



NEWS



News Headlines 09/08/2021

- San Bernardino County moving to ban homeless camping in mountain areas
- Man injured, nearly drowned after jump at Copper Canyon

San Bernardino County moving to ban homeless camping in mountain areas

Joe Nelson, San Bernardino Sun

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San Bernardino County probation officer Victoria Whitworth, left, checks on Travis Stock, who's been living homeless for a year in Waterman Canyon in San Bernardino on Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021. San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford is pushing for an order banning homeless encampments in the mountains and forest due to the wildfire threat. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

Deputy Mike Jones and his colleagues on the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's H.O.P.E. team stepped into a grove of trees nestled in San Bernardino's Waterman Canyon, ferreting out homeless encampments that present a fire danger to the parched terrain.

In recent years, homeless people have congregated in the area below Highway 18 and Arrowhead Road, near Wildwood Park. One man's camp on Thursday included a makeshift stove crafted from stacked river rocks and a barbecue grate.

"He's got a pretty big rock stove," said Jones, peering at the pile of scorched rocks. Such scenarios are common at the many homeless encampments routinely encountered by the H.O.P.E. team, Jones said. At a turnout on Highway 18, just north of Old Waterman Canyon road, a burned tree stump sat amid an abandoned homeless encampment strewn with garbage and human feces.

Homeless concerns

In the past several years, homeless camping in Waterman Canyon, in the forest and along highway turnouts across the San Bernardino Mountains has been igniting fear among residents over their potential to cause wildland fires.

Those fears were elevated on Tuesday, Aug. 31, when firefighters were called to a small fire at a homeless encampment on Strawberry Peak Road, south of Twin Peaks, about 6:50 a.m. The fire burned a 50-by-50-foot area near the Strawberry Peak fire lookout tower before it was extinguished, said Zach Behrens, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

"It was an encampment that we were cleaning up, and we had everything bagged, and we were just arranging for a roll-off bin, and someone came back and lit it on fire with a car," Behrens said. "It all burned up — the car and all the bags of trash we had cleaned up." He said no suspects have been identified.

Local residents have been complaining to the Forest Service and Sheriff's Department about the Strawberry Peak encampment since 2018, but authorities have yet to vacate the homeless from the area, said Judy Brumm, 66, a Twin Peaks resident for 45 years.

“Besides the possible loss of life, Strawberry Peak is the location of vital communication towers,” Brumm said. “We live in fear. Every single day we worry if a fire is going to start.”

Camping ban

Amid the recent closure of forest land across the state due to fire threats and in response to resident concerns about the homeless, San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford plans to propose an order prohibiting the homeless from camping in the mountains and other high fire danger areas at the next Board of Supervisors meeting on Sept. 14.

Rutherford’s district includes the San Bernardino County mountain communities of Crestline and Lake Arrowhead.

“My residents up in the Rim of the World communities are very concerned about fires that start in canyons and turnouts below and race up the hillside,” Rutherford said. “Several of the fires we’ve seen so far have been started by people who are camping and living at the base of the hills.”

Vulnerable canyon

Residents are concerned about the most fire-prone areas at the base of the mountains, Waterman Canyon and Highway 330 below Running Springs, near the city of Highland, Brumm said.

It was in Waterman Canyon, near Old Waterman Canyon Road and Highway 18, where, in October 2003, an arson-caused blaze rapidly spread uphill, then across the San Bernardino Mountain range. It burned more than 91,000 acres and destroyed nearly 1,000 homes before it was contained two weeks later. It was one of the deadliest and most destructive wildfires in San Bernardino County history.

“Fire definitely likes to travel uphill. And you’re at the bottom right there,” U.S. Forest Service spokesman Zach Behrens said of Waterman Canyon.

L.A. County order

Rutherford said her proposed order will be similar to one unanimously approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on Aug. 10.

With 66,000 homeless people, 72% of them unsheltered, Los Angeles County has the highest unsheltered homeless population in the United States.

“While many people experiencing homelessness live in our urban centers, a growing number have taken refuge in more remote, mountainous regions,” according to the L.A. County order. “As more people ... live within high fire zones, the risk of fires starting and causing harm and loss of life has also increased.”

Rutherford said her proposed order would give the sheriff’s H.O.P.E. team, an acronym for Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement, another tool to help persuade them to relocate and get out of danger’s way. The team typically directs the homeless to available housing and essential services, such as medical treatment.

Still, it may be tricky. Among the main reasons some homeless people refuse to go into shelters is because they have pets, are couples, or both — neither of which homeless shelters allow, in most cases.

Rutherford said her order, if passed, also would should provide mountain residents some peace of mind. “Hopefully, it gives our mountain residents a little more security that there’s a tool to keep themselves safe as well,” she said.

Not so black-and-white

Despite what mountain residents believe to be an increase in homeless-related fires in the the mountains and canyons, the issue is not as black-and-white with fire officials.

“Data wise, it is hard to measure the homeless impact on calls for service. Many fires that occur in the mountains and foothill areas are caused by human activity but cannot be conclusively connected to a hopeless encampment,” said Mike McClintock, a battalion chief with the San Bernardino County Fire Department, in an email. “It is also difficult for our emergency responders to determine the living status of individuals they encounter at the fire scene.”

Only three of hundreds of fires in and around the mountain areas in the past year were confirmed to have been started by homeless individuals, McClintock said.

For example, some residents believe the 35-acre Peak Fire that erupted on Old Waterman Canyon Road, adjacent Highway 18, on June 28 was caused by a homeless person camping in a car. That, however, was never confirmed.

Gearing up

In preparation for the coming of peak fire season, the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** is deploying firefighters and other resources to all vegetation fires in its jurisdiction, and will continue to monitor illegal fire activities on any public or private lands, McClintock said.

“This would include illegal cooking or warming fires caused by the homeless, those caused by illegal camping and trespassing, and illegal shooting,” McClintock said. “If a large amount of activity or increased risk of fire danger is present, the Office of the Fire Marshal will secure and close entry to these areas, as well as post notices and write citations to individuals.”

Behrens said anyone cited for an illegal campfire on U.S. Forest Service land faces an appearance in federal court. Maximum punishment can be as high as a \$5,000 fine per individual, or \$10,000 per group, and up to six months in jail, he said.

In and around Lower Waterman Canyon, the San Manuel Fire Department wielded a powerful fire prevention tool, with great success, over the past three years: goats. Up to 400 Nubian and Boer goats have grazed hundreds of acres near the Arrowhead Springs Hotel, which is owned by the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.

“They’re such a unique wildland fuel-mitigation tool. They don’t graze down to bare soil. They leave a couple of inches so there’s not an erosion problem,” San Manuel Fire Chief Michael Smith said. “They’ll eat up a tree or a bush as far as they can reach, so they can clear up to a 5-foot space. That eliminates what we refer to in the fire service as ladder fuels — where fires can go from the ground up to the trees and become crown fires, which travel from treetop to treetop, and they’re harder to put out.”

He said firefighters at other departments have been so intrigued by the goats they drop by from time to time to see what they do.

“They’re the best firefighters I have,” Smith said with a hearty laugh. “But don’t tell my other firefighters that.”

<https://www.sbsun.com/2021/09/07/san-bernardino-county-moving-to-ban-homeless-camping-in-mountain-areas/>

Man injured, nearly drowned after jump at Copper Canyon

Staff Writer, Today's News Herald Havasu News

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A man was injured and nearly drowned Sunday afternoon after he jumped from a rock formation at Copper Canyon, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. According to a news release, the male victim did several flips in the air as he jumped into the water but was knocked unconscious on his way down. He was recovered from the water by an onlooker, and he soon regained consciousness. He was treated and taken to shore by boat by the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**. He was then taken to Havasu Regional Medical Center for further treatment.

The accident comes about three weeks after a teenager was killed at Copper Canyon in a similar jumping accident. In that accident, Kason R. Adams jumped into the water and didn't resurface.

https://www.havasunews.com/news/man-injured-nearly-drowned-after-jump-at-copper-canyon/article_d3cad64a-106a-11ec-be92-afefd6324200.html