



NEWS



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1 adult dead, 1 child missing, 2 children rescued after car crashes into Hesperia aqueduct

John M. Blodgett, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Posted: March 2, 2017, 7:42 PM

HESPERIA >> One adult was dead, one child was missing and two children were hospitalized after a car went into the California Aqueduct near Main Street Thursday evening, according to fire and law enforcement reports.

A San Bernardino County sheriff's dive team was still searching for the missing child at 9:19 p.m., according to a **San Bernardino County Fire Department** tweet.

One of the two children rescued was thought to have been ejected, said firefighter Jeremy Kern. At least one was taken to a trauma center. Their conditions were not reported as of 9:25 p.m.

The incident was reported at 6:45 p.m. according to a California Highway Patrol log entry.

At 7:19 p.m., the Fire Department tweeted that ground and air units were searching the length of the aqueduct and there was "no visual of vehicle," until a tweet at 7:32 p.m. indicated the car had been found submerged and the dive team was "making entry for rescue."

A victim reported removed from the water by the dive team was with paramedics, according to a fire department tweet at 7:36 p.m.

The car was reported removed from the water in a 9:19 p.m. tweet.

The Department of Water Resources was reportedly going to decrease the flow of water for the benefit of the dive team members could enter the water, the CHP log states as of 7:08 p.m.

Main Street was reported closed in the vicinity of the rescue.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170302/1-adult-dead-1-child-missing-2-children-rescued-after-car-crashes-into-hesperia-aqueduct>

Aqueduct crash leaves 1 dead; 2 injured, 1 possibly missing

Daily Press

Posted: March 2, 2017, 8:36 PM



San Bernardino County Sheriff and Fire departments pull a vehicle out of the California Aqueduct below Main Street in Hesperia on Thursday night. Officials confirmed one person died and one is believed to be missing as a result of the crash. [David Pardo, Daily Press]



San Bernardino County Fire and Sheriff's Department staff Pull a rescue diver and victim of an collision from the California Aqueduct after a car rolled off Main Street and into the aqueduct in Hesperia CA on Thursday March 2, 2017 [James Quigg, Daily Press]



San Bernardino County Firefighters rush a victim from the California Aqueduct and into an ambulance near Main Street in Hesperia CA on Thursday March 2, 2017. A car rolled off the road and into the aqueduct. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

HESPERIA — Authorities said one person died when a vehicle crashed into the California Aqueduct late Thursday, two others were rescued and a search was still underway for a possible fourth victim. The incident was initially reported as a crash with extrication on Main Street between Pyrite and Escondido avenues just before 7 p.m. Thursday, according to **San Bernardino County Fire Department** spokesman Eric Spies, who said fire personnel arrived and found that a young child had been ejected from the vehicle just before it fell into the aqueduct.

The child reported that two others were still in the vehicle, prompting a response from both County Fire and San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department officials.

Jacob Robles, a Hesperia resident, said he was leaving the Walmart parking lot on Main Street when he saw a cloud of "dust and debris" from the crash.

"It all happened so fast," Robles said. "It looked like the vehicle swerved into the dirt (off the roadway), crashed through the fence and into the aqueduct."

Another witness, who declined to provide his name, said the vehicle was airborne and "went up like a rocket" just before it landed in the aqueduct.

Robles and other passersby helped rescue the boy that was ejected from the vehicle. Robles said the boy informed them his mother and two younger brothers were still inside.

"He was conscious, he knew who he was, but he had a deep gash over his left eye," Robles said. Another witness shared the sentiment, while adding that the boy's skull was showing from the gash.

The child was taken to Loma Linda University Medical Center for treatment, Spies said, but further details on his condition weren't available.

The submerged vehicle, which appeared to be a red VW Beetle, was found by Sheriff's dive team members around 7:30 p.m. One more child was rescued and was taken to a local hospital for treatment, Spies said. Officials didn't have further details on the rescued victim's condition Thursday night.

Spies said the rescue was switched to a "recovery effort" after the vehicle was under water for about 2 hours. The vehicle was pulled out of the aqueduct just before 9 p.m., and a deceased adult was found.

The identity of the deceased person is being withheld pending positive identification and notification of next of kin.

Hesperia Sheriff's Station Sgt. Ron Goddard said officials received "conflicting reports" about the number of passengers in the vehicle, and a possible fourth victim was believed to still be in the aqueduct. Dive team members continued their search late Thursday.

Goddard said specifics on the crash were still being investigated and it wasn't immediately clear how the crash occurred. The Hesperia Sheriff's Station Major Accident Investigation Team was requested to conduct the investigation.

Main Street was shut down in both directions between Pyrite and Escondido avenues following the incident. Goddard said the closure was expected to last for "several, several hours," as the investigation and search continued.

The incident remains under investigation by the Hesperia Sheriff's Station.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170302/aqueduct-crash-leaves-1-dead-2-injured-1-possibly-missing>

2 Children Injured, 1 Woman Killed, 1 Child Still Missing After Car Crashes Into Hesperia Aqueduct

Marisel Turner, KTLA5 News

Posted: March 2, 2017, 9:56 PM



San Bernardino County Fire officials rescue an injured child after a crash in a Hesperia aqueduct on March 2, 2017. (Credit: Victor Valley News)

Two children were left injured, a woman was killed and an additional child has not been located after a car crashed into an aqueduct in Hesperia, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

Fire officials received a call around 6:43 p.m. about a possible vehicle collision near Main Street. When firefighters arrived they found one car submerged in the aqueduct.

One child was ejected in the crash and another was rescued by the San Bernardino Sheriff's Dive team, according to Jeremy Kern with SBFD. Both children were transported to a local hospital in unknown condition.

Authorities originally reported that one man was found inside the vehicle but the victim was later identified as a woman. She was pronounced dead at the scene, Kern added.

Another child is thought have to been inside the car but has not yet been located, according to the SBFD.

Divers are still searching for the missing child, officials said.

<http://ktla.com/2017/03/02/2-children-injured-1-man-killed-1-child-still-missing-after-car-crashes-into-hesperia-aqueduct/>

Traffic Collision Sends One Vehicle into Aqueduct in Hesperia

Christie Martin, 24/7 Headline News

Posted: March 2, 2017

HESPERIA – A collision was reported in the area of Main Street near the Aqueduct in the City of Hesperia Thursday evening. The **San Bernardino County Fire** officials said that the collision sent a vehicle off of the road and into the fast moving aqueduct water.

The incident was reported at around 6:45 p.m. When emergency personnel arrived they were not immediately able to locate the submerged red Volkswagen Beetle. A Swift water rescue response was requested. Five fire engines, two fire chiefs, one fire truck, four ambulances, a heavy rescue, two patrol helicopters, dive team. The dive team arrived and located the vehicle.

The dive team made entry into the aqueduct.

One immediate patient was located and transported to Loma Linda University Medical Center. Witnesses said that an approximately 10-year-old boy with a visible head injury was ejected and rescued by good samaritans. The boy was conscious and able to give important information regarding the other occupants inside the vehicle. A 3-year-old child was also transported to Desert Valley Hospital with life-threatening injuries.

At 8:40 p.m. the search changed from a rescue to a recovery. The vehicle was pulled from the aqueduct at around 8:50 p.m. and one deceased adult female was located inside. The child at Loma Linda University Medical Center reported that a 2-year-old was also in the vehicle at the time of the collision. The dive team continued to search the surrounding area attempting to locate the small boy. The search was suspended at around 10:45 p.m. and the recovery effort will resume Friday morning.

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Sergeant Ron Goddard said that it is unknown what caused the vehicle to leave the road and go into the aqueduct. The collision is being investigated by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

It is unclear the condition of each of the victims at this time. There is no additional information at this time, information will be updated as it is received.

<https://247headline.com/traffic-collision-sends-one-vehicle-into-aqueduct-in-hesperia/>

Dive team searches for missing child after car plunges into California Aqueduct in Hesperia

Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun

Posted: March 3, 2017, 6:24 AM



A San Bernardino County sheriff's dive team continues the search Friday, March 3, 2017, for a missing child after a car crashed into the California Aqueduct Thursday night near Main Street in Hesperia. Photo by Sarah Alvarado

HESPERIA >> San Bernardino County sheriff's divers continued their search Friday for a 2-year-old child after the vehicle the juvenile was in crashed into the California Aqueduct in Hesperia Thursday night, killing a woman and her child as well as injuring another children.

The mother and child have been identified as 31-year-old Christina Eileen Estrada and her son, Jeremiah Robert Abbott, 3, both of Hesperia, according to the San Bernardino County Coroner's website.

The dive team searched for the missing child for several hours but finally had to suspend their hunt late Thursday night, according to a tweet from Dive Team Commander Lt. Doug Wolfe.

A 10-year-old child who was rescued was thought to have been ejected, firefighter Jeremy Kern said.

Jeremiah was pulled from the water and taken to a trauma center where he later died.

The condition of the older child was not released although initial reports indicate he was conscious and talking to investigators and rescuers.

The crash was reported at 6:45 p.m. near Main Street and the California Aqueduct, according to a California Highway Patrol log entry.

Around 7:30 p.m., the **San Bernardino Fire Department** tweeted the car had been found submerged and the dive team was "making entry for rescue."

The dive team pulled Estrada from the aqueduct and she was pronounced dead at the scene.

Authorities say she was traveling west on Main Street when for unknown reasons she drove through the fence and ended up in the water.

About two hours after the vehicle went into the aqueduct, authorities pulled it from the waterway.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170303/dive-team-searches-for-missing-child-after-car-plunges-into-california-aqueduct-in-hesperia>

Coroner ID's Hesperia woman, 3-year-old son killed in California Aqueduct crash Thursday evening

Jose Quintero, Daily Press

Posted: March 3, 2017, 7:27 AM



San Bernardino County Fire and Sheriff's Department staff search and attempt to rescue victims of an collision where a car rolled off Main Street and into the California Aqueduct in Hesperia CA on Thursday March 2, 2017 [James Quigg, Daily Press]

HESPERIA — Authorities on Friday morning identified the mother and son who died after a red Volkswagen Beetle crashed through a fence and into the California Aqueduct on Thursday night.

San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner officials said Christina Eileen Estrada, 31, of Hesperia, was pronounced dead at the scene at 7:47 p.m. after emergency personnel pulled her from the water.

Emergency personnel also pulled Jeremiah Robert Abbott, Estrada's 3-year-old son, from the water and transported him to Desert Valley Hospital. Jeremiah succumbed to injuries and was pronounced dead in the emergency department at 10:32 p.m., authorities said.

San Bernardino County Fire Department officials said fire personnel responded to reports of a car fully submerged in the California Aqueduct, roughly 200 yards west of Main Street, at approximately 6:40 p.m. and found that a young child had been ejected from the vehicle just before it went into the aqueduct. The child reported that two others were still in the vehicle, prompting a response from both County Fire and San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department officials.

The child was taken to Loma Linda University Medical Center for treatment, officials on scene said and did not have further details on his condition.

Witnesses at the scene said they helped rescue the boy after he was ejected from the Volkswagen. The boy's skull was reportedly showing from a "deep gash" above his left eye, according to witnesses.

The submerged Volkswagen was found by Sheriff's dive team members around 7:30 p.m. County Fire officials said the rescue was switched to a "recovery effort" after the vehicle was under water for about 2 hours.

The Volkswagen was pulled out of the aqueduct just before 9 p.m.

Hesperia Sheriff's Station Sgt. Ron Goddard told the Daily Press that officials received "conflicting reports" about the number of passengers in the vehicle, and a possible fourth victim was believed to still be in the aqueduct late Thursday night.

Goddard said specifics on the crash were still being investigated and it wasn't immediately clear how the crash occurred. The Hesperia Sheriff's Station Major Accident Investigation Team was requested to conduct the investigation.

The incident forced a shutdown of Main Street between Escondido and Pyrite avenues for several hours as the investigation and search continued.

This story is developing and will be updated as more information becomes available.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170303/coroner-ids-hesperia-woman-3-year-old-son-killed-in-california-aqueduct-crash-thursday-evening>

Mother, 3-year-old son killed when car plunges into aqueduct; another child missing

Brittney Mejia, LA Times

Posted: March 3, 2017, 10:05 AM

A mother and her 3-year-old son were killed when their car plunged into an aqueduct in Hesperia on Thursday night and another child who was in the vehicle remains unaccounted for, authorities said.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and paramedics responded to a report at 6:40 p.m. of a car that was fully submerged in the California Aqueduct in the 13000 block of Main Street, the coroner's department said in a release.

Christina Estrada, 31, and her 3-year-old son, Jeremiah Abbott, were pulled from the water.

Estrada was pronounced dead at the scene and Jeremiah was later pronounced dead at a hospital.

The **San Bernardino County Fire Department** tweeted Thursday night that one child remained unaccounted for. The sheriff's dive team continued the search for the 2-year-old Friday morning, a spokeswoman tweeted.

News outlets reported that there had been three children in the car and that one remained hospitalized.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-aqueduct-20170303-story.html>

Mother Killed, 2 Children Injured After Car Crashes Into Hesperia Aqueduct

Victor Valley News Group

Posted: March 3, 2017



A car was recovered after a mother crashed into the aqueduct with three children in the vehicle. The mother died and two children were transported. Another child is reported to be missing. (Gabriel D. Espinoza, Victor Valley News)



A vehicle drove through a barrier and landed in the aqueduct with three people located and another child reported to be missing. (Gabriel D. Espinoza, Victor Valley News)



The recovered vehicle was a red Volkswagen Beetle. (Gabriel D. Espinoza, Victor Valley News)

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com)– A mother is dead, two children injured, and a fourth child is feared to be missing after their car crashed into the California Aqueduct Thursday night.

At about 6:43 p.m. Sheriff's dispatch received reports of a vehicle into the aqueduct on Main Street just east of Escondido Avenue in Hesperia.

When deputies arrived, they made contact with a good Samaritan who described hearing a loud bang, he looked over and saw a metal barrier that leads into the aqueduct broken.

The man parked his car to investigate and noticed a young boy hanging on to a rope in the chilly waters of the aqueduct.

Per the witness, the boy was 10-years-old and stated his family was still in the vehicle. “The boy had a huge gash on his forehead and was bleeding heavily. He was alert and most importantly alive,” the witness stated.

The Sheriff’s helicopter responded and searched the aqueduct for the vehicle as well as any other victims. A Sheriff’s Dive Team entered the water and located the vehicle a short time later. A young girl, possibly 2-years-old, was pulled unresponsive from the waters and rushed to a trauma center.

“The child was taken out of the water and taken to a local hospital where they are conducting life-saving procedures. We have not received information that the child is actually deceased at this moment,” stated Sergeant Ron Goddard with the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department.

The vehicle was then pulled from the aqueduct, and a woman’s body believed to be the mother of the children surfaced and she was pronounced deceased at the scene, officials confirmed.

According to **San Bernardino County Fire** spokesman Eric Spies, the search continued for approximately two hours before the operation changed from a rescue to a recovery operation.

“There are unconfirmed reports of a fourth person still possibly missing,” stated Spies. “The search is still continuing until we can confirm that.”

The man claiming to be the father of the children arrived at the scene shortly after 10:00 p.m. and was in distress when he learned about the incident.

The Sheriff’s Department is conducting an investigation into the cause of the accident. Information will be updated as it becomes available.

<http://www.vvng.com/mother-killed-2-children-injured-car-crashes-hesperia-aqueduct/>

Vehicle plunges into California Aqueduct, mother and son die

Inland News

Posted: March 3, 2017

HESPERIA – (INT) – A mother and son died and another child was still unaccounted for after a traffic mishap that sent one vehicle into the California Aqueduct near Main Street Thursday evening.

The vehicle eventually became fully submerged. But, the water level was being decreased to gain better access to it.

Two hours after the mishap, the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** tweeted that the incident was being switched from rescue to recovery.

Pulled from the water was Christina Eileen Estrada, 31, and her son, 3-year-old Jeremiah. The coroner said Christina was dead at the scene and her son died at a hospital 3-hours later.

<http://www.inlandnewstoday.com/story.php?s=45359>

Man arrested for torture and holding a woman captive

SBSD via Highland News

Posted: March 1, 2017, 7:03 AM

On February 27, 2017, at approximately 5:30 pm, the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station received a call requesting a welfare check of the victim. The reporting party believed the victim was suffering from great bodily harm and wanted deputies to check on the victim and the suspect, Monte Shultz, 56, of Crestline. Deputies went to Shultz' residence in the 23900 block of Straight Way, Crestline and contacted both Shultz and the victim.

Deputies discovered the victim was suffering from traumatic injuries to her head and facial area. The victim told deputies she was beaten and tortured by Shultz over the past two days.

Fire personnel from the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** responded to the scene and transported the victim to a nearby hospital. The victim is currently in critical condition.

Detectives from the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station assumed the investigation. Deputies and detectives learned Shultz is a convicted sex offender, however, in 2013 the Department of Justice suspended his requirement to register with law enforcement. Shultz was arrested and taken into custody without incident.

Shultz was transported to the Central Detention Center and booked for PC 206 Torture. He is currently being held in lieu of \$500,000 bail. The investigation is ongoing, and detectives would like anyone with further information regarding this case, to please contact them at the Twin Peaks Station (909) 336-0600 or We Tip 1-800-78-CRIME.

http://www.highlandnews.net/news/crime_and_fire/man-arrested-for-torture-and-holding-a-woman-captive/article_4c8d14f4-fe90-11e6-b730-33b5f512ce2a.html

Crestline Man Arrested for Torture

Mountain News

Posted: March 2, 2017, 11:00 AM

A Crestline man was arrested for torture after allegedly beating and holding a woman captive for two days at his home. According to a press release from the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station, deputies discovered that the victim was suffering from traumatic injuries to her head and face.

The sheriff's station received a call at 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 27 from a citizen requesting a welfare check of the victim. Deputies went to the residence of Monte Wayne Shultz, 56, in the 23900 block of Straight Way in Crestline. There, the deputies made contact with Shultz and with the victim, who told deputies that Shultz had beaten and tortured her over the past two days.

San Bernardino County Fire Department personnel responded, and transported the victim to a nearby hospital. The victim is currently in critical condition.

Deputies and detectives from the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station later assumed responsibility for the investigation and learned that Shultz is a convicted sex offender. However, in 2013 the Department of Justice suspended his requirement to register with law enforcement, the sheriff's press release stated.

Shultz was arrested and taken into custody without incident. Shultz was transported to the Central Detention Center in San Bernardino and booked for California Penal Code §206, torture.

He is being held in lieu of \$500,000 bail.

The investigation is ongoing. Detectives would like anyone with further information regarding this case to contact Detective Mike Salazar at the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station by calling (909) 336-0600 or on the We Tip hotline: 1 (800) 78-CRIME.

http://www.mountain-news.com/news/crime_log/article_a6a850f4-ff6a-11e6-ab97-1f2b4e6852b9.html

Two Hikers Rescued

SBSD Aviation via Highland News

Posted: March 2, 2017, 8:24 AM

On Tuesday, February 28, 2017, at approximately 7:00 p.m., Sheriff's helicopter 40 King 2 was dispatched to the hill near Hulda Crooks Park in Loma Linda to assist Loma Linda/East Valley Fire Department with an injured hiker. Aaron Lerner, 35, of Loma Linda was hiking with Jane Xu, 28, of Redlands in the foothills near the park and fell on a hillside sustaining a fractured leg. The incident occurred in a remote area of the foothills making it difficult for ground emergency medical services to reach the victim.

The crew of 40 King 2 with Pilot Deputy Jon Roberg and Flight Officer Deputy Brad Heard located the victim utilizing night vision goggles (NVG's). Roberg performed a one skid landing with the helicopter near Lerner and Xu. Heard was able to contact them and determined Lerner suffered a leg injury that needed immediate medical attention. Heard remained with the victim while Roberg left the scene to get **San Bernardino County Fire Department** Captain Mark Murphy to assist with rendering aid for the victim.

Roberg and Murphy returned to the scene where Roberg performed another one skid landing. Murphy and Heard loaded Lerner into the helicopter and he was flown to awaiting Loma Linda Fire Department personnel. Roberg and Murphy returned to the scene performing another one skid landing where Xu and Heard were flown back to the Sheriff's Hangar at San Bernardino International Airport.

Lerner was transported by ground to the Loma Linda University Medical Center.

As a reminder when hiking in the outdoors, please assure you have the appropriate hiking equipment and are adequately prepared for the weather and environment.

http://www.highlandnews.net/news/public_safety/two-hikers-rescued/article_bc721790-ff64-11e6-aba9-9325d95452e7.html

Hikers rescued by helicopter from remote Loma Linda foothills

Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Posted: March 2, 2017, 5:04 PM

LOMA LINDA >> Deputies and firefighters using the sheriff's helicopter rescued two hikers Tuesday in a remote area of the foothills near Hulda Crooks Park, officials say.

Loma Linda resident Aaron Lerner, 35, was hiking with Jane Xu, 28, of Redlands, when Lerner fell on a hillside about 7 p.m. and fractured his leg, according to a Sheriff's Department news release.

The helicopter crew found him using night vision goggles and landed on one skid, according to the release.

They then determined Lerner needed immediate medical attention, so one deputy stayed with him while the other left to get a **San Bernardino County fire** captain to treat the leg.

Lerner and Xu were then flown to the Sheriff's Hangar at San Bernardino International Airport, and from there Lerner was taken to Loma Linda University Medical Center, according to the news release.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170302/hikers-rescued-by-helicopter-from-remote-loma-linda-foothills>

More than 80 percent of all wildfires caused by humans, new study says

Seth Borenstein, The Associated Press via The Sun

Posted: March 2, 2017, 11:12 PM



In this Oct. 29, 2013, file photo, one of an estimated 200 homes burns with a burnt Volvo rests in the foreground on its rims after being burned along Hook Creek Road in Cedar Glen as the Old Fire rages on in the San Bernardino National Forest. FILE PHOTO

People have triggered five out of six wildfires in the U.S. over the last two decades, tripling the length of the wildfire season and making it start earlier in the East and last longer in the West, a new study finds.

Even as climate change worsens the nation's fire season — making it longer and easier to burn more acres — researchers said human activities play an even bigger role.

In Southern California, large populations living in close proximity to fire-prone foothills and national forests make the region a poster child for human-caused wildfires that wreak havoc on life and property, said lead author Jennifer Balch, a fire ecologist with University of Colorado-Boulder.

“This problem isn't going to go away,” she said during an interview Monday. “We spend over \$2 billion a year fighting fires. We will have more and more people living in this mix between houses and wildlands by the year 2030.”

While fire experts have long blamed people more than lightning, the new work details the extent of human-caused ignitions and how they interact with global warming to make matters worse.

Scientists analyzing fire data from 1992 to 2012 found that 84 percent of all U.S. wildfires — but only 44 percent of the total acres burned — were started by people, either by accident or on purpose. And human-caused blazes have more than tripled the length of the wildfire season from 46 days to 154 days, according to a study in Monday's journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

“People are moving more and more into natural wild areas and essentially providing ignition for wildfires,” said Balch. The result? Fire seasons can be year-round, as long as people are around, she said.

THE SPARK

Of the more than 1 million human-started fires since 1992, about 29 percent began by trash burning, another 21 percent were arson and 11 percent were from misuse of equipment, Balch said.

Last year's Soberanes fire near Monterey was sparked by an illegal campfire and burned for nearly three months. The blaze surpassed \$200 million in firefighting costs, the most expensive in U.S. history.

One out of every five wildfires occurs on the Fourth of July from fireworks, Balch said.

THE HUMAN CONNECTION

On Oct. 25, 2003, a 91,000-acre inferno dubbed the Old fire, ignited by convicted arsonist Rickie Lee Fowler near Waterman Canyon, marched through the San Bernardino National Forest toward Lake Arrowhead after it destroyed homes in San Bernardino.

The Old fire would eventually burn through more than 1,000 structures and cause the deaths of six people between Oct. 25 and Nov. 2 of that year. Many of the blackened husks of houses left behind in the Old fire's wake have been replaced with new homes in northern San Bernardino, although standing chimneys and foundations remain in areas such as Cedar Glen.

More recently, the Blue Cut fire rapidly spread after erupting along Old Cajon Boulevard in August, consuming nearly 57 square miles (more than 37,000 acres) of terrain throughout the Cajon Pass.

Ronnie Moore's home is one of the more than 100 structures damaged or destroyed by the fire's furious flames as it ripped through the Highway 138 corridor in the High Desert.

"I tried to run back in to save some things," Moore said. "But the smoke and flames were so hot, I couldn't make it."

Moore and his family narrowly escaped with their lives as flames quickly approached and eventually destroyed their home. Sitting along the highway, the Moores watched in horror as their home and all they owned burned to the ground.

However, six-months after firestorm that wreaked so much havoc in the desert community was officially considered extinguished, officials at the U.S. Forest Service, who are investigating the incident, have not determined if the blaze was sparked by human hands.

Several calls and emails to USFS officials for comment went unanswered.

THE HOTTEST SPOTS

The Southeast is a hot spot for human-triggered wildfires. Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee had fire seasons that lasted more than 200 days and 99 percent of the wildfires in those states are caused by people.

The region is home to swaths of forests with trees that don't catch fire easily or naturally so people are the main culprits, said study co-author Adam Mahood.

THE CLIMATE CONNECTION

Climate change has lengthened the U.S. fire season by a few weeks, which is dwarfed by what humans do. But the study shows how both human-sparked flames and man-made climate change work together to make America burn more, especially during more frequent dry, hot weather.

“If a campfire grows out of control during a wet, cool period, then it probably isn’t going to grow into a large wildfire,” said University of Utah fire scientist Philip Dennison, who wasn’t part of the study. “Climate change loads the dice toward warmer, drier conditions that make it more likely that a fire will develop from human-caused ignitions.”

FIRE DANGER NEAR NORMAL

Recent rains have added new grasses to foothills and canyons within the San Bernardino Mountains, San Gabriel Mountains and Santa Monica Mountains. While the grasses hold more moisture, they can quickly dry out after a hot summer and fall, Balch said.

“Moisture during winter and early spring allow grasses to grow. If that is coupled with a very dry season then you can get significant fires,” she said.

The change from five years of drought to a surplus of rains have sharply reduced the probability of winter fires to near zero in Southern California, according to the National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook released by the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho on Feb. 1. The forecast says grasses and soils will retain enough moisture to ward off a severe fire season through summer or later. The group casts the fire potential through May as normal.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170302/more-than-80-percent-of-all-wildfires-caused-by-humans-new-study-says>