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Ready to race: County Fire cycling team launches practice run through county fire stations Tuesday

Paola Baker, Daily Press

Posted: April 18, 12:01 AM



Tim Goforth of the San Bernardino County Fire Department prepares to take one of his turns during a practice race in Crestline on Tuesday. A team of County firefighters have entered the Race Across America, a coast to coast bicycle race coming up this June. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — Most cyclists preparing for a long, cross-country ride make a few practice runs before the main event — but a team of four **San Bernardino County Fire Department** cyclists took their training a step further on Tuesday.

Team Fire Velo/Norton Strong, comprised of four County Fire firefighters, launched an “intricate dry run” in preparation for the 2017 Race Across America this summer. Tuesday’s practice run took the team to nearly every fire station in the county over a 20-plus hour period, a 395-mile span, firefighter/paramedic Sean Jackson said.

While the idea was initially launched for training purposes, Jackson said it then expanded into a ride geared at raising awareness of the Fire Family Foundation, a nonprofit organization that offers financial assistance to firefighters, their families and fire victims in need.

Potential donors can pledge a dollar per station amount, with all funds going to the Foundation. The group also aims to shine a light on the prevalence of cancer among firefighters.

“Firefighters have a much higher chance of getting cancer than other occupations, due to all the carcinogens we’re exposed to while fighting fires or during cleanup,” Jackson said. “So we’re riding to raise awareness of this and raise funds for the Foundation.”

He said they were inspired by fellow firefighter and team namesake Cory Norton, who’s currently doing “very well” in his battle with a rare form of cancer diagnosed last year, and other department personnel fighting the disease as well

The team, consisting of Captain Tim Goforth, Engineer Ricky Arnold, Engineer Travis Grapes, and Jackson, began their ride at Station 96 in Fawnskin on Tuesday morning. From there, Jackson said they crossed the mountain top from Lake Arrowhead to Crestline before hopping onto Highway 18 and heading into San Bernardino.

After riding through San Bernardino and neighboring cities, the team stopped at Station 2 in Devore before starting the trek up the Cajon Pass and into the High Desert. The group then expected to head through Yucca Valley, Joshua Tree and 29 Palms, stopping at every fire station along the way.

“So we get to ride through the mountains, the cities, and the desert — we get a little bit of everything,” Jackson said.

The group split into two-man teams, each riding 20 to 30 minute intervals before switching off. Jackson said this was done to allow each member to rest while also preparing for the larger race in June, where the same method will be utilized.

“Before we started this morning, I started feeling the butterflies and jitters from the excitement and anticipation,” Jackson said. “So far, it’s been a lot of fun. It’s neat to get a feel for what the actual race is going to be like.”

All four team members have a passion for cycling, Jackson said.

“We’ve all been doing it for quite some time. Ricky and Travis have each done a few triathlons and I’ve been cycling for over 30 years now,” Jackson said.

Team Fire Velo/Norton Strong will participate in the Race Across America on June 17. The race begins in San Diego and ends in Annapolis approximately one week later.

Visit the team’s Facebook page, “Team Fire Velo Norton Strong,” for live updates on Tuesday’s run and further information on the Race Across America.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170418/ready-to-race-county-fire-cycling-team-launches-practice-run-through-county-fire-stations-tuesday>

San Bernardino Firefighters To Take Part In Race Across America To Help Crewmen With Cancer

Leticia Juarez, ABC 7 News

Posted: April 18, 2017, 8:59 PM

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (KABC) --

A team of San Bernardino firefighters are taking on a cross-country bike race in an effort to raise awareness about cancer and how firefighting increases those risks.

For firefighter and paramedic Sean Jackson, a 393-mile ride on Tuesday was just for practice. It was just the first leg of the 24-hour long relay.

Jackson, along with Capt. Tim Goforth, Ricky Arnold and Travis Grape, are preparing for a much tougher journey. In June, the four-man racing team will ride from San Diego to Annapolis, Maryland for the eight-day Race Across America.

The men will be pedaling to bring awareness to the cause that is close to their hearts.

"Currently, we have two guys from our department who are battling cancer, so that's really become our inspiration," Jackson said.

The team's inspiration is their colleague Cory Norton. The 30-year-old is battling a rare form of epithelioid sarcoma, which is a rare soft tissue tumor.

"This ride means everything to me, and not only me, but to all firemen across the country. They're riding for everybody - to raise awareness for fire-service cancer," Norton said.

As a team, they are raising money for the Fire Family Foundation to garner support for their ride in June. As the men raced across San Bernardino County Tuesday, they said their goal is to hit all 50 full-time fire stations.

"We're trying to simulate what we'll actually be doing during the Race Across America, where we need to average about 400 to 420 miles per day," Jackson said.

The dress rehearsal so far has gone smoothly.

The firefighters will wrap up their practice run Wednesday around 6 a.m. near Wonder Valley. If you would like more information on the race and the Fire Family Foundation, you can click [here](#).

<http://abc7.com/society/firefighters-to-take-part-in-race-across-america-to-fight-cancer/1890198/>

Scientists: Get Used to Wildfires in a Warming World

Bobby Magill, Climate Central

Posted: April 17, 2017



The 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire in eastern Alberta.
Credit: The Premier of Alberta/flickr



The aftermath of the 2016 Blue Cut Fire near San Bernardino, Calif.
Credit: Russ Allison Loar/flickr

Communities across the Western U.S. and Canada may have to adapt to living with the ever-increasing threat of catastrophic wildfires as global warming heats up and dries out forests across the West, according to a University of Colorado study published Monday.

Residents living in neighborhoods adjacent to forests — known as “wildland-urban interface” zones — will have to accept that many wildfires may have to be allowed to burn and that building new homes in fire-prone forests should be discouraged, the study says.

Firefighters and policymakers will also have to adapt in new ways as catastrophic wildfires burn more land and destroy more homes than ever before.

Officials have long tried to cut wildfire risk by spending billions of dollars annually to “manage fuels” — physically removing some trees and underbrush from dense forests and intentionally setting some forests ablaze in controlled “prescribed burns.” In the dry season, firefighters rush to fight, or “suppress,” nearly all blazes to prevent them from spreading.

Yet homes and even whole communities still go up in flames, and there's little indication that many efforts to reduce the risk have done much good, the study says.

"Neither suppression nor current approaches to fuels management adequately reduce vulnerability of communities to increasing wildfire," said the study's lead author, Tania Schoennagel, a research scientist at the University of Colorado-Boulder's Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research. "We've been very effective with fire suppression for many years, but wildfires are increasing beyond our capacity to control, especially with more people in fire's way."

Park Williams, a bioclimatologist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University, said the paper makes a valuable point: Forest density and climate change have converged to vastly increase catastrophic wildfire frequency and size in a way that is entirely out of human control.

"We now know that continued increases in fire activity are inevitable, but we've been able to come up with no other way forward other than to fight fires as hard as we can," said Williams, who is unaffiliated with the study. "All we're doing is paying huge amounts of money to deliver an even worse problem onto the next generation."

The West's increasing vulnerability to catastrophic wildfire was on display in 2016 as much of Fort McMurray, Alberta, was consumed in a firestorm that incinerated 2,400 buildings. The blaze quickly became the most expensive natural disaster in Canadian history. Later in the year, the Blue Cut Fire burned 105 homes near San Bernardino, Calif., and forced the evacuation of 82,000.

All the homes destroyed in those blazes were in the wildland-urban interface zone, an area that includes millions of homes in the West. In California alone, 4.5 million homes have been built in the zone, according to the study.

About 40 percent of the zone is expected to see an increased chance of burning by 2040. Today about 900,000 homes in the zone are at high risk of fire damage across the West, Schoennagel said.

The reason is that climate change is making wildfire seasons longer and more intense. The trend bends toward bigger, more destructive and drought-driven blazes in the West. On average, wildfires burn six times the acreage they did 45 years ago, Climate Central research shows.

Since the 1970s, the frequency of wildfire has increased 1,000 percent in the Pacific Northwest, 889 percent in the Northern Rockies, 462 percent in the Southwest and 256 percent in California's Sierra Nevada as the mountain snowpack melts earlier and the fire season lengthens, according to Schoennagel's team's research.

In the northern latitudes, where Fort McMurray sits, the boreal forest is burning at a rate unprecedented in the past 10,000 years as the wildfire season arrives a month earlier than it did in 1970. In Alaska, the number of large wildfires have doubled in 65 years.

The study says that adapting to climate change and cutting the risk of catastrophic blazes means it's time for a cultural change in the West. Forests are going to have to be managed differently and people will have to get comfortable with fighting fire with fire — literally.

Forests that have burned either naturally under natural conditions or with prescribed burns are much less likely to burn catastrophically in the future. But prescribed burns account for only a tiny portion of the total area in the West affected by wildfire. Firefighters fight 95 percent of all other blazes in attempt to keep as many acres from burning as possible.

The best way for forests to adapt to climate change is for them to burn, except when they threaten communities directly, the study says.

“As wildfires continue to increase, more and more communities are threatened, and suppression simply will not be able to keep up,” Schoennagel said. “Through suppression, we’ve tried to make fire adapt to us, but going forward, we will have to adapt to it.”

Foresters’ can greatly reduce the catastrophic wildfire risk to communities by conducting more prescribed burns in controlled conditions near where people live and allowing more wildfires to burn freely far from where people live, the study says.

Thinning forests to cut the risk of wildfire doesn’t work well, except in the driest of forests, according to the study. Of all the areas in national forests that have been thinned by hand — known in forestry parlance as “treatments” — since 2001, only 10 percent have come close enough to an active wildfire since they were treated to have had the opportunity to burn.

The effect of that thinning is temporary because the underbrush eventually grows back, requiring the forest to thinned again if it hasn’t burned.

“The effectiveness of most forest treatments last about 10-20 years, suggesting that most treatments have little influence on wildfire,” the study says, adding that between 2006 and 2015, the U.S. Forest Service spent \$3.2 billion on forest thinning is likely to have little if any benefit.

Forest thinning is most effective near homes rather than deep in the woods.

People living near forests need to adapt by making it as difficult as possible for their homes to burn by removing wood decks, vegetation and other combustible items from around their homes.

“The first step is to expect that wildfire will come to your door rather than assume it will not,” Schoennagel said.

Officials should also consider creating buffer zones of cleared trees and other vegetation between homes and the forest, while reducing the density of the woods around communities, she said.

Another important step is to discourage new development in forests prone to wildfire.

“By some estimates, 80 percent of the WUI is yet undeveloped, and if this were filled with homes, the risks and costs would skyrocket in combination with increasing wildfire,” Schoennagel said.

Williams said the West has millions of acres of forest that are too dense, and it’s impossible to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in all those forests.

“The public needs to become aware that fire is a natural process and that increases in the frequency and size of large fires are inevitable,” Williams said.

<http://www.climatecentral.org/news/scientists-wildfires-warming-world-21360>

City Council places sales tax measure aimed at preserving Barstow Fire Protection District on ballot

Paola Baker, Desert Dispatch

Posted: April 18, 2017, 3:27 PM



The Barstow City Council voted Monday night to put a sales tax measure on a special November election ballot. If approved by voters, it would fund the Barstow Fire Protection District. [Daily Press file]

BARSTOW — The City Council took the last step needed to place a sales tax hike to keep the Barstow Fire Protection District solvent on the ballot this fall.

With a unanimous vote Monday night, the City Council adopted a resolution calling for a special election to present a half-cent sales tax measure to voters in November. If approved, the sales tax is expected to generate an estimated \$3.8 million per year, with residents paying an average of \$47 a year, according to city officials. San Bernardino County's current sales tax rate is 7.75 percent. If this measure is approved, Barstow's sales tax would increase to 8.25 percent.

It would be a special purpose tax, requiring two-thirds approval of Barstow voters. The Council also approved a resolution to earmark \$50,000 for election costs. The funds are expected to be reimbursed by the BFPD by next fiscal year.

“Right now, the fire district is being paid for primarily by property owners, which isn't fair,” Councilman Timothy Silva said. “I honestly feel like if we don't do this, (the fire district) will go to the county, who will issue a parcel tax and it will be more expensive.”

The sales tax — meant to offset the BFPD's increased retirement costs — comes on the heels of the district's transition to a new retirement pool, also approved during Monday's meeting. The transition to a San Bernardino County Employees' Retirement Association (SBCERA) retirement pool will cost the fire district \$9.1 million.

City officials created a payment plan with the county to offset some of that initial cost, consisting of annual payments of \$833,000 for 20 years. A \$900,000 loan agreement between the city and BFPD also was approved Monday, with funds from the loan being used for the initial \$833,000 pension payment.

Silva addressed concerns about the loan during a discussion of the BFPD agenda items, specifically how the loan may affect the city's general fund.

"My concern is we're giving this loan to an agency that can't pay it back as it stands now," Silva said. "And we're relying on an election in November to make up for the loan. My concern is city expenditures."

However, Assistant City Manager Cindy Prothro and Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Hernandez both said the city's financial standing "was strong" enough to give the fire district the boost it needs to maintain its autonomy.

"I understand your concerns, but we're also listening to the people who said they want their own Fire Department," Hernandez said. "Victorville is trying to get their own Fire Department because costs with the county are so high."

Silva also brought up questions about other options available for the fire district if voters don't approve the sales tax measure.

"If the tax doesn't go through, what are our options?" Silva said. "If the fire district is dissolved, would the county absorb it? And what would be the plan to pay back the city?"

After City Manager Curt Mitchell said annexation to the county would be the next option if the sales tax measure fails, Prothro explained that the fire district's debt would follow it to the county, which would then be responsible for paying back city funds. Other options besides annexation are also still on the table, Prothro said.

The measure will be presented to voters during a special election on Nov. 7.

"It's up to the people in this community to decide for the fire protection district how much your autonomy and independence matters," City Councilman Merrill Gracey said. "We're putting this up to you."

The next City Council meeting is scheduled for May 1. Visit www.barstowca.org for more information.

<http://www.desertdispatch.com/news/20170418/city-council-places-sales-tax-measure-aimed-at-preserving-barstow-fire-protection-district-on-ballot>

Yucca Valley Firefighters Help Deliver a Baby Tuesday

Z107.7 News

Posted: April 19, 2017

Yucca Valley firefighters responded to a call Tuesday they'll never forget: they helped a woman deliver a baby. County paramedic Ezekiel Morales said firefighters were called to a home on Kickapoo Trail near Onaga Avenue when it became obvious that the 27-year-old mother wasn't going to make it to the hospital in time for delivery of her baby. Morales said the baby girl made her appearance at 10:33 a.m. in the back of the ambulance on the way to Hi-Desert Medical Center. Both mother and baby are doing well. Paramedic Morales was assisted with the delivery by Firefighter Paul Gill, which was his first, and EMT Derek Horvath was driving the ambulance.

<http://z1077fm.com/yucca-valley-firefighters-help-deliver-a-baby-tuesday/>