community."

Dave and Karen have hired a private contractor and are contributing their own labor to remove the debris from the burned out larger building. Once this debris is removed, a final cleaning of the patio area should have the patio ready for public occupancy for food service, musical events, spiritual services and other public gatherings.

Improve the Rock House website to help the business to recover and to provide a location for delivery of strategic resources directly to Concow and Yankee Hill residents. The website for the Rock House, [www.rockhousehwy70.com](http://www.rockhousehwy70.com), will be improved to attract more business to the Rock House Café, and will also employ software that will allow Concow residents to post messages with equipment and supplies they need, and so that persons living outside of Butte County can arrange for delivery of the requested resources. Often this exchange will be made at the Rock House property. We will be posting regular updates at [www.californiagiftofmusic.org](http://www.californiagiftofmusic.org), which is the website used for my blog posts about our work at Miracle City in Chico immediately after the Fire.

An example of such person-to- person assistance is what inspired me to begin this action. In December 2018, I was contacted by a friend in Plumas County who knew of someone who had a 1990s Subaru wagon they wished to donate directly to someone displaced by the fire. I then called Karen MacGowan, who confirmed she knew of a person who desperately needed a replacement vehicle.

I never spoke directly with the owner of the Subaru, and I only spoke once with the person who received this donated vehicle. But somehow, my friend and I managed to get these people connected so that one life torn apart by the Camp Fire was made a bit better by the generosity of a Plumas county resident.

After a disaster of the magnitude of the Camp Fire, recovery can be too big of a word for a damaged person, or family or community to deal with. Sometimes, we need to put the big picture of recovery aside, and just focus on the small steps to make things "better." When we take enough small steps to fix the simple problems in front of us, on a person-to-person or family-to-family basis, "better" will eventually lead to the larger picture falling into place.

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The process of arranging for delivery of these supplies and equipment will be item-to-item and person-to-person. This will keep the operation small, easily manageable, and involve the least possible regulatory oversight. Even though FEMA has officially withdrawn from the Rock House property, everything involving regulatory issues in Butte County remains difficult due to overlapping jurisdictions ... Federal government (FEMA, U.S. Forest Service) Butte County (sheriff, code enforcement, health department, etc), State of California (DMV, CalFire, state relief agencies).

## The next steps

The first step is to organize some workdays to help Karen and Dave clean the inside of the café and the surrounding property to the point where it is fully operational, and a beautiful and pleasant location to have a meal. Dave and Karen are doing such an amazing job of cleaning their property that the list of what is specifically needed is growing shorter every day. Look for updates about what work is needed at [www.rockhousehwy70.com](http://www.rockhousehwy70.com), and at [www.californiagiftofmusic.org](http://www.californiagiftofmusic.org).

The second step is to concurrently begin holding conference calls among those persons who want to take a lead role in organizing the longer-term work. Group emails will be also be helpful, but some group conversations will be important. It would be nice to start these conversations in one to two weeks (approximately March 1).

In the beginning, I will be organizing these discussions myself, and posting through [www.californiagiftofmusic.org](http://www.californiagiftofmusic.org). As our work moves forward, and as Karen and Dave have more available time, Karen will begin to assume responsibility for organizing future "Rock House Revival Events" through [www.rockhousehwy70.com](http://www.rockhousehwy70.com).

My long term dream is that, for many years to come, every resident of Plumas County who passes the Rock House traveling to or from their Plumas home will feel a sense of pride at seeing, and possibly being a part of, the Rock House Revival.

Each of us reading these words has the ability to make a difference in the lives of residents in the Concow-Yankee Hill communities who desperately need HOPE to persevere, and move forward. This is a moment we where can make history, and I encourage anyone, living anywhere, to join this noble work.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 3-1-2019

### CRIME

## Men change pleas in theft of firefighter's pickup in Camp Fire

By Andre Byik

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OROVILLE » Two men accused of stealing a firefighter's personal pickup truck during the Camp Fire have changed their pleas.

Concow residents William Erlbacher, 39, and Robert DePalma, 60, each pleaded no contest Thursday in Butte County Superior Court to a felony count of vehicle theft in connection with the incident.

Erlbacher and DePalma each face up to three years in state prison when they are sentenced April 25.

Erlbacher had faced an additional count of first-degree burglary, but that charge was dismissed as part of his no contest plea. Prosecutors had alleged he broke into a fire station before taking the firefighter's pickup.

Both men remained out of custody as they await sentencing.

The Butte County District Attorney's Office has said the charges against the two men stem from an episode that began Nov. 8 — the day the Camp Fire ignited — when the fire-

fighter was called in to respond to the blaze, driving his Ford F-250 to Cal Fire Station 36 at Jarbo Gap.

The firefighter left his key in the station's bunk area and left the station on a fire engine, prosecutors have said. After returning, things were amiss at the station, and the firefighter's truck was missing.

The truck was later reported seen near the Safeway on East Avenue in Chico, and it was later found parked near the side of a house on Cactus Avenue, prosecutors have said.

Cal Fire law enforcement officers arrested Erlbacher and DePalma for their suspected roles in the incident Nov. 16, according to jail records.

Prosecutors said that while it was indicated Erlbacher and DePalma were fleeing the fire at the time, it did not appear they had a plan to return the pickup, which was found eight days after it had been taken from the fire station. It was further alleged that the truck's back window and license plate had been covered while it was parked.

Philip Heithecker, Erl-

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**"I spent an extraordinary amount of time and effort trying to piece this case together. What I've discovered was DePalma, Erlbacher and another gentleman by the name of 'Jones' — they were home when Concow was engulfed in flames."**

— Philip Heithecker, William Erlbacher's attorney

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bacher's attorney, said Thursday he was able to show that Erlbacher, DePalma and a third uncharged person had a legal necessity to take the truck to escape death.

"It was either that or death," Heithecker said. "That's how serious it was. That fire came ... to the fire station."

In light of the legal necessity showing, he said, Erlbacher was able to plead to vehicle theft in an agreement that resulted in his burglary charge being dismissed. It was unfortunate, the defense attorney said, that the truck was not returned promptly.

"I spent an extraordinary amount of time and effort trying to piece this

case together," Heithecker said. "What I've discovered was DePalma, Erlbacher and another gentleman by the name of 'Jones' — they were home when Concow was engulfed in flames."

The attorney said Erlbacher and DePalma got in DePalma's truck to escape the fire, and Jones got on a motorcycle. Jones, however, wrecked the motorcycle trying to escape and was badly burned. He then got in DePalma's truck, which "basically melted."

They then walked, ran and sometimes crawled from Concow to Highway 70, making it to the fire station, Heithecker said. A video camera at the station captured a white car arriv-

ing there and then turning around and leaving.

The defense attorney said he learned that a woman driving the white car gave Erlbacher and Jones a ride to the station before going back and picking up DePalma. After DePalma got to the station, he said, Jones came out saying something to the effect of, "I've got a truck, let's get out of here."

The three men got in the truck and immediately headed for a hospital, Heithecker said. Jones was ultimately flown to a hospital to care for his wounds.

Erlbacher, he said, did admit to driving the pickup, but he just took the fall for Jones. Heithecker added he was able to show that Erlbacher has not driven for 15 years and cannot "legally see."

"Jones was the one that took the truck and drove it," he said.

Where is Jones?

"Jones is in the wind and probably won't be prosecuted," Heithecker said, "because of legal necessity."

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Contact reporter Andre Byik at 530-896-7760.

### BIDWELL PARK



LAURA URSENY — ENTERPRISE-RECORD FILE

Injured or captured deer once ran in the Bidwell Park deer pen on East Eighth Street, visible Feb. 11 next to the Chico Creek Nature Center in Chico.

# Details of Maidu Living Village plan available

### Staff reports

**CHICO** » A chance for the public to see plans for the proposed Maidu Living Village comes with a meeting at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Chico Creek Nature Center, 1968 E. Eighth St.

The plan is to create an

interactive experience to inform visitors about the Mechoopda, which is a tribe of the Maidu people, according to a city press release. The site is the former deer pen that is next to the Chico Creek Nature Center.

The project is a coordi-

nated effort between the city, which owns Bidwell Park, the local Mechoopda tribe, and the Chico Area Recreation and Park District, which leases the nature center and its grounds from the city.

The groups are applying to the state for a Prop. 68

grant from the California Natural Resources Agency to build the site.

*Information about the project will be available at the meeting, or contact the Chico Parks Division, 896-7800 or email [parkinfo@chicoca.gov](mailto:parkinfo@chicoca.gov).*

CAMP FIRE

# LOCAL BUILDER, VOLUNTEERS BUILD TINY HOMES FOR VICTIMS



PHOTOS BY KAYLA FITZGERALD — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Alyssa Nolan (left) works with Rohan Patil (back), Guru Prasad and Abhishek Mishra (far right) to build a tiny house for a Camp Fire victim in Oroville on Sunday.

**By Kayla Fitzgerald**  
kfitzgerald@chicoer.com

**OROVILLE** » Volunteers from Sewa International joined local builder Alyssa Nolan to build tiny homes for victims of the Camp Fire on Sunday.

Nolan, who lost her home in the Butte Lightning Complex fires in 2008, began building the tiny homes in January.

"I got burned out from Concow in 2008 so I totally know what it is," Nolan said. "When the fire happened I gave food, clothes and money and I just thought, 'Lord, I really could do more.'"

After reaching out to her network, the owner of the land at 1790 Montgomery St. in Oroville told Nolan she could build on that property.

Nolan said she works nights and most weekend but still finds time to build during the week. People have come from as far as Placerville to help with the building.

"I come out here almost 40 hours a week Tuesday through Friday whether people are here or not.

In 2016, Nolan was named social entrepreneur of the year

at Chico State for a different housing venture and used her knowledge to begin building tiny homes. Since January, Nolan said she has completed two homes that will be donated to single parents.

"That's a single mom that got burned out from Concow," Nolan said. "This is for a single dad. He has an 8-year-old developmentally disabled son. They were living at the fairgrounds and now they're at the Torres Shelter just waiting for it."

Funding for the tiny homes began by using GoFundMe pages. Others, like Scott from High-Hand Nursery in Loomis has helped fund some of the building as well, Nolan said.

Building of the third tiny home began Sunday with a group of 25 volunteers from the Bay Area chapter of Sewa International.

Sewa International is a non-profit volunteer organization that helps those in the time of need after disaster hits anywhere in the world, said Guru Prasad, coordinator of the Sewa Bay Area chapter.

"Our team is trying to see how we can help. Sewa does it



Abhishek Mishra (left) works with Rohan Patil, Suresh Patil, Shivani Patil and Alyssa Nolan when members of Sewa International came to Oroville to help build a tiny home for a victim of the Camp Fire on Sunday.

in three ways. Relief, rehabilitate and rebuild,” Prasad said.

Prasad said the funding comes from donations, corporate sponsors and grants. Sewa is funding and helping build the third tiny house, but the organization hopes to be able to help build more in the future by bringing more volunteers and more funds.

“Being empathetic and giving back is something that is very important. It really feels good that we are able to help somebody,” Prasad said.

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 3-24-2019

### PARADISE

# Seriously burned bear cub rescued, recovering

By Robin Epley

*repley@chicoer.com*

**PARADISE** » An emaciated bear cub found Wednesday in Yankee Hill is likely a Camp Fire survivor, due to the severe burns found on his paws and the conspicuous absence of his mother, said Henry Lomeli, a biologist for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The bear, which Lomeli said was a “stunted yearling,” only weighed about 15-20 pounds when Fish and Wildlife wardens got a call to investigate a cub that had been up a tree for several days, according to a local resident.

Such a small cub is often a target of prey, and “because of that, they don’t get far from their mothers,” Lomeli said. The lack of a mother bear hovering somewhere nearby is a likely sign that she did not survive November’s wildfire.

Lomeli said the bear was in “terrible” condition when they found him, and that “he was just skin and bones and hair, with very little muscle,” after surviving on his own for the past five months.

## Bear

FROM PAGE 1

The bear has been taken to Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, one of the few local centers that rehabilitates bears. Cheryl Millham, founder of the center, said they often call their temporary residents by the area in which they were found — thus, the bear cub has been named “Paradise.”

Paradise the Bear is still at an extreme risk of death or organ failure due to malnutrition, and “he’s not out of the woods by any means,” Lomeli said, but Millham said she’s very encouraged so far by the cub’s acceptance of formula and of some oatmeal and fruits.

“As long as I can get him to drink formula, he’ll be OK,” Millham said.

So far, she said, Paradise’s favorite snack is oatmeal ... maple-flavored, of course.

The center will likely keep Paradise for six to eight weeks, and if he survives, they will return him to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, headquartered in Rancho Cordova. The department officials

will observe him for a short time, fit him with a GPS tracking collar and then return him to his home in Butte County, Lomeli said.

Generally, Lomeli advised, the department does not immediately assume cubs to be abandoned or orphaned, and always suggest waiting to see if the mother returns within a day or two.

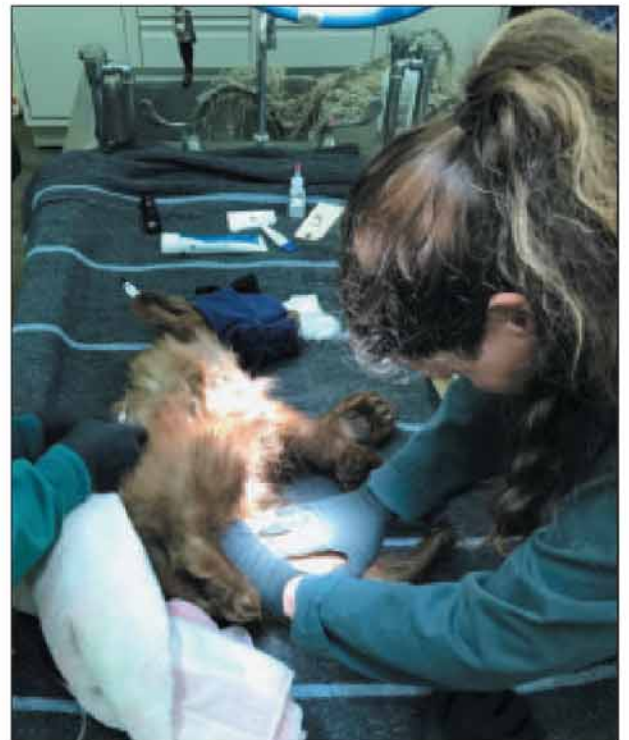
“We don’t want to start taking animals away from their parents if they’re not lost,” he said.

But in the case of Paradise, it was obvious to game warden Lt. Barry Ceccon that no tracks from a mother were nearby, and the little bear needed help.

“He’s been without a mother for five months, trying to make a living and not doing very well at it,” Lomeli said. “He’s a tough little guy.”

In the meantime, the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care center has a webcam where supporters can follow the cub’s progress. You can visit [www.ltwc.org/webcams](http://www.ltwc.org/webcams) to watch Paradise and two other recently-orphaned cubs play, sleep and eat as they recover.

Contact reporter Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.



HENRY LOMELI — CONTRIBUTED

Veterinarian Deanna Clifford works to save a badly-emaciated bear cub with burns on its paws, found Wednesday in Yankee Hill.



# Chico Enterprise Record

## 3-25-2019

### CAMP FIRE

## Volunteers begin replanting trees for private land owner

By Kayla Fitzgerald  
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**CONCOW »** A group of 30 volunteers began replanting trees Saturday near Concow for a private land owner whose land was burned in the Camp Fire.

The group was led by Thad Walker with the Butte County Conservation Resource District and Carrie Wendt with Point Blue Conservation Science. One Tree Planted, a nonprofit based in Vermont, also was part of the project.

“We’re working with One Tree Planted; they’re kind of our partner. They’re an international organization that focuses on reforestation,” Walker said. “They kind of contacted us and had already been thinking a lot about the replanting efforts. They have been a great partner in helping us make this happen.”

Walker said after the fire, there are a lot of needs in a lot of different directions. This was the first day the group began the replanting efforts.

“Our efforts right now are just providing land owners with information about their property post-fire, erosion control, things like that. Just kind of being able to provide the resources for them,” Walker said.

Wendt, who works with Point Blue Conservation Science, was a resident of Paradise and lost her home in the Camp Fire. She said there are multiple reasons why replanting in the burn area is important.

“For ecological restoration, so we’re bringing trees back into

the system. That would happen on its own naturally over a long period of time, but we’re trying to jump-start that,” Wendt said. “I also think it’s helpful for the community to see the restoration and to feel like they can be part of restoring landscapes after the fire, just to feel like they’re connected to the land a little bit more.”

Wendt said she was surprised to see people coming from far away to help with the replanting project.

**TREES » PAGE 8**

## Trees

FROM PAGE 1

“I think it’s really unique that we have people coming from the Bay Area and Shasta Lake and from all over the place. It feels like a greater community,” Wendt said. “This community was heavily impacted, but it feels like people are really coming in from all over the place to help, so it’s great.”

Claudia Ward and Belle Gartland drove to Oroville from Oakland Saturday morning.

One of Ward’s close friend’s parents lost their home in the Camp Fire and she had put together a fundraiser for them after the fire occurred. She said when Gartland asked her to attend the replanting, she was all for it because it affected so many people who don’t even live near the burned area.

“It just affected so many



Claudia Ward looks on as Belle Gartland digs a hole to plant one of their trees on Saturday.

MATT BATES —  
ENTERPRISE-RECORD

people. It affected us being down there (Oakland) from the smoke,” Ward said. “We weren’t too far removed from what was going on. It’s a great opportunity to come and support.”

Ward said seeing the devastation for the first time was emotional for her.

“It’s definitely emotional,” Ward said. “I hadn’t driven up here. This is the first time I’ve driven through

here and just seeing it for the first time, it just has an eerie sense about it as you drive through because it’s silent. You really see first-hand how devastating the fire was.”

# Chico Enterprise Record

## 3-27-2019

### CAMP FIRE

# Grant applications being accepted by Butte Strong

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#### *Staff reports*

The Butte Strong Fund is accepting grant applications for organizations and agencies that qualify for Camp Fire recovery and rebuilding funds. A nine-member committee of community leaders, most with ties to Paradise, Magalia or Concow, will evaluate and determine which applications are approved and how much money will be allocated from NVCF.

The nine members on the NVCF committee are: Chuck Rough, former Paradise town manager; Anna Bauer, First 5 Commission program manager; Scott Lotter, former Paradise mayor; Carol Peterson, former publisher of the Paradise Post; Don McNelis, former Butte County Office of Education superintendent; Geoffrey Chinnock, manager, Morrison & Co.; Greg Webb, local builder; Peggy Moak, former Butte County treasurer-tax collector; and Farshad Azad, board chair, North Valley Community Foundation.

Sierra Nevada and Aaron Rodgers will maintain the decisions on the use of their donated funds.

Organizations are asked to visit [ButteStrongFund.org](http://ButteStrongFund.org).

org to determine if they qualify for funding. Those that do can submit a brief grant inquiry before being invited to submit a full application. Staff at NVCF will facilitate the application process.

The applications then will be reviewed by the three founders of the Butte Strong Fund — the North Valley Community Foundation, Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. and the Aaron Rodgers NorCal Fire Recovery Fund.

“We have been thoughtful about every grant made in response to the Camp Fire,” said Alexa Benson-Valavanis, president and CEO of the North Valley Community Foundation. “To date, we have granted more than \$2.4 million from our Camp Fire Relief Fund, and facilitated more than \$3 million in NVCF donor-directed and sponsor-directed relief efforts.” “However, as we shift to the long-term recovery work it has always been our intention to appoint an independent group of people to determine the most appropriate use of our philanthropic dollars. I believe we have the right group in place. They have our trust and confidence. I

am so hopeful that NVCF and the Butte Strong Fund will play a meaningful role in the long-term recovery of this region.” The Butte Strong Fund, established last month as a partnership of three major fundraising efforts, provides funding for eligible organizations or local government entities that are directly serving people affected by the Camp Fire. Individual assistance is handled through those organizations. The Butte Strong Fund offers grants to organizations within six focus areas: housing, children and youth services, health and wellness, education, community development and business recovery. To be eligible to request funding, an organization must clearly show the direct benefit to those displaced by the Camp Fire that will be achieved through their project. Grantees will be asked to provide periodic updates to track progress on the projects that are funded. The Butte Strong Fund is still receiving donations. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to Butte Strong Fund, 240 Main St., Suite 260, Chico, CA 95928 or by visiting [www.butesstrongfund.org](http://www.butesstrongfund.org).

# Chico Enterprise Record

3-30-2019

## CAMP FIRE

# Tender Loving Coffee donates over \$7,000

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*Staff reports*

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**CHICO** » Tender Loving Coffee donated \$7,150 last weekend to 21 families and individuals from Concow and Magalia, the same day launching a new coffee blend called Rise from which all proceeds will go toward long-term fire recovery.

“Immediate relief can only go so far, and there will never be enough to make up for everything that was lost,” said Heath Dewey, co-owner of Tender Loving Coffee. “We know that many impacted by the tragedy fear that support will dry up just as they are ready to receive it. Our goal is to raise funds that can benefit Butte County in the long-term. We want to let the community know that we are with them for the long haul.”

The coffee roaster also delivered 80 pounds of coffee to Camp Fire victims and community workers for Thanksgiving as well as complimentary coffee throughout November and December to first responders, survivors, Federal Emergency Management Agency workers and others involved.

Twelve-ounce bags of the Rise blend can be purchased for \$14 at Tender Loving Coffee, located at 365 E. Sixth St. in Chico. For more information, visit the company’s website at [tenderlovingcoffee.com](http://tenderlovingcoffee.com).



Coverage you can count on!

## CAMP FIRE SURVIVOR AND BURN VICTIM SHARES STORY OF SURVIVAL



A Camp Fire survivor and burn victim shared her story of survival with Action News Now.

Posted: Apr. 1, 2019 10:26 PM

Updated: Apr. 2, 2019 9:55 AM

Posted By: Laura Eng



CONCOW, Calif. - A Camp Fire survivor and burn victim shared her story of survival with Action News Now.

36-year-old Terra Hill has third-degree burns from her waist to her toes. She said the injuries changed her life forever.

"I remember looking down at my feet, my feet melting off," Hill said. "The skin was off to the side and there was blood everywhere."

Just before her escape from the fire on Nov. 8, Hill said she was in bed when she saw a glow from her Concow window.

She was a caretaker on the property. She got into a truck with her roommate and tried to drive off.

"We maybe made it 10, 15 feet before it died and the brakes failed and it rolled back into a ditch," Hill said.

The pair got out of the truck and tried to run back to the property to hide in a water tank, but the property was in flames. Her skin was burning off as she ran through the fire. They soon found other trucks parked nearby.

"I started inhaling the air from the truck," Hill said.

Hill and her roommate kicked each other, making sure the other was still alive.

"And the last time I kicked him, he didn't kick me back," Hill said.

She screamed for help and first responders picked her up and took her to safety. She was sent to UC Davis for treatment.

Doctors at UC Davis said she had a 20 percent chance of survival, but three and a half months later, she beat those odds and was sent to the Enloe Rehabilitation Center in Chico.

Hill has third-degree burns from her waist to her toes.

"I will have surgeries throughout the rest of my life," Hill said. "I will be in and out of the hospital."

But she said despite her injuries, she will walk again one day.

"I know I will be able to walk again because I don't know how to give up, but my life will never be the same again," Hill said.

Hill's lawyer said she is pursuing a claim through the bankruptcy court alongside several other wildfire survivors.

CALIFORNIA

# What is the toll? Wildfires explained

A CALmatters investigation breaks down wildfire costs to environment, life, finances, housing and more

By Julie Cart and Judy Lin  
CALmatters

If it seems that wildfires are burning nearly all the time these days, that there's no longer a definable fire season in California, you're right. Fourteen of the 20 most destructive fires in state history have occurred since 2007, and California has 78 more annual "fire days" now than it had 50 years ago.

When 2018 became the worst fire year on record, we accepted a new reality. Now each year could surpass the last, setting records for the size, destruction, cost and loss of life. A state-commissioned report makes the harrowing projection that under current emissions trends, the average burn area in California will increase 77 percent by the end of the century.

The state has spent, conservatively, more than \$4.7 billion from its emergency fund in the last 10 years to fight fires. Cal Fire, the state's firefighting agency, has been chewing through its firefighting budget only months into a year, leaving little to pay for thinning California's forests and helping rural communities protect infrastructure and water supplies.

California's fires are disruptive long after they are put out, displacing homeowners and even entire communities for months or years. Even as the charred wood decays, it produces emissions that set back the state's efforts to combat climate change — only worsening the wildfires to come.

## A changing climate

A warming climate complicates everything. Hotter and drier seasons mean that big fires in

December, once almost unheard of, are now common.

In earlier decades, fires late in the year might have sputtered out after hitting hillsides wet with winter rain. More recent blazes feasted on vegetation that has been sucked of moisture by persistent drought.

Even years of plentiful rain harbor dangers. Post-fire precipitation, especially very wet winters, can usher in the growth of non-native shrubs and grasses that burn quickly and spread fires faster than native species.

## More homes at risk

California's bigger, more frequent fires are endangering more residents — 85 perished in the 2018 blaze that destroyed Paradise and much of Concow, Magalia and Butte Creek Canyon. Forest fires is a misnomer as flames race across landscapes dotted with communities that have been carved out where trees once stood.

The trend of more Californians living in harm's way complicates firefighting efforts and ramps up the danger fires pose.

# Chico Enterprise Record

4-2-2019, page 2 of 6

## Epidemic of dead trees

California's forests, which cover a third of the state, are now choked with some 150 million dead trees.

Weakened by a prolonged drought, which scientists link to climate change, California's ubiquitous pines and oaks are vulnerable to insect infestation and disease. Those giants crash to the forest floor and, unless they are removed, provide ready fodder for the next voracious fire. The die-off is catastrophic, beyond the reach of state foresters to remedy.

In many communities of the central and southern Sierra Nevada, "80 percent of trees are dead," said Ken Pimlott, former director of Cal Fire.

## Fire-prone federal forests

The state owns only about 3 percent of California's wooded acreage. Some land is owned by cities, counties, Native American tribes and private holders. President Trump has criticized California's fire management.

But the biggest forest landlord in California, by far, is the federal government, which manages 18 national forests in the state.

The U.S. Forest Service has a longtime policy of quickly putting out every fire which has packed federal land with fuel to burn. Its budget falls short of the cost of needed work to reduce that fuel.

## The electricity factor

Hundreds of thousands of miles of transmission lines and other electrical equipment are strung across California, drawing little attention — until authorities name utility equipment as the cause of a wildfire. One in 10 California wildfires is related to energy equipment, according to the state's chief utility regulator.

Lawmakers have ordered that utility companies put safety measures in place, hoping to ensure that their equipment won't spark future fires. Among the firms' strategies: more aggressively clearing brush and trees around transmission lines; swapping wooden power poles for metal ones; and maintaining a network of remote cameras to watch wind, smoke and other dangers.

None of these or other fire-mitigation efforts will come cheaply. When a judge proposed sweeping new safety measures for Pacific Gas & Electric, the company said the work could cost an eye-popping \$150 billion. And consumers can be expected to foot much of the fire-mitigation bill as utility companies pass costs along.

## Floating umbrellas of horrid air

When fires burn in uninhabited wildlands, their corrosive effects can be carried hundreds of miles by the wind, causing stinging

eyes, burning throats and severe coughing.

Local air districts issue warnings to residents to wear masks and avoid outside exercise. Emergency rooms report increased numbers of patients seeking help for respiratory problems, and school closures can keep up to a million children home as even indoor air quality deteriorates.

## Undercutting climate goals

No state has done as much as California to reduce its output of planet-warming greenhouse gases. Yet the smoke produced by major fires is so potent that a single weeks-long blaze can undo a year's worth of carbon-reduction efforts. State officials are concerned that what's pumped into the air during fires could impair California's ability to reach its stringent greenhouse-gas reduction goals.

A single wildfire can spew more pollutants into the air than millions of cars. Moreover, as trees die, another weapon to combat climate change is lost: the prodigious ability of healthy trees to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. That process is reversed if the trees burn.

## The lingering villain: black carbon

Trees release a powerful pollutant, black carbon, as they burn. Black carbon is many thousand times more damaging than greenhouse gases. And the damage doesn't cease once flames are snuffed out; decaying forests continue to emit harmful pollutants.

If a burned-out forest is replaced by chaparral or brush, that landscape loses more than 90 percent of its capacity to take in and retain carbon.

## Erosion danger

When fires rage in California's mountains, the system that stores and cleans water, feeds streams and rivers, supports fish and wildlife and literally holds the hillsides together burns up.

Forests are watersheds, a critical component of California's water supply.

- Trees hold water in their limbs, roots and soil and

draw it into underground aquifers, a source of drinking water.

- Meadows on lower slopes filter and clean water.
- Tree loss after fires foster soil erosion; the runoff clogs waterways.
- Unstable hills can threaten public safety with landslides and mudslides.

## Regrowth is not all good

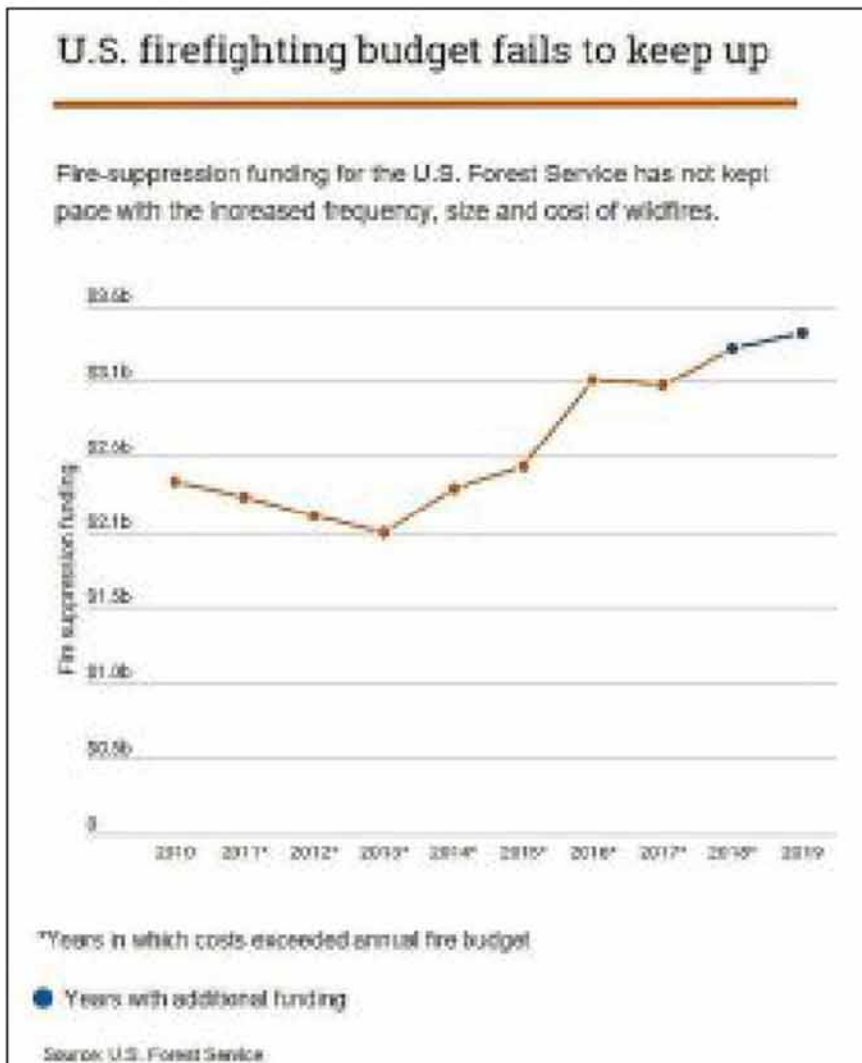
It has to be said that fires are not always bad. Naturally occurring fires clear overgrown forests, creating space for some plants and trees to revitalize. Researchers say less-dense forests are more natural and healthy.

But more often in California, wildfires ignite a furious competition for life. Fast-growing and opportunistic non-native plants rush in after fires, with the potential to supplant native species. This phenomenon doesn't just erase an aspect of California's botanical history; it affects its fire future. Invasive grasses and weeds often burn more readily, fanning hotter and more frequent fires.

## Toll on state finances

Not surprisingly, the wildfire tab is growing.

The state has exceeded projected fire suppression costs in seven of the last 10 years. In 2018, California spent nearly \$1 billion on fire suppression and emergency response, far exceeding the budgeted \$450 million.

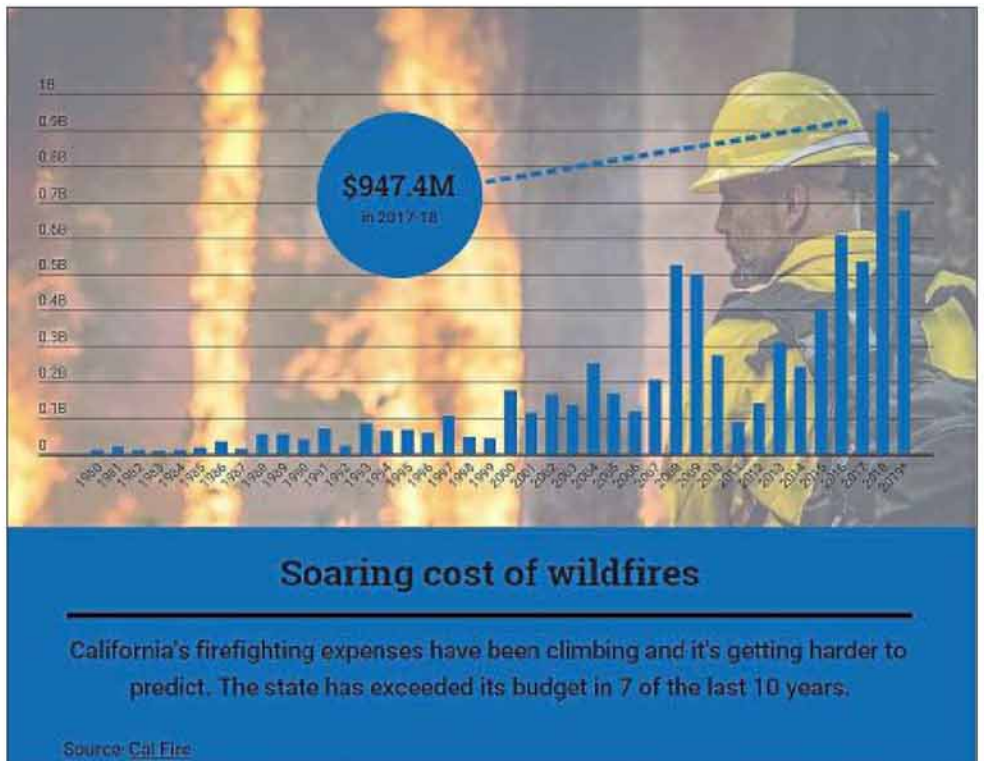


Cal Fire boasts one of the largest, firefighting air fleets in the world, including S-2T air tankers and Huey helicopters. The state will start upgrading the Hueys to Black Hawks and begin to add C-130 Hercules cargo planes.

And rather than waiting to respond to a wildfire, emergency personnel have shifted to pre-positioning strike teams before a fire even starts. It's a strategy that costs more.

### Financial toll for private citizens

Seven of the 10 most destructive wildfires in California have occurred in the last five years. The financial toll for homeowners, renters and businesses in the past two fire seasons





has topped \$10 billion in insured losses each year.

The California Department of Insurance has reported claims from major wildfire seasons going back to 2007. The claims include damages reported to residential and commercial properties as well as auto and other lines of insurance.

Of course, the figures don't tell the whole story. Many wildfire victims lived in high-threat areas without insurance.

## **Rising insurance rates and canceled policies**

Insurance in fire-prone areas is getting more expensive.

The RAND Corp. found the average premium for high-risk areas was up 15 percent between 2007 and 2014 in reviewing prices in a portion of San Bernardino County. It was up 12 percent in the same period in the Sierra foothills east of Sacramento.

The Santa Monica-based nonprofit research firm conducted the study as part of California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment and was funded by the California Natural Resources Agency.

RAND researcher Lloyd Dixon found the higher prices were influencing purchasing patterns: Policyholders are buying less coverage, lowballing the cost to fully replace their belongings and tending to elect higher deductibles.

But are insurers canceling policies?

A December 2017 survey by the California Department of Insurance found an uptick in renewal complaints in areas designated by Cal Fire as having the greatest risk of wildfire. The department received 41 complaints in 2010 but 143 in 2016. And the insurance department found that insurer-initiated cancellations went up from 8,796 in 2015 in high fire areas to 10,151 in 2016.

However, those figures are a fraction of the more than 36,000 cancellations initiated by policyholders. In fact, RAND's study found more insurers are actually offering in high-risk areas.

At the same time, insurance policies of last resort written for brush and wildfire areas have increased from 22,397 policies to 33,898 policies, a 51 percent increase over five years.

This suggests people are more likely to be priced out and taking on more risk. Property owners in fire-threat areas can expect insurance prices to keep rising. In areas with the highest risk, people can expect their premiums by 2055 to go up 18 percent.

## **The utilities debacle**

Pacific Gas and Electric

Company filed for Chapter 11 reorganization in U.S. Bankruptcy Court on Jan. 29, 2019 in the aftermath of the 2017 and 2018 wildfire seasons, the two most destructive in state history.

The utility cited up to \$30 billion in liabilities since many blazes have been linked to its equipment. Legal experts say it could take two to three years to rehabilitate PG&E, a process that could leave energy goals hampered and wildfire victims short-changed.

But even before PG&E's bankruptcy, there was debate about who bears the costs as wildfires become more frequent and destructive.

## **Residents**

Residents have a responsibility to create a defensible space around their property and "harden" homes to make them fire resistant.

California law requires creating a buffer by clearing out trees, brush and grass within 100 feet around homes in wildfire-affected areas. Fire officials say it can increase the likelihood of a house surviving a wildfire eight-fold. In addition, homes with wood or shingle roofs are at high risk of being destroyed. Consider materials such as composition, metal or tile.

## Utilities

Under new law, investor-owned utilities must prepare wildfire mitigation plans that describe what they are doing to prevent, combat and respond to wildfires. The state's three largest utilities, PG&E, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric, all plan to spend millions clearing brush and trees away from transmission lines, insulate or underground power lines, install or maintain a network of remote cameras and weather stations to detect wind, smoke and other dangers.

PG&E and SCE are now following in the footsteps of SDG&E in expanding the use of public safety power shutoffs, also known as de-energization. The practice of shutting off electric power is viewed as a public-safety measure of last resort because it can cut off internet access and make communication difficult for hospitals, firefighters and emergency personnel.

## The state

On March 22, 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a wildfire state of emergency for California and waived environmental regulations to speed up forest management projects aimed at reducing the fuel load for the upcoming wildfire season. By removing dead trees or clearing brush, the programs aim to reduce the threat of wildfires by creat-

ing fuel breaks, defensible space and safe travel corridors around vulnerable communities.

Some environmental groups, however, question whether logging would damage ecosystems and suggest it's more effective to clear vegetation around homes.

## Restrictions on where and how to build

Even when fires threaten homes and no help is in sight, all is not lost. There is much homeowners can do to prepare and protect their property in the face of wildfire, beginning with clearing trees, brush and wood piles around their houses.

The manner of construction and the types of materials used can help give structures a fighting chance against the advance of flames. California building codes for new homes require forgoing wooden roofs and decks in favor of fire-resistant materials, among other things.

Among the actions homeowners can take to protect their property:

- Install double-paned windows.
- Detach garages and storage sheds from the main house.
- Install ember-resistant vents.
- Consider fire-resistant cladding such as stucco or stone.

There are, however, some places where the risk is so great that fire scientists say homes simply should not be built there — even in a state where housing shortages have reached crisis levels. Between 1990 and 2010, an estimated 34 percent of new housing units in California were built in what experts refer to as the wildland-urban interface — where the state's suburban subdivisions and rural communities meet its flammable forests and shrub landscapes. With more and more residences sprouting on the edge of wildlands or deep in narrow canyons, fires become an inevitability, an ever-larger and more challenging front for firefighters to defend.

## Bills to watch

What to do? State lawmakers have already extended some restrictions to local lands, and some have talked about possible rebates or other subsidies for residents who cannot afford to "harden" their homes. But essentially legislators are grappling with an unpalatable reality: Require even more extensive and expensive upgrades to existing homes, or ban building altogether in some areas. That discussion is as potentially explosive as the fires themselves.

While Newsom is monitoring PG&E bankruptcy developments, state lawmakers have turned their focus toward prevention. Here are some key proposals for the 2019 legislative session:

Senate Bill 190 (Sen. Bill Dodd of Napa) Would direct the State Fire Marshal to develop a defensible space ordinance for local governments.

SB209 (Dodd) establishes the California Wildfire Warning Center in order to better predict weather conditions and share information. Requires that utilities install additional weather monitoring equipment in high fire threat areas.

SB290 (Dodd) Sponsored by Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara and Treasurer Fiona Ma, the bill would authorize the state to explore purchasing a policy to cover wildfires, earthquakes, floods and other disasters.

Assembly Bill 235 (Assemblyman Chad Mayes of Yucca Valley) Would create the California Wildfire Catastrophe Fund Authority financed by participating utilities to reimburse the utility for liability costs that exceed established insurance levels.

AB281 (Assemblyman Jim Frazier of Fairfield) A bill with early-stage language that proposes to have California utilities relocate, underground or otherwise enhance the safety of transmission and distribution lines in high fire-threat areas.

'PARADISE'

# Camp Fire bear cub doing well, thriving

By Robin Epley

*repley@chicoer.com*

**PARADISE** » The badly burned bear cub found last month and named "Paradise" is surviving and thriving at a wildlife care center in Lake Tahoe.

The cub was found in early March and is likely a Camp Fire survivor, due to the severe burns found on his paws and the conspicuous absence of his mother, said Henry Lomeli, a biologist for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The bear, which Lomeli said was a "stunted yearling," only weighed about 15-20 pounds when Fish and Wildlife wardens picked him up from a tree in Yankee Hill where he'd been living for several days.

Paradise the Bear was taken to Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, one of the few local centers that rehabilitates bears, said Cheryl Millham, the founder.

Millham said Paradise has put on at least 9 pounds and is doing very well.

"He just loves to eat," she said. "He's eaten nearly everything we've put in there."

Right now, Paradise's diet consists of avocados, apples, pears, grapes and watermelon, and a nice big bowl of maple-flavored oatmeal mixed with baby formula.

Millham said because it's still winter, the bear hasn't done much other than eat or sleep, but "he's doing everything a bear should do."

Lomeli said the bear was in "terrible" condition when they found him, and that "he was just skin and bones and hair, with very little muscle," after surviving on his own since the fire. His scar tissue is healing now, thanks to Millham's care.

The center in Lake Tahoe will



HENRY LOMELI—CONTRIBUTED

Veterinarian Deanna Clifford works to save Paradise, a badly-emaciated bear cub with burns on its paws, that was found in Yankee Hill.

## Bear

FROM PAGE 1

likely keep Paradise for another month and a half, and then return him to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, which is headquartered in Rancho Cordova.

The department officials will observe him for a short time, fit him with a GPS tracking collar and then

return him to his home in Butte County, Lomeli said.

The Wildlife Care Center has a webcam where supporters can follow the cub's progress.

You can visit [www.ltwc.org/webcams](http://www.ltwc.org/webcams) to watch Paradise and two other recently-orphaned cubs play, sleep and eat as they recover.

Contact reporter Robin Epley at 530.896.7776.

**WILDFIRE**

# 2 fire-safety grants awarded in Butte County

**By Steve Schoonover**

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Two Butte County fire-safety projects were among 66 that were funded Tuesday by Cal Fire.

The Butte County Fire Safe Council was awarded \$3.7 million for fuel reduction work in the footprint of the Camp Fire, while Chico got \$159,000 to prepare a fuels management plan for the city's parks and greenways.

The Fire Safe Council's grant will be used to remove burned and unburned vegetation around the communities in the Camp Fire area west of the West Branch of the Feather River: Paradise,

Magalia, Butte Creek Canyon and lower Forest Ranch.

A similar grant was sought by the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council for the communities west of the West Branch, but that was not funded this go around.

The idea is to remove "ladder fuels" — small trees that can carry fire to the forest crown — and also the break up continuous masses of brush on the surface to hinder fire's spread. The work would be done in 8,000 acres around the "wildland urban interface," where communities are pushing into forested or brushy areas.

Butte Canyon Fire Safe Council Executive Director Calli-Jane DeAnda said the



BILL HUSA — ENTERPRISE-RECORD FILE PHOTO

A work crew clears brush at a fire break project near Kelly Ridge Road in Oroville.

design is similar to what was done along Little Butte Creek, which is credited for helping protect northern

Magalia from the Camp Fire. She said the grant money probably wouldn't come

**GRANTS » PAGE 4**

## Grants

FROM PAGE 1

through until July. Then, property owners will have to be contacted to obtain permission to do the work, and after that environmental impact reports will have to be prepared.

An added wrinkle, according to DeAnda, is that the state Board of Forestry only approves such projects in 2,000-acre pieces. That means four separate projects will have to be laid out, and she expects a separate EIR will be needed for each one.

DeAnda said it will probably be a year before any work actually gets started.

She said the Fire Safe Council hopes to leverage that as the local match to a larger \$19 million grant being sought from the California Office of Emergency Services. That would aid property owners in removing dead trees from their properties.

Burnt trees deteriorate rapidly and lose any potential value in a matter of months. It becomes a costly liability for landowners to cut down and remove hazardous trees that aren't dealt with by PG&E, Paradise or Butte County.

"The important thing is to help Paradise and Magalia rebuild," said DeAnda. "Two or three years down the road the dead trees will be an impediment to growth, and just a hazard for travelers."

### Other grants

All told, Cal Fire awarded \$43 million in grants to lo-

cal agencies on Tuesday.

"Funding these projects will add significant fire prevention efforts to combat California's severe fire risk," said Chief Thomas Porter, Cal Fire director and state forester, in a press release.

The Fire Safe Council's grant came from \$33 million allocated from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund for California Climate Investments. That's a program funded by the state's cap-and-trade system.

A billion dollars of that money has been allocated to forest health projects over the next five years, because healthy forests are very good at sequestering carbon, and are also more resilient in the face of wildfires that release carbon.

The Tehama County Resource Conservation District also got a grant from that fund to fund fuel breaks along roads in the western part of the county. Those reduce roadside ignitions and also make it easier to keep escape routes open when fire does happen.

The largest grant from that pool of money was \$12.7 million to the McConnell Foundation in Redding for hazardous fuel reduction in the footprint of last year's Carr Fire.

### Chico

The city of Chico's \$159,000 grant came from a different \$10 million pool of money, Cal Fire's Community Wildfire Prevention Program.

The city's proposal indicates Chico's 20 miles of park corridors have the potential of carrying fire from the wildland urban interface into the center of the

city.

The money will be used to create a master vegetative fuels management plan for Chico's 6,847 acres of parks and greenways. The plan will assess fire risks and lay out how to mitigate them. It indicates Chico State University experts will be among sources tapped for the work.

### Priority projects

Two additional local projects were included on a separate list of 35 priority projects released by Cal Fire in late February in response to an executive order by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

The order called for a list of projects ready to go, which would also protect economically or otherwise disadvantaged communities.

In late March he waived some environmental rules for those 35 projects, with the goal of getting that work done before fire season started.

No. 13 on the priority list was a 1,673-acre project on the Forbestown ridge east of Oroville, which would complement a 330-acre project of the Fire Safe Council that was funded last October.

DeAnda said the Fire Safe Council's project was focused at reducing fuel along roads to keep them open as escape routes in case of fire, while Cal Fire's project involved a strategic fuel break along the ridge top. The break would provide a starting point for stopping a fire before it reached the communities of Robinson Mill, Hurelton and Wyandotte.

A 953-acre fuel break to help protect Elk Creek and Stonyford in western Glenn and Colusa counties was No. 33 on the list.

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Contact reporter Steve Schoonover at 530-896-7750.

**BUTTE COUNTY**

# OPTIONS SOUGHT FOR DESTROYED CANAL

Camp Fire hit along 9 miles of PG&E's Upper Miocene Canal; water users in limbo

**By Steve Schoonover**  
*sschoonovernews@gmail.com*  
*@ER\_sschoonover on Twitter*

**OROVILLE** » The Camp Fire destroyed thousands of homes and dozens of businesses, and also the water supply for an undetermined number of people.

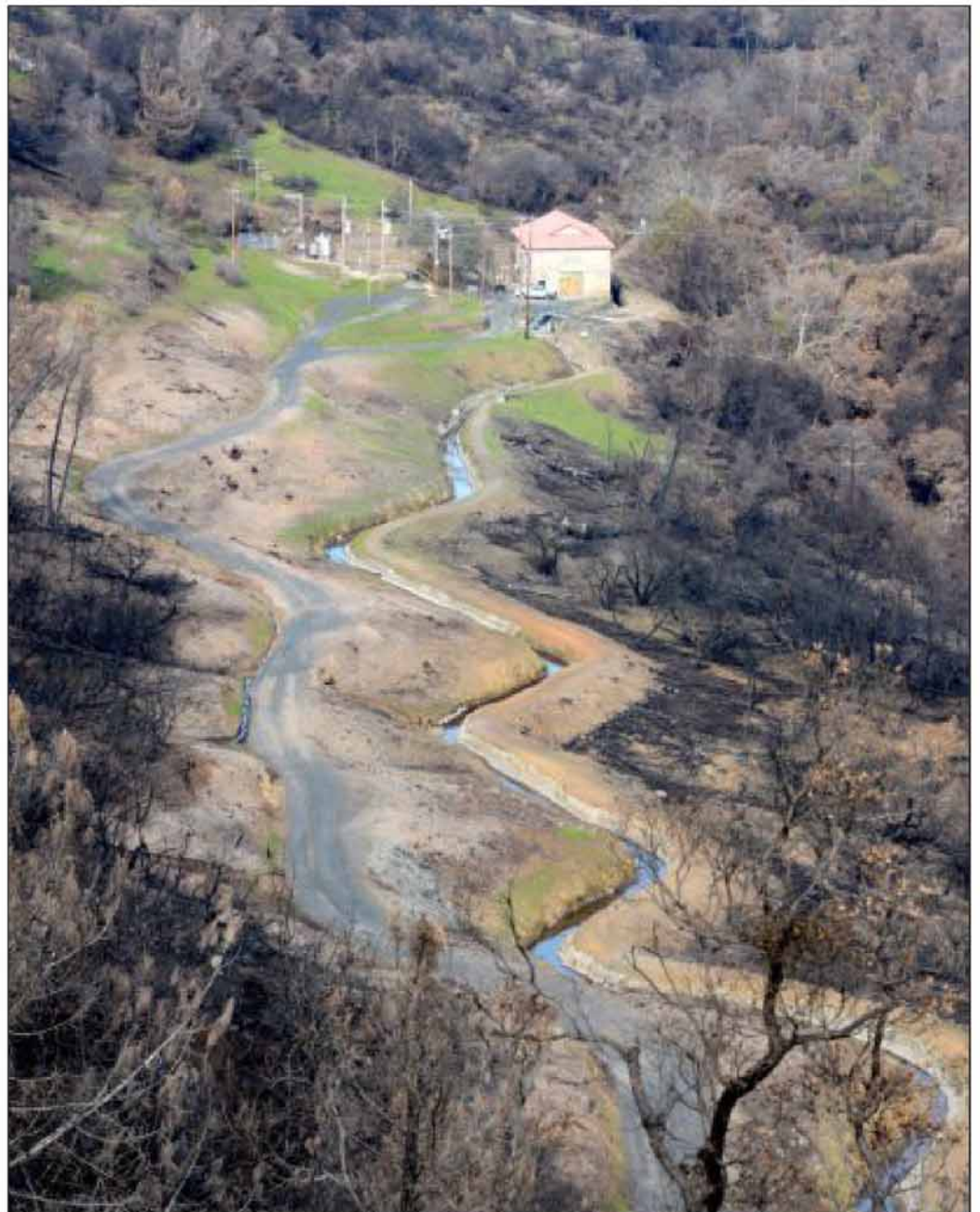
The fire destroyed or damaged the 9 miles of PG&E's Upper Miocene Canal, which is the flume system along the West Branch of the Feather River. That also cut off water to ranches and homes along the Middle Miocene Canal — from Kunkel Reservoir to the vicinity of Cherokee — and the Lower Miocene Canal (or Powers Canal) along the west side of Table Mountain to Oroville.

The number of people directly affected is easy to count. PG&E spokesman Paul Moreno said three properties along the Upper Canal and nine on the Middle Canal have contracts that allow them to take water from the canal.

Moreno said the contracts do not guarantee a supply of water; they just allow people to take water if it's there. He said PG&E has "for decades" been encouraging those people to find an alternative source.

There are another 14 water users that draw water from the Lower Canal, which belongs to the California Water Service. That stretch was damaged by the Cherokee Fire in 2017, and has been partially repaired.

But many more than those 26 properties may be affected due to seepage from the canal that has altered aquifers in the area and created wetlands. The number of parcels may be as high as a thousand, according to Paul Gosselin, director of the county Department of Water and Resource Conservation.



BILL HUSA — ENTERPRISE-RECORD FILE

## Canal

FROM PAGE 1

“It’s a human-made system that has taken on a life of its own,” he told the Board of Supervisors Tuesday.

He said there are reports that the effects may stretch as far as Highway 99. The habitat created at Highways 70 and 149 to mitigate the impacts of widening Highway 149, is dependent on water from the canal system, according to Gosselin.

“The system is pretty complicated,” Gosselin said, “and has a cascading effect on a whole range of water right holders and others.”

He said a planning grant has been sought to determine just how widespread the influence is.

Regardless, PG&E does not plan to repair the Upper Canal, which could cost as much as \$15 million.

Moreno said in a phone interview Thursday the decision was not made lightly, but that there was no way to recoup the costs of repairs from the hydroelectric power generation possible.

The Miocene Canal system was developed about 150 years ago to support the hydraulic mines at Cherokee. Sometime after hydraulic mining was banned, PG&E took over the canal and used it to run power plants built at Lime Saddle and Coal Canyon, on the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEGAN BROWN

A view of the Lower Miocene Canal crossing a ravine on Table Mountain, still smoldering from the Cherokee Fire, in November 2017.

north side of Table Mountain.

The Coal Canyon plant has been shut down for years, and Lime Saddle was “non-economic” even before the Upper Canal was damaged, according to Moreno.

He also pointed out that if the Upper Canal were repaired, it would take years to get it back on line.

That’s too late for a number of people. Gosselin said Kunkel Reservoir would “dewater” before the year is out, and a number of shallow wells would go dry due to the loss of seepage. Olive growers on Table Mountain said they need water

by May, and cattle ranching operations there are close to selling off their herds or moving them elsewhere.

There’s one big problem to solving the situation: The county can’t force anything. It’s not a party to the agreements between landowners and PG&E and Cal Water. It has no legal stake in the matter, County Counsel Bruce Alpert told the board.

“It’s a very compelling case, but it’s just not one the county can take on.”

What the county is trying to do is come up with some short-term and long-term solutions, which the affected property owners will have to negotiate with PG&E — and possibly a potential buyer for the Miocene system — and Cal Water.

The best option sounds like using the Del Oro Water Co. system that draws water to customers in its Lime Saddle District from Lake Oroville. The pipe crosses the Middle Canal and a mechanism to put water in the canal could be engineered.

Del Oro is willing to discuss the option, according to Gosselin, though its customers would get priority.

The company would have to be reimbursed for the high expense of pumping water out of the lake, and that raises the question: who would pay? Would it be PG&E, Cal Water, the water users, or a combination?

That would be subject to negotiations — negotiations the county could not be part of.

Supervisor Bill Connelly suggested the water users look for a lawyer versed in water law, and reach out to state and federal environmental agencies to pressure PG&E on that front. That might provide leverage that would make the utility more responsive to accepting an option if it’s presented to them.

Thursday, Moreno said PG&E was “open and willing to work with those who have solutions.”

But Tuesday, Connelly was skeptical.

“I don’t believe PG&E will cooperate unless they’re put in a position where it costs them less to fix it than to not fix it.”

# Secret emergency plans and no pre-planning

Chico Enterprise Record  
4-30-2019

## Part 2: A look at evacuation plans in some of California's highest areas at risk for wildfires

By Damon Arthur  
*Redding Record Searchlight*

*Note: This is part of a special investigation series "Destined to Burn" analyzing the wildfire crisis California faces. The collaboration includes the Chico Enterprise-Record, Sacramento Bee, USA Today and Associated Press.*

### Secret plans

When USA TODAY Network-California reporters contacted community leaders and emergency managers around the state, some claimed they do have plans but refused to make them available.

Reporters submitted requests for copies of evacuation plans in March to Los Angeles, El Dorado and San Bernardino counties through the California Public Records Act.

Emily Montaner, a senior program manager with the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management, said the evacuation report is not available to the public because it contains sensitive information about the sheriff's office main station and substations.

Los Angeles County later released a copy of the evacuation plan after it received a public records request for the document.

In San Bernardino County, the sheriff's and fire departments have developed evacuation plans, but "the information is not public record because of the possibility of someone using that information to hamper evacuations during an emergency," said Scott Vanhorne, a spokesman for a county supervisor.

However, in response to a USA TODAY Network public records request, county officials two days later provided 851 pages of documents.

While the documents referred to the roles and responsibilities of various agencies during emergency evacuations, they did not include a separate appendix on evacuations.

El Dorado County officials also initially refused to release information about evacuation plans that would cover Pollock Pines, one of the 15 largest communities in the state where more than 95 percent of residents live in a very high hazard zone for wildfire.

"I confirmed with the (lieutenant) for our (emergency services) division that we do not release our emergency plan, for obvious security reasons," wrote El Dorado County Sheriff's Sgt. Anthony Principe, in an email response. He did not elaborate on those reasons.

Then, in response to a Public Records Act request, the county provided one page from its emergency operations plan that refers to evacuations. Three paragraphs on that page were blacked out.

El Dorado County officials also provided several pages of what it called evacuation plans for the area of Mosquito and Swansboro roads near Flacerville, but those consisted mostly of general instructions to residents on how to prepare themselves.

### What is an evacuation plan

The detail and quality of evacuation plans vary from community to community across the state.

"One of the more impressive" evacuation plans, according to researcher Cova,

was developed by San Diego County and is included as a 76-page appendix to its emergency operations plan.

The evacuation plan is a "regional, 50,000-foot view of evacuation planning" not intended to replace on-the-spot decision making in specific emergencies, said Alex Bell, a spokeswoman for San Diego County.

The county's evacuation plan was born out of the lessons learned from evacuating New Orleans residents during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as well as hurricanes Irma and Harvey in 2017.

San Diego's evacuation plan also contains estimates on the number of residents within communities in the county who may require evacuation assistance, sheltering, transportation and help with pet evacuation.

It provides general evacuation routes and road capacities, countywide shelter capacities, resources available locally and through mutual aid and access considerations for people with disabilities.

There is "all sort of disagreement out there" about what makes a viable evacuation plan, said Tim Haney, professor of sociology and director of the Centre for Community Disaster Research at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta.

He looks for:

- Distinctions between what's needed for slow- vs. fast-onset disaster.

- Plans for the vulnerable: low-income, elderly, disabled, those without a vehicle, etc. The plan should note where those populations are concentrated relative to the hazard and what kind of transportation they'll need.

- A plan for what to do when people don't hear the evacuation order, don't trust it or choose not to evacuate. Will uniformed officers knock on doors, and if so how will that be staffed and organized?

- An estimate of the number of people who will need shelter while they are evacuated and where those shelters will be set up. A plan also should identify sources of food, toiletries, etc. Shelter plans should be set up in a way to minimize risk of gendered violence. Shelter plans should also accommodate pets.

- Assurance that emergency social services such as mental health services will be available and evacuees will know how to get those services.

"A successful evacuation is basically a chain of events that must happen smoothly and if any one link in the chain breaks, the plan fails," Cova said.

### A patchwork approach

State law doesn't require evacuation plans. City and county authorities can decide whether to have one, said Mark Pazin, chief of law enforcement for the California Office of Emergency Services.

"Nothing is mandated, but it's highly advisable, given the drama we've seen up and down the state," Pazin said.

Nine of the 27 communities surveyed for this story are in Los Angeles County, which has an evacuation plan within its overall emergency operations plan, but those plans aren't readily available to the public.

Los Angeles County released a copy of its evacuation plan in response to a public records request from the USA Today Network.

The 73-page evacuation



The Camp Fire spread rapidly through Concord and Paradise on Nov. 8, with wind-whipped flames throwing embers and spreading at the rate of one football field every second.

plan is part of the county's Operational Area Emergency Response Plan.

While the plan was not available without a public records request, it begins by addressing the "officials, employees and residents of Los Angeles County."

Two Los Angeles County communities, Malibu and Topanga Canyon, have individual evacuation plans that are posted on the internet.

Three communities in San Bernardino County — Lake Arrowhead, Crestline and Running Springs — are covered under the agency's evacuation plan for the mountain communities in an area stretching from Crestline to Big Bear, said Glenn Barley, San Bernardino County unit chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

While evacuation routes are posted online, the complete evacuation plan for Crestline, Running Springs and Lake Arrowhead are not publicly available, Barley said.

Two other communities on the list — Magalia and Paradise — have posted evacuation plans online.

The city of Glendale's 2008 emergency plan identifies nine brush fire zones in neighborhoods near the mountains.

Each of the zones includes a population figure and notes about narrow roads or remote neighborhoods with restricted access. The plan cautions that such road conditions could lead to problems for emergency responders as well as people evacuating.

"I looked at that and I don't know if there is a problem. I wouldn't call that a problem, maybe a concern," said Dan Bell, a spokesman for the city.

Bell said the city has updated the plans but declined to release those newer documents. He said the plans do not list solutions or steps the city is taking to address road obstacles in the brush fire zones.

While officials in Sonoma, Shasta and Ventura counties evacuated tens of thousands of residents from wildfires over the past three years, those counties also do not have evacuation plans.

### 'Concern with that pre-planned stuff'

Kevin McGowan, assistant director of emergency services for Ventura County, said fires are too unpredictable to plan for evacuations: "You don't know where they will start and you don't know where they'll go.

"Our concern with that



A charred vehicle was left in the middle of Honey Run Road in Paradise.

pre-planned stuff is that it doesn't lend itself to that dynamic decision-making process," McGowan said.

He said when fires break out firefighters and law enforcement personnel are authorized to make decisions quickly based on current conditions.

"We built a culture in Ventura County to evaluate evacuation needs right away," he said.

Planning out evacuations ahead of time would be very hard to do, he said.

"It's not something you can just have written and on the shelf and then just pull it out. It doesn't work that way with wildfires," McGowan said.

Ventura County officials do evacuation planning for tsunamis, but emergency planners know where a tsunami will come from. Those evacuation plans are available online, McGowan said.

As far as traffic congestion during evacuations, McGowan said evacuation plans aren't likely to solve that problem.

"Every single one of these really large fires had traffic congestion," McGowan said. However, it wasn't gridlock, he said.

"There's absolutely no evacuation in the history of the world that is going to go absolutely seamless," McGowan said.

Evacuation plans are helpful for "well-defined hazards" such as a tsunami or dam failure, said Briana Khan, a spokeswoman for Sonoma County.

Wildfire evacuation plans also may help smaller communities but not larger ones, she said. Plus, there's the cost.

"Most communities in California do not have wildfire evacuation plans due to the need to expend resources in addressing other hazards such as flooding or earthquakes," Khan said.

However, she said, Sonoma County is interested in developing evacuation planning for its most at-risk communities.

"Although we do not have a definite timeline in place for delivering and exercising these plans, the county is very aware of — and is counting on — the significant community interest in this subject," Khan said.

Since the 2017 fires, officials also have begun sending out emergency warnings and calling for evacuations earlier, she said.

Haney, the Mt. Royal University researcher, said the success of an evacuation plan rests on several things: effective communication, whether a community trusts its local government, resources available to residents and geography.

The trend among emergency managers is to develop evacuation plans for many different types of disasters — hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, fires, etc. — rather than a single evacuation plan for each, Haney said.

"It's really about imagining the different scenarios — making plans flexible enough to fit many different disaster types," Haney said.

"Things that never happened before happen all the time," he said.

What happened during the Camp Fire in 2018 had happened before, although on a smaller scale, said Jones, the Paradise mayor.

Because of evacuation problems during a 2008 wildfire, Paradise and county officials drew up evacuation plans that include evacuation zones and routes, she said.

"We had terrible traffic jams (in 2008) and from that we developed an evacuation plan," Jones said.

But Jones takes away a different lesson than emergency leaders in other parts

of California. She doesn't see the Camp Fire deaths as a sign that planning is futile. Quite the opposite.

"Eighty-five deaths is a lot and it's terrible, but our residents knew what to do," she said.

USA Today Network-California reporter Megan Diskin contributed to this report.

### PET CARE TODAY



### Dr. Brogan PANCREATITIS

Pancreatitis is a condition in which the pancreas inappropriately releases digestive enzymes resulting in damage to itself and surrounding organs. There is a wide range of symptoms associated with this potentially serious disease but the most common is vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, lethargy, and sometimes fever. Cases can vary in severity from a mild gastrointestinal disturbance to serious illness requiring intensive treatment and hospitalization. Risk factors for pancreatitis include abdominal trauma, high fat diets, some types of drugs and concurrent disease such as hyperadrenocorticism and diabetes. Yorkshire terriers and miniature Schnauzers may be at increased risk of developing pancreatitis. While it may not be possible



# Wildfire project explained

Chico Enterprise Record  
4-30-2019  
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A collaboration among the Chico Enterprise-Record, Sacramento Bee, USA Today and Associated Press

By Silas Lyons

Redding Record Searchlight

*Note: This is part of a special investigation series "Destined to Burn" analyzing the wildfire crisis California faces. The collaboration includes the Chico Enterprise-Record, Sacramento Bee, USA Today and Associated Press.*

**REDDING »** After the Carr Fire tore through our community of Redding last summer, we mostly avoided the "what if" question.



Lyons

Lines of cars tried to get out of the neighborhoods near the Sacramento River. A fire whirl the likes of which few had ever seen — a towering beast with 143-mph winds, the strength of an EF3 tornado — bore down on us.

It stopped just short of the cars that crept along, bumper to bumper.

What if it hadn't stopped?

That was in late July. By November, we had an answer.

When the Camp Fire struck, people in Paradise, 85 miles south of Redding, didn't have time to get out. The cars were found in burned-out lines. Eight bodies were recovered from vehicles, two others were found near vehicles. Dozens of other people never made it out of their houses.

In all, 85 people perished. This is how bad it can be.

Tragedy, as we all know, brings people together. Journalists are no exception.

After the Paradise fire, Sacramento Bee Editor Lauren Gustus drove to Chico to meet with David Little, then editor of the Chico Enterprise-Record. Gustus is the top editor for McClatchy's western papers, and the Enterprise-Record is part of MediaNews, which publishes papers throughout the state.

They decided the critical issues surrounding wildfire in California were big enough to merit an ambitious partnership.

Soon the USA TODAY Network, where I work, and the Associated Press joined. We would tackle the issue from several critical perspectives. Our goal is to illuminate problems and point to potential solutions. We wanted to spark life-and-death policy discussions and to inspire Californians to get in-

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KARL MONDON — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Fire burns around PG&E transmission towers on Nov. 12, 2018, east of Pulga. The first report of the deadly Camp Fire was made near here.

involved, to hold their leaders accountable and protect their own families and communities.

Two weeks ago, the first collaborative stories revealed the extent to which construction standards determine the destruction or survival of homes. These articles incorporated sophisticated data analysis, identifying 10 California communities at high risk

as the next dry season arrives.

The second half of our reporting work is focused on how we get out.

In California, there are no statewide standards for evacuation planning, and most of the high-risk communities we surveyed had either no plan of their own or had one that was minimal or secret. A data analysis showed many ex-

isting exit routes are inadequate.

More traffic jams like those in Redding and Paradise are nearly inevitable, and they will happen throughout the state.

But the problem need not paralyze us.

We hope after reading these stories you'll feel more empowered to take action. California can't afford to live through another year like the one we just had. And we must do better at getting people to safety when the fires do come.

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*Silas Lyons is the executive editor for USA TODAY Network newsrooms in Northern California, Nevada and Utah. The USA TODAY Network includes The Redding Record Searchlight, The Reno Gazette Journal, The Ventura County Star, The Salinas Californian, The Visalia Times-Delta, and The Desert Sun in Palm Springs.*