



# NEWS



## News Headlines 05/13/2020

- Firefighters douse flames that briefly threatened homes in Redlands
- Hiker jailed for starting wildfire with cigarette
- Joshua Tree man accused of setting fire which burnt 150 acres of conservation land
- Joshua Tree Fire Burns 150 Acres

## Firefighters douse flames that briefly threatened homes in Redlands

Eric Licas, San Bernardino Sun

Posted: May 12, 2020, 10:08 pm



Firefighters in Redlands spray water at flames burning in the area of Camelot Drive, near homes along Wabash Avenue, Monday, May 11. (Photo by Tod Sudmeier, courtesy of the Redlands Fire Department)

A brush fire briefly threatened homes in Redlands, but was quickly extinguished Monday, May 11.

Flames scorched vegetation in the area of Camelot Drive, near homes along Wabash Avenue, Redlands Fire Department officials said on social media. The fire was reported at about 4 p.m. It burned about nine acres before firefighters from the Redlands, Loma Linda and **San Bernardino County Fire Departments**, as well as CalFire, managed to contain it.

Crews on the ground doused the blaze with water while aircraft dropped payloads of bright red flame retardant from above. It took them about an hour to extinguish the fire.

Firefighters remained in the area well into Monday evening to monitor for hot spots. The cause of the fire was under investigation Tuesday.

<https://www.sbsun.com/2020/05/12/firefighters-douse-flames-that-briefly-threatened-homes-in-redlands/>

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## Hiker jailed for starting wildfire with cigarette

Stacy Moore, Hi-Desert Star

Posted: May 12, 2020



A county fire engineer listens to radio traffic in between making adjustments to the water pumping through lines into Mojave Desert Land Trust property Monday. Stacy Moore Hi-Desert Star

**JOSHUA TREE** — A man flicking a lit cigarette is suspected of causing a fire that burned about 155 acres of conservation land Monday.

Michael Smith, 43, of Joshua Tree, was arrested at Twentynine Palms Highway and Olympic Road and is being held in jail on \$25,000 bail on a charge of unlawfully causing a fire.

The land that burned belongs to the Mojave Desert Land Trust and is a desert tortoise habitat, said spokeswoman Jessica Dacey.

Several people called 911 to report the fire starting around 11:50 a.m., and sheriff's deputies, firefighters and California Highway Patrol officers all responded.

They found flames whipped by winds consuming the dry brush and trees that cover the property, and firefighters quickly called for backup.

Callers also said they saw a man leaving the area where the fire started, said **county fire** Battalion Chief Mike McClintock.

Fire crews found flames on 2 to 3 acres but spreading.

“Strong and erratic winds quickly pushed the fire into dry, receptive fuels,” McClintock said.

The first firefighters to arrive started laying in hose to limit the spread and quickly requested additional crews as the fire burned rapidly northeast toward Twentynine Palms Highway and Joshua Tree Memorial Park.

“Initial priorities were keeping the fire south of the highway and west of the Memorial Park,” McClintock said.

As smoke poured from the flames and fire equipment rolled in, the CHP and Caltrans closed the highway at La Contenta/Yucca Mesa and Sunny Vista roads.

“Despite strong winds and an active fire, crews successfully held the fire at the highway,” McClintock said.

“Engines also kept the fire from damaging nearby buildings on the memorial park property.”

The chief said cooperation between fire departments from the county, state, national park and combat center helped keep the fire south of the highway and out of structures.

A bulldozer staffed by a county firefighter and hand crews from the prison dug containment lines to keep the fire from jumping into nearby fuels.

Crews continued to work into the late afternoon and evening on mop-up and line construction.

When the fire was completely contained by 7:45 p.m., approximately 155 acres of the 623-acre parcel had been burned.

In the meantime, a sheriff’s aviation crew helped search for the suspect.

Deputies identified Smith as the suspect and contacted him at his residence near the fire.

Sheriff’s Sgt. E. Smoot said Smith admitted he accidentally caused the fire by flicking a lit cigarette butt into the dry brush while on a hike. He tried to put out the fire but was unsuccessful.

He was arrested and is due in court this afternoon.

Anyone with information for the investigation is asked to call the sheriff’s station at (760) 366-4175 or leave an anonymous tip at (888) 782-7463.

Stretching from the border of Joshua Tree to Joshua Tree Memorial Park, the parcel is home not only to desert tortoises but also wildlife including the burrowing owl, bobcat, American badger, prairie falcon and kit fox, Dacey said.

It was once targeted for a subdivision, but the land trust bought the acreage in 2013 with money from the Department of Navy and other donors.

It is open to the public, although it is now closed because of the fire.

[http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article\\_92e18e22-94b4-11ea-aca5-f71030e91f37.html](http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article_92e18e22-94b4-11ea-aca5-f71030e91f37.html)

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## **Joshua Tree man accused of setting fire which burnt 150 acres of conservation land**

Martin Estacio, Victorville Daily Press

Posted: May 12, 2020, 8:34 PM



A Fire burns in Joshua Tree on Monday, May 11, 2020. A local resident, Michael Smith, was arrested on suspicion of starting the 150-acre blaze. [COURTESY OF SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT]

**JOSHUA TREE** — A local man was arrested on suspicion of starting a fire that charred roughly 150 acres of conservation land Monday and forced the temporary closure of a nearby highway.

Michael Smith, 43, of Joshua Tree, is being held in lieu of \$25,000 bail after being identified as the suspect in starting the blaze which burned about one-fourth of a 623-acre parcel owned by the nonprofit Mojave Desert Land Trust.

He is scheduled to appear in court on Wednesday.

The fire broke out at about 11:30 a.m. Monday in the area of Twentynine Palms Highway and La Contenta Road.

Firefighters found two to three acres burning which started to spread rapidly as “strong and erratic winds quickly pushed the fire into dry, receptive fuels,” said **San Bernardino County Fire** Department Battalion Chief Mike McClintock in a statement.

As the fire pushed northeast toward Twentynine Palms Highway and Joshua Tree Memorial Park, the highway was closed due to heavy smoke and fire equipment, McClintock said.

Crews were able to hold the fire at the highway with help from a bulldozer and keep it from damaging nearby buildings.

By 7:45 p.m., McClintock said the blaze was 100% contained.

According to the Mojave Desert Land Trust, the parcel is home to over 10,000 Joshua trees and an “important habitat for many species including desert tortoise, burrowing owl, bobcat, American badger, prairie falcon, and kit fox.”

The western Joshua tree has been recommended for protection under the state’s Endangered Species Act, the Center for Biological Diversity announced last month.

“We are saddened to see a fire of this size affect this important ecological area. We are hoping that the rate at which the fire moved through the area and the relatively light cover of invasive plants will have prevented significant damage to the Joshua tree forest,” said Geary Hund, Executive Director of the Mojave Desert Land

Trust, in a statement. “We are grateful to San Bernardino County Fire Department for their rapid response and their efforts to contain the burn, as well as other agencies that assisted.”

“This parcel is very special,” Hund added. “It is well-loved by the community and helps maintain our community’s rural character by preserving open space, access to nature, and incredible views of our National Park.”

The 623 acres was purchased in 2013 and had a conservation easement placed over it meaning it could never be developed, the MDLT said.

<https://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20200512/joshua-tree-man-accused-of-setting-fire-which-burnt-150-acres-of-conservation-land>

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## **Joshua Tree Fire Burns 150 Acres**

**Mike McClintock, Battalion Chief / Public Information Officer, SBCoFD / News Mirror**

Posted: May 12, 2020

At 11:27 a.m. **San Bernardino County Fire** crews were dispatched to a reported vegetation fire in the area of 29 Palms Highway & La Contenta Road in Joshua Tree. Units arrived in the area within six minutes to find smoke showing from a large plot of land Southeast of the intersection.

Crews made access to find 2-3 acres of medium fuels with a moderate to rapid rate of spread. Strong and erratic winds quickly pushed the fire into dry, receptive fuels. Arriving crews anchored the fire and started putting in hose lays to limit spread. Additional crews were quickly requested due to the size and rate of spread. The fire continued to burn at a rapid rate of spread Northeast towards 29 Palms Highway and Joshua Tree Memorial Park. Initial priorities were keeping fire South of the highway and West of the Memorial Park. The highway was closed due to fire equipment, heavy smoke and proximity of the fire. Despite strong winds & an active fire, crews successfully held the fire at the highway. Engines also kept the fire from damaging nearby buildings on the Memorial Park property. A San Bernardino County Fire bulldozer and inmate hand crews worked on containment lines to keep the fire from jumping into nearby receptive fuels. Crews continued to work into the late afternoon and evening on mop-up operations and line construction. By 7:45 the fire was 100% contained and held at approximately 150 acres. Crews will continue to monitor the fire and patrol the perimeter for hot spots.

Early on in the fire 911 callers stated they saw an adult male leaving the area where the fire started. San Bernardino County Sheriff Deputies and Fire Investigators responded and searched the area, finding the person responsible for starting the fire. A 43-year-old adult from Joshua was arrested for unlawfully causing the fire. He is being held on \$25,000 bail. Anyone with information related to this investigation is asked to contact the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department, Morongo Basin Station at (760) 366-4175 or San Bernardino County Office of the Fire Marshal at 386-4800. Anyone wishing to remain anonymous may contact We-Tip at 1-888-78-CRIME.

The 150-acre fire burned on Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) land in unincorporated Joshua Tree. The 623-acre property features thousands of Joshua trees and other native plants, as well as desert tortoises, burrowing owls, desert kit foxes, and badgers. San Bernardino County personnel worked closely with MDLT staff to establish a plan for conserving land while providing containment lines to ensure no further spread. With high winds forecasted for the coming days, containment lines were a high priority. Line construction by bulldozer was kept to a minimum to minimize impact.

San Bernardino County Fire responded with nine Engines, two Hand Crews, two Water Tenders, two Fire Investigators and three Chief Officers. CALFIRE assisted with one Engine. Joshua Tree National Park responded with an Engine and Chief Officer. Combat Center FD assisted with station coverage. Strong inter-agency cooperation made a positive impact on keeping the fire South of 29 Palms Highway and out of structures. CHP & Cal-Trans provided a road closure and traffic control while crews worked on the fire. Thanks to all our public safety partners for your help.

[https://www.newsmirror.net/news/joshua-tree-fire-burns-150-acres/article\\_af883b04-94bc-11ea-aaf0-e3ce17886fe1.html](https://www.newsmirror.net/news/joshua-tree-fire-burns-150-acres/article_af883b04-94bc-11ea-aaf0-e3ce17886fe1.html)