



NEWS



News Headlines 11/16/2018

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Agencies discuss winter traffic issues

Terri McCawley Hill, Mountaineer Progress

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Last week representatives of agencies from San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties attended Wrightwood's annual Winter Traffic Meeting. Every November for the past 14 years, law enforcement, roads, and emergency services gather to discuss what methods of traffic control have worked during snow events, and what improvements can be made. Before these meetings were initiated, little communication existed between agencies and counties, making patrol and enforcement non-existent during periods of snow-player gridlock. Emergency responses were affected, as vehicles and equipment were unable to travel Highway 2 or Big Pines. Since the meetings began, communication has improved, and so has the ability of emergency response services to navigate the crowded roads.

Alex Tardy, meteorologist with the National Weather Service, spoke first, giving a detailed winter forecast with several forecast models suggesting an El Nino pattern this season.

Paul Bauer of Mountain High explained the logistics of hiring CHP officers to direct traffic at the 4-way stop, and at the entrance to Mountain High West. Mike Troeger, of Mountain Hardware shares that cost with the ski resort.

Cal Trans Media Relations officer Terri Kasinga reported plans for the agency to allow porta-potties and trash dumpsters along the highway, and about improving the location and timing of chain installation ares, and replacing missing "no Parking" signs along the highway.

Concerns about Lone Pine Canyon Road's appearance on GPS making it more heavily travelled, were directed to Frank Opice, Department of Public Works Operations Supervisor. He discussed the possibility of enforced chain control on Lone Pine. A resolution passed in 2014 might be the avenue to that enforcement. Sheriff's staff and CHP from both counties reported increased coverage for parking violations and the success using the PA systems to warn travelers of possible infractions.

Matthew Bocash of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument spoke to staffing for enforcement, crowd control, and trash and facilities upkeep. Matthew reported he will generally have just two Forest Service employees on patrol at a given time, but they will do everything they can to keep trash bins emptied and bathrooms clean and stocked.

Other agencies represented included Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests, L.A. and **SB County Fire** Departments, Wrightwood Fire safe Council, Mountain Hardware, Supervisor Lovingood, SBC Office of Emergency Services.

CalTrans and CHP will keep current road conditions uploaded too all of their social media sites and CalTrans Quick Maps can be found online and as a phone app.

Before the meeting was over, CalTrans project directors reported that the Highway 2, Sheep Creek Bridge project will begin April 2019. Construction will take two tears, with most of the structural work finished in the first year. Detours around the work are expected to be short-term and occur during the late-night hours. CalTrans also discussed the removal of the dead trees along the highway, between Sheep Creek and town. They will contact Fenner Camp for information about removal.

<http://mtprogress.net/home/thisweeksnews.html>

Death toll, number of missing rise in California's Camp Fire

Staff Writer, CNN News

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Hundreds of people poured Wednesday into the Northern California communities ravaged by the deadly Camp Fire, searching for human remains while authorities tried to track down 130 people who are unaccounted for after the blaze.

The staggering death toll from the fire increased to 56 as eight sets of remains were found.

Most of the people on the partial list of the missing posted earlier Wednesday on the Butte County website are senior citizens.

The majority of the missing live in Paradise, which is a town of 27,000 residents, many of them retirees. About 461 people and 22 cadaver dogs are searching the town and other communities, Butte County Sheriff and Coroner Kory Honea said.

"We're moving as fast as we can. It will take as long as it takes," Honea said when asked about a timeline for the search. "It's an important thing that we get right. And I understand the issue (of residents wanting to return to their properties), and I'm balancing the competing interests."

The sheriff's department will begin taking DNA samples from people who are missing a family member on Thursday, he said.

The Camp Fire is one of two major blazes burning in California that have left at least 58 people dead. The other is the Woolsey Fire in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, which has killed at least two people and destroyed nearly 500 homes.

Earlier officials said the number of missing was 103 but the total will change each day with new information.

Residents want to rebuild

Paradise Mayor Jody Jones insists her town will be brought back.

"We're gonna come back, we're gonna rebuild. We're gonna make Paradise Paradise again," she said Wednesday.

Jones knows people want desperately to come back to see what can be done, what is gone and what can be salvaged.

The threat from the Camp Fire is now minimal, but there are other dangers, she said.

"I know people want to take RV's up and stay on their land while they rebuild and I think that will eventually be possible, but it's gonna take time before it's safe enough to do that. We all just need to be patient," she said.

Water service is out and power lines are down, she said.

Carmen Smith is one of those anxious and displaced residents. She waited Tuesday at a roadblock outside Paradise, hoping someone would help her get home and retrieve her husband's medicine.

"I thought I was going to go home because I work at the hospital and we had to evacuate all the people, and I go, 'Oh, I'm coming back home,' but I did not know it was this bad," Smith told CNN affiliate KCRA. "The fire was right there."

Smith and others are wondering when they can go back to get medicine and clothing or simply to check on the damage.

"I don't know what to do here," Charles Terry told KCRA. "I need to get that stuff out of the house."

New fire

In Southern California, firefighters still are battling the Woolsey Fire, which so far has left at least two people dead in Malibu. Authorities are trying to determine whether a third person, found dead at a burned home in Agoura Hills, also died as a result of that fire, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said.

They've also been fighting a new blaze, the Sierra Fire, in San Bernardino County. It started late Tuesday about 50 miles east of Los Angeles near Rialto and Fontana, and by Wednesday morning had burned 147 acres, though no evacuations have been ordered, the **San Bernardino County Fire** District said.

Fire officials said the Sierra Fire was fanned by the Santa Ana winds — strong, dry winds that high-pressure systems push from east to west, from the mountains and desert areas down into the Los Angeles area. It was 85% contained by Wednesday afternoon.

Winds were "particularly strong" Wednesday morning but weakened during the day, meteorologists said. The forecast calls for light winds Thursday and Friday, but brisk winds are expected to return Saturday night.

The chance of precipitation — next week — has increased, forecasters said.

A look at the wildfires' astonishing numbers

- **Camp Fire:** The Camp Fire has destroyed 8,650 homes and scorched 138,000 acres in Northern California. As of Wednesday, the inferno was 35% contained. More than 10,000 structures have burned down, officials said.
- **Woolsey Fire:** This Southern California blaze has torched 98,362 acres and destroyed at least 504 structures. As of Wednesday, the inferno was 52% contained.
- **Hill Fire:** A second Southern California blaze has burned 4,531 acres and was 96% contained as of Wednesday morning.
- **Death toll:** There have been 58 deaths statewide.
- **A devastating week for the Golden State:** More than 230,000 acres burned in California in the past week. That's larger than the cities of Chicago and Boston combined. And in 30 days, firefighters have battled more than 500 blazes, said Cal Fire, the state's forestry and fire protection agency.

Federal officials visit

President Donald Trump received a briefing about the fires from Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Brock Long, who were in California.

The two officials told reporters the Camp Fire was one of the worst disasters they have seen.

Zinke also said this is not the time to cast the deadly fire in a political light or cast blame.

He said he wanted the focus to be on checking with families and residents, and to continue to work with state and local partners throughout the recovery phase.

“This is not just a state issue. It’s not a federal issue. This is an American issue of managing our forests,” he said.

Zinke cited several reasons for the increase in devastation including dead and dying timber and beetle infestation. He stopped short of blaming climate change.

He said prescribed burns are a start and that “the best scientists are looking at best practices.”

After viewing the decimated town of Paradise, Long said a lot of planning will go into reconstructing the town.

“This is a very complex disaster. Probably one of the most complicated disasters this nation has ever seen when it comes to Paradise,” he said.

Hundreds of thousands are displaced

More than 300,000 people have been forced from their homes statewide. Most of those live in Los Angeles County, where 170,000 were evacuated.

The evacuees included celebrities who lost their homes in Malibu as well as first responders who are still working despite their own homes being destroyed.

Thomas Hirsch was searching the burned remains of his childhood home Tuesday in Malibu, looking for anything salvageable. His parents — who are 97 and 94 — still live there and plan to rebuild, he said.

“We’re survivors. We’ll rebuild, we’ll come back and take whatever little insurance money they had, clean it off, rebuild it and make it nicer than it was before,” he said.

The Los Angeles County sheriff expressed empathy for residents waiting to return to the remains of the few hundred homes destroyed by the Woolsey Fire.

He took a helicopter tour of the burned areas and posted aerial photos of the destruction to Twitter.

“We see the frustration of (people) trying to get back into their homes & appreciate their cooperation,” Sheriff Jim McDonnell wrote.

The wildfires across California are being battled by more than 9,600 firefighters, including many from out of state.

<https://kpax.com/fire-watch/2018/11/15/death-toll-number-of-missing-rise-in-californias-camp-fire/>

Staggered evacuation plan questioned

Paul Elias and Kathleen Ronayne, Daily Press

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Residences were leveled Thursday by the wildfire in Paradise, Calif. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said the wildfire that destroyed the town of Paradise is now 40 percent contained, up from 30 percent Wednesday morning.
[NOAH BERGER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

MAGALIA, Calif. — Ten years ago, as two wildfires advanced on Paradise, residents jumped into their vehicles to flee and got stuck in gridlock. That led authorities to devise a staggered evacuation plan — one that they used when fire came again last week.

But this time, Paradise’s carefully laid plans quickly devolved into a panicked exodus. Some survivors said that by the time they got warnings, the flames were already extremely close, and they barely escaped with their lives. Others said they received no warnings at all.

Now, with at least 56 people dead and perhaps 300 unaccounted for in the nation’s deadliest wildfire in a century, authorities are facing questions of whether they took the right approach.

It’s also a lesson for other communities across the West that could be threatened as climate change contributes to longer, more destructive fire seasons.

Reeny Victoria Breevaart, who lives in Magalia, a forested community of 11,000 people north of the devastated town of Paradise that was also ravaged in the Nov. 8 inferno, said she couldn’t receive warnings because cellphones weren’t working. She also lost electrical power.

Just over an hour after the first evacuation order was issued at 8 a.m., she said, neighbors came to her door to say: “You have to get out of here.”

Shari Bernacett, who with her husband managed a mobile home park in Paradise where they also lived, received a text ordering an evacuation. “Within minutes the flames were on top of us,” she said.

Bernacett quickly packed two duffel bags while her husband and another neighbor knocked on doors, yelling for people to get out. The couple grabbed their dog and jumped in their pickup truck and made a harrowing escape, driving through 12-foot flames.

In the aftermath of the disaster, survivors said that authorities need to devise a plan to reach residents who can't get a cellphone signal in the hilly terrain or don't have cellphones at all.

In his defense, Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said evacuation orders were issued through 5,227 emails, 25,643 phone calls and 5,445 texts, in addition to social media and the use of loudspeakers. As cellphone service went down, authorities went into neighborhoods with bullhorns to tell people to leave, and that saved some lives.

Honea said he was too busy with the emergency and the recovery of human remains to analyze how the evacuation went. But he said it was a big, chaotic, fast-moving situation, and there weren't enough law enforcement officers to go out and warn everyone.

"The fact that we have thousands and thousands of people in shelters would clearly indicate that we were able to notify a significant number of people," the sheriff said.

He added: "We are dealing with a worst-case scenario disaster, and when you're faced with a worst-case scenario disaster, there is no way to ensure that everybody's going to come out OK."

On Thursday, firefighters reported progress in battling the nearly 220-square-mile blaze. It was 40 percent contained, fire officials said, and crews managed to slow the flames' advance on populated areas.

The search for the dead in and around Paradise went on, with more than 450 rescue workers assigned to look for remains. President Donald Trump plans to travel to California on Saturday to visit victims of the wildfires burning at both ends of the state.

The Paradise fire once again underscored shortcomings in warning systems.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill in September requiring the development of statewide guidelines for Amber Alert-like warnings. And a few Northern California communities are moving to install sirens after some wine country residents complained they didn't receive warnings to evacuate ahead of a deadly wildfire in October 2017 that destroyed 5,300 homes.

In 2008, the pair of wildfires that menaced Paradise destroyed 130 homes. No one was seriously hurt, but the chaos highlighted the need for a plan.

Paradise sits on a ridge between two higher hills, with only one main exit out of town. The best solution seemed to be to order evacuations in phases, so people didn't get trapped.

"Gridlock is always the biggest concern," said William Stewart, a forestry professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

<http://victorvilledailynews.com/newsmemory.com/publink.php?shareid=60544b8c7>