



NEWS RELEASE

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COUNTY FIRE HAND CREW ASSISTS WITH FUEL BREAK PROJECT

LAKE ARROWHEAD - An ongoing fire fuel reduction project will get a boost for the next month from one of the San Bernardino County Fire Department's newest resource.

Since 2006 the County Fire Fuels Reduction crew has been building a large "fire break," removing overgrowth and dead, dry timber in a swath of forest stretching from Deer Lodge Park across toward Manitoba Rd. on the north side of Lake Arrowhead. Starting this week through mid-October that unit will receive a major boost in manpower from Crew 40, County Fire's new firefighting hand crew.

The hand crew's 15 personnel will augment the five-member fuels reduction crew that has been working to reduce the threat to the mountain communities from a fire that could potentially start in areas left unburned by the most recent firestorms in 2003 and 2007. These areas are thick with what fuels reduction crew leader Scott Turknette describes as vegetation that helps fire spread to the major forest timber.

"Our focus will be to remove as much as we can of what we call "ladder fuels," Turknette said. "These are the dried, dead undergrowth and fallen timber that can often help a fire climb into the trees."

Crew 40, established earlier this year, is led by full-time County firefighters but primarily comprises select personnel from the paid-call-firefighter ranks. A hand crew primarily fights fire by cutting, chopping, and scraping away vegetation with chain saws, axes and other hand-held tools. The unit will remain available for dispatch to fires and other emergencies while assigned to the mountain fire break program.

Despite the damage to Lake Arrowhead caused by 2007's Grass Valley Fire, efforts by the fuels reduction crew are credited with having kept the firestorm from destroying a larger portion of Lake Arrowhead.

"The area in question is one we've identified as a major point of focus if a fire starts running uphill towards Lake Arrowhead," said County Fire Division Chief Jim Johnstone. "The fire break is designed to keep the fire slowed just enough to allow our firefighters to protect the homes in the area."

The crews' work on the fire break is an integral part of a comprehensive wildland – urban interface structure protection plan. In addition, homeowners are encouraged to maintain brush and fuel clearance in a 100' radius around their homes. For more information on keeping your home fire safe, go online to www.sbcfire.org and click on "Community Safety/Fire Prevention."

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