



# NEWS



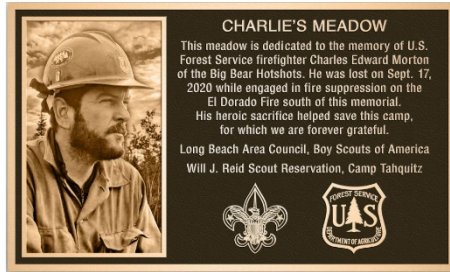
## News Headlines 08/23/2021

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Quinn Wilson, The SUN

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A rendering of the memorial that will be erected at the Boy Scouts' Camp Tahquitz in the San Bernardino National Forest to honor Charlie Morton, the hotshot firefighter who died near the campground in 2020 protecting it from the raging El Dorado wildfire. (Image courtesy of Mike Rohde)

The hotshot firefighter who died in 2020 battling the El Dorado fire will be honored with a memorial plaque and have a meadow named for him at the campground in the San Bernardino Mountains he died defending.

The memorial for Charlie Morton will be installed in the fall at the Boy Scouts' Camp Tahquitz in Angelus Oaks in the San Bernardino National Forest, said John Fullerton, scouting executive with the Long Beach Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. It will be dedicated by the Long Beach area council as well as the U.S. Forest Service.

Fullerton said they felt compelled to recognize Morton because of the bevy of strong associations between the Boy Scouts and emergency services.

“Being that the El Dorado fire came right up to the border of our camp, the fact that so many worked hard to save property and Charles Morton gave his life to help protect that area ... we felt compelled to recognize that with such strong associations scouting and emergency services have had over the years,” Fullerton said.

The 39-year-old firefighter worked as the crew boss for the Big Bear Hotshots at the time of his death. He worked as a firefighter for 18 years, with 14 of them with the U.S. Forest Service.

Morton died on Sept. 17 while defending a fire containment line within an eighth-of-a-mile of Camp Tahquitz, said Mike Rohde, a former scoutmaster and retired fire chief who volunteered on the memorial project. The El Dorado fire — which was allegedly sparked by a pyrotechnic device used to generate smoke during a gender-reveal — also burned 22,680 acres, destroyed five homes and damaged four others.

The couple accused of starting the fire was charged on July 20 with involuntary manslaughter, three felony counts of recklessly causing a fire with great bodily injury, four felony counts of recklessly causing a fire to inhabited structures and 22 misdemeanor counts of recklessly causing a fire to property of another.

Marc Stamer, district ranger for the Mountaintop Ranger District in the forest and former colleague of Morton, said the memorial was “important to the Forest Service family.”

“For me, it’s hard to capture in words what it means,” Stamer said. “Recognizing what Charlie sacrificed and who Charlie was is critically important.”

The meadow, which is the centerpiece of Camp Tahquitz and takes up a significant portion of the campgrounds, is currently known as simply “Upper Meadow,” Rohde said. It will be renamed “Charlie’s Meadow.”

Within the meadow will be a large boulder that is about five feet in diameter with a bronze plaque honoring Morton, Fullerton said.

“This meadow is dedicated to the memory of U.S. Forest Service firefighter Charles Edward Morton of the Big Bear Hotshots,” the plaque reads. “He was lost on Sept. 17, 2020, while engaged in fire suppression on the El Dorado Fire south of this memorial.”

“His heroic sacrifice helped save this camp, which we are forever grateful.”

The meadow has served as a place for mandatory fire drills during each summer camp session, Rohde said. He said the meadow is the primary place in the camp that’s most likely to survive a fire and be a safe evacuation point.

Rohde also pointed out that the fire containment line Morton died defending ultimately held and there was “very little” damage to the camp and its infrastructure, which features historic 150-year-old pioneering cabins.

“That fire most certainly would have (taken the camp) if they weren’t effective (with the fire containment line),” Rohde said.

Morton’s death was immediately on Rohde’s radar through his communication with old subordinates working commanding roles on the fire. “Saddened” and “affected” by the loss, Rohde soon took on a de facto leadership role in honoring Morton’s legacy.

Rohde and others soon approached scouting executives about the idea and then ran it by Morton’s fellow U.S. Forest Service firefighters. Morton’s family has also been involved with the project and is “very excited,” Fullerton said.

The Long Beach area Boy Scouts Council has raised \$3,500 that will go towards the casting of the plaque and its mounting while any excess funds will be donated to Morton’s family, Rohde said. Caltrans is also donating equipment and crews to relocate the boulder to the meadow and the Angelus Oaks Volunteer firefighters with the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** are building and donating benches for the memorial site, Rohde said.

Once in place, the camp has also made arrangements to allow access for U.S. Forest Service crew members to visit the fire site to honor and reflect on the sacrifice that Morton made, Rohde said.

This was an aspect Stamer felt was important for wildland firefighters.

“It’s important for us to learn and heal to move forward,” Stamer said.

The memorial will be presented at an intimate, private gathering at the camp in the autumn.

<https://www.sbsun.com/2021/08/20/boy-scouts-erecting-memorial-to-honor-firefighter-killed-in-el-dorado-fire-near-their-camp/>