START DATE, CALL TIME
JULY 8, 2017 1:45 P.M.

CONTAINMENT
46%

CAUSE
UNDER INVESTIGATION

SIZE
11,920 ACRES

STRUCTURES BURNED
8 RESIDENCES AND 12 OUTBUILDINGS

PERSONNEL
765

INJURIES/FATALITIES
0

ESTIMATED COST
$4.6 MILLION

CALIFORNIA HAS ALREADY HAD 3,449 FOREST FIRES THIS YEAR, AND IT’S NOT OVER YET

ACCENTUATING THE EXTREME

Although the Whittier Fire started near Lake Cachuma last week, there were already 35 other fires burning elsewhere in California — and even more to come. These fires are burning in more places than in previous years, and the acreage burned thus far is much higher than in 2016.

From January 1-July 9, 2016, Cal Fire reported 2,270 fires on nearly 30,000 acres. With so many fires raging, it’s no surprise that 35 other fires burned in the same region. These fires are burning in more places than ever before, and the acreage burned thus far is much higher than in 2016.

Since Sunday, temperatures dropped considerably as the marine layer thickened, helping to cool down Whittier’s scary wildfires. As of noon July 12, 2017, via InciWeb, 11,920 acres had been controlled. The fire is 11 percent contained. There have been no reported injuries.

California’s natural wildfire problem is an ongoing issue. In recent years, the state has experienced more extreme weather conditions and increased human population in areas near fires. This has led to more frequent and larger wildfires, which require increased resources to fight.

While temporary setbacks may occur, the state continues to work towards preventing the spread of wildfires. The focus is on creating safe and sustainable communities, implementing wildfire mitigation strategies, and improving fire suppression tactics.

The Whittier Fire started near Lake Cachuma last week, and it remains a significant threat to nearby communities. As the fire continues to burn, residents and officials are working to ensure safety and protect property. The ongoing challenge is to balance the need for development with the need to prevent wildfires.

Like its rainfall, California forest fires are part of a natural cycle that occurs in response to climate change. As the climate warms, wildfires become more common and destructive. The state is adapting to these changes by implementing strategies to reduce the risk of wildfires and protect communities.

In the coming days, weakened tree trunks and destabilized soil will increase the fire risk. Firefighters are working to contain the fire and protect lives and property. As of July 8, the fire is 11 percent contained.

For up-to-date fire coverage, visit Independent.com or Facebook.com/SierraDependence.
ANIMALS LOST AND SAVED

Two snakes and one iguana died when the Whittier Fire raged through the grounds of Rancho Alegre Saturday afternoon, July 9. Most of the reptiles were in terrariums that were set up for a science program, during the school year and a sleepaway Boy Scout camp in the summer. The staff hopes that their beloved pets, which had just been released, was able to survive by burrowing into the ground.

Meanwhile, at nearby Santa Francis Ranch, an adobe and 12 rare Warani cattle were spared. “Saint Francis must have been looking down on us,” said ranch owner: Alexandra Germain, who was in Santa Ynez when she got news of a brush fire at Camp Whittier. Germain got no time to evacuate, employees moved the adobe and cattle to a patch of grassland pasture, hoping the fire would not find any fuel there to burn. It worked.

The animals “may be very calm, as if they knew what to do,” said Germain. “We were very lucky.”

As the fire grew to 2,000 acres on Saturday night and threatened to crest the Santa Ynez Mountains, a number of large and small animals fell under the evacuation order. Working with the Santa Barbara Humane Society and the Santa Barbara Equine Assistance and Evacuation Team, S.B. County Animal Services housed four horses at the Earl Warren Showgrounds, two cats at UCSB, and one at the Humane Society; according to Animal Services Director Jon Gloek. The Humane Society had also taken in eight cats, four dogs, four birds, and one guinea pig.

Meanwhile, in the vicinity of the Alamo Fire north of Santa Maria, Animal Services and the Santa Maria Valley Humane Society had sheltered five goats, 39 dogs, and 27 cats. Horses Emergency Rescue Team (SHEET) volunteers from San Luis Obispo were among the four horses that were evacuated to the Elle-Rosendal grounds.

Rumors that Santa Barbara's Earl Warren Showgrounds would not accept evacuated horses due to the Santa Barbara National Forest's budget is consumed by fire suppression. For the U.S. Forest Service, that number is closer to 90 percent across the nation, a static jump from 85 percent in 2019. Cal Fire spends roughly half a billion dollars a year fighting fires on its lands. With state and federal budgets constrained, fires are raging. Californians director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), Mark Guadalupe, visited earlier this month in a letter to the Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, but all accusing him of short-changing California local fire departments for resources technical on federal Forest Service lands to the tune of $8 million. Cal Fire relies on a network of “mutual aid” agreements among federal, state, and local firefighting agencies to keep wildfires in check. Underpinning this system is the expectation that everyone gets paid. “I cannot continue to support the deployment of resources to protect federal land that ultimately may bankrupt our local government,” Guadalupe wrote Tidwell. Some in the Forest Service are privately seething over what they term a gratuitously “hostile” letter—delivered at the height of the fire season.

Late Tuesday, Tidwell responded sharply to Guadalupe after first affirming the Forest Service's commitment to collaboration. "We respect the actions of all firefighting personnel who serve side by side on the wildfires in California where we don't all wear blue or green uniforms, but yellow that signifies our shared unity.” Tidwell then noted that one million of the five million dollars that had already been paid to local firefighting agencies and that half of the remaining $4 million is currently being processed. Tidwell added that a Congress had “found that local cooperators (in California) incurs enormous and unreasonable indirect costs for activities,” including $4,5 million in administrative costs charged by nine California agencies. “It was determined the Forest Service was overpaying local governments during that period and that controls need to be in place to ensure they didn’t occur again.”

These tensions between California and the feds hardly sprang up overnight, and based upon the letter exchange, they’re not going away anytime soon. Tidwell closed by chastising the OES for not providing the proper invoices needed for bills to be paid. “Despite our efforts for the past several years, we have had marginal compliance from the OES staff.”

The issue is hardly new: “We’re telling hundreds of millions of dollars system-wide,” said Santa Barbara Fire Chief Pat McElroy. He said the Forest Service still owes his department $400,000, but that a small agency, he said, “a $50,000 weather the delay. If you’re a small agency, you can’t afford a bill that goes unpaid year after year. Can you imagine what it would do to your budget if you were to have the delay? It would put you out of business.” Tidwell added, “Finance” in the Forest Service can kill you. “While such tensions rarely occur again,” Tidwell said, “a delay in payment can cause major problems for small agencies.”

Dennis Burns, a wildfire expert, with a pitcher of water and pour it on the fire, ” he said. “You paint it in a box and keep it there. If we had everything we wanted, we’d be able to fight it differently, but we still have to fight it.”

ANCIENTING THE EXTREME CONT'D FROM P.15

CLEANUP ON HWY. 154: Firefighters quickly jumped on the northern edge (above) of the Whittier Fire as it jumped the highway near Larchmont Lane. Below, Ranch Alegre’s fire danger rises a sign of the times.

Call the County Animal Services hotline at 681-4332.

Get your cat Fat, livestock evacuated from fire hit, 1546

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Children, their counselors, and other PCB staff, wearing T-shirts with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's emblem, busied themselves clearing the way for the long line of rescue vehicles packed with children. Driving a van with so many kids was an unusual experience, said Forest Service Patrolman Dave Dahlberg, who was on duty when the blaze hit. "It was a tight situation," said Dahlberg, who estimated the capacity of his van at 10 passengers. "But we were ready." The kids were outside, ready to go, and it was not chaos, "he remembered. All the campers were outside, ready to go, and divided into small groups that would fit into the Search & Rescue vehicles, plus several Sheriff's UTVs and the handful of staffers and counselors that were already at the site. It was a tight operation, Dahlberg said. Within six minutes, everybody was loaded up and was on the road for the long line of rescue vehicles packed with children. Driving a van with so many kids and another Search & Rescue volunteer, Dahlberg remembers feeling the heat of the fire through his side window. His group was relatively calm, at one point singing "Let My Little Light Shine." "They did an outstanding job," Von Tillova said, "taking care of priority number one — saving lives." At the 154, the kids were transferred to a fleet of sleek buses provided by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department and shuttled to their loved ones anxiously waiting at Old Mission Santa Inés in Solvang. "Once they transferred to the buses, our role was over," Dahlberg said. "We were assigned to help with evacuations and to help provide a calming influence on the other counselors." Scattered reports of injured campers were confirmed by the leading edge of the blaze as the firefighters continued their work to contain the fire. The fire, which started near the Circle V Ranch Camp, was described as a "tense situation," with the kids remaining calm and waiting to be evacuated. The firefighters, along with other emergency personnel, worked together to ensure the safety of the children and staff, providing a calming influence on the situation and helping to evacuate the area. As the fire continued to grow, the firefighters and other emergency personnel worked tirelessly to contain the blaze and protect the children and staff. The fire, which was described as "tinder-dry" and "hot and fast," continued to spread, causing concern among the firefighters and other emergency personnel. Despite the challenges, the firefighters and other emergency personnel remained focused on the task at hand, working to ensure the safety of the children and staff and to contain the fire. The fire was eventually contained, and the children and staff were safely evacuated. The firefighters and other emergency personnel were commended for their hard work and dedication in ensuring the safety of the children and staff during this challenging incident.