

# Soberanes Incident Summary

August 25-September 13, 2016



**Tom Kurth**  
Incident Commander

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Deputy Incident Commander

## Sobranes Fire - 105,642 acres on 9/11

- ◆ Currently Staffed (Full Suppression with indirect line)
- ◆ Ignited by an illegal campfire on July 22, 2016, in Garrapata State Park

### Opening Statement

The Soberanes fire was ignited by an illegal campfire on July 22, 2016, in Garrapata State Park. On August 24th, when the Alaska Type 1 IMT (Kurth) in-briefed for the Soberanes Fire, the incident was being managed by California Interagency IMT 3 (von Tillow) in Unified Command with CAL-FIRE San Benito-Monterey Ranger Unit (King). The AKIMT assumed command of the Soberanes Fire at 0700 hours on August 26th after a delegation of authority was granted from the U.S. Forest Service Los Padres National Forest Supervisor Robert Baird. The Unified Command was dissolved, however the CAL-FIRE cost apportionment remained in place.

The fire was approximately 91,100 acres in size. Even though it was burning primarily in the Ventana Wilderness, the fire was recognized as a threat to numerous values including the communities of Tassajara, Big Sur, Cachagua, and associated infrastructure; State Parks; properties and tourism associated with Highway 1; cultural and heritage resources; and endangered species habitat.

Inholdings within and adjacent to the indirect line were scouted and prepared for structure defense. Structure protection groups were formed that evaluated structures, developed structure protection plans, and implemented the protection actions along Highway 1 as fire threatened the Coast Ridge Road indirect containment line. In addition, contingency lines were scouted and developed outside of the indirect line associated with the “big box”.

Areas of indirect line were scouted and improved to keep the fire in the “big box”. Suppression resources worked closely with Resource Advisors while improving indirect line to protect identified resource values in the fire area. As the fire continued to spread south firing groups were formed and a firing plan developed and approved. Firing operations were implemented to keep up with the interior fire spread. The firing groups were successful in carrying fire along the North Coast Ridge Road and securing the indirect line. Aerial assets were utilized to check fire spread where needed.

Evacuation orders were in effect along the Coast Ridge Road and warnings were in effect for the Tassajara Zen Center and north to Carmel Road. Forest trail and area closures were also in effect. An evacuation order was issued on September 10, 2016 at 2100 hours along the Tassajara Road (Forest Rd 18S02). The new evacuation order applied to all residents along the Tassajara Road from Chews Ridge south to the end of the road at Tassajara Hot Springs. Evacuation warnings still remained in effect from the Tassajara Road intersection with the Carmel Valley to Chews Ridge.

The IMT was requested to assist the forest with initial attack activities and created initial attack groups that were pre-positioned to assist with holding operations. Suppression resources were strategically placed in multiple camps and spikes in different areas of the fire.



## Weather Summary

There has been no measureable precipitation over the fire area since May, and the Central Coast remains in severe drought due to deficits over the last 5 years. Temperatures have been seasonable for the most part in late August and early September, however episodes of above normal temperatures and frontal winds have produced significant increases in growth on several days.

## Fire Behavior

During that period, fire has been burning through several significant fire scars, the Kirk of 1999 and the Basin of 2008 that burned a larger area, including all of the Kirk scar. There are noticeable differences in fuels between the “once burned” and “twice burned” areas. The areas burned only in 2008 have considerable standing dead and possibly heavier loadings on north slopes from deadfalls. Attempts to ascribe differences in fire behavior have helped understand burning intensity. However, fire is being carried primarily in chamise and buttonbrush shrub fuels on south and west facing slopes, pulling fire through the Oak Woodlands on north and east slopes as it passes.

Very steep and bisected terrain throughout the Ventana Wilderness both directs fire spread and, in some cases, limits it. Fire spread has been primarily upslope and updrainage, with ridgelines stopping spread from the south or west in several instances. However, none of these terrain features are continuous enough to provide effective barriers to fire spread.

Fire season is expected to continue into October, and there is little chance for significant fire slowing events before then.



## Strategic Direction and Course of Action

Full suppression strategy was utilized to protect communities and other values at risk with a combination of direct and indirect tactics to suppress the fire. To the extent possible, existing or, historic fire lines were used for control purposes to minimize resource effects to wilderness. The Life First Doctrinal Guidelines and Chief's Intent for 2016 were followed with implementation of the right plan at the right place at the right time with the right assets for the right duration and the right reason in order to achieve objectives with minimum firefighter exposure.

The fire was burning in remote, rugged terrain with limited access. Weather was hot and dry following a prolonged drought. The overall strategy was to keep the fire in the Ventana Wilderness utilizing containment line that was successful during the Basic Fire (2008). This chosen strategy minimized the risk to incident personnel while protecting values at risk by attempting to control the fire where chances for success are highest and risks to personnel are lowest.

## Objectives

Provide for firefighter and public safety through the application of sound risk management analysis and the implementation of appropriate mitigations.

Protect communities, infrastructure, utilities, improvements, historical assets, and the Ventana watershed by keeping the fire:

- Inside the current perimeter in Branches I, II, and IX to protect infrastructure in adjacent communities.

- North of Nacimiento-Ferguson Road to limit fire growth to the south at the point of greatest opportunity

- West of Carmel Valley and Reliz Canyon to avoid impacts to the communities along the Highway 101 corridor and Fort Hunter Liggett Military Reservation

- East of the Coast Ridge Road to protect values within the visual corridor of the Highway 1 National Scenic Byway.

Assess suppression repair needs on federal lands and implement where safe and appropriate.

Provide initial attack assistance at the request of Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest.

Ensure cost containment measures are identified, applied, and documented.

Enhance community relationships through respect, engagement, communication, and trust.

Keep public informed of incident status



## Key Decisions

### Medical Statistics

Medical Unit visits 3241

Lost time accidents 2

Personal injuries 2

Helicopter transports to

Hospital

ALS 2

BLS 0

### Personnel

Personnel Assigned 1501

(maximum day)

Total hours worked

### Aircraft

Rotor/fixed wing assigned 19

(maximum day)

Flight hours (total)

SAFECOM 0

## Command

Coinciding with transfer of command from CIIMT #3 to the Alaska Type 1 IMT, Unified Command between the USFS Los Padres N.F. and CalFire BEU Unit was terminated while apportionment has continued. The bulk of the effort on lands under CalFire jurisdiction since that time has been in suppression repair while active suppression efforts have primarily taken place on Forest Service lands.

The USFS has been the sole agency delegating authority since August 26. The primary Agency Administrator expectation for Alaska Team was for all incident management activities to be executed in accordance with the strategy that has been identified within the support of the WFDSS with clear, concise, transparent, and timely communications.

## Safety

Good risk management decisions were made and implemented by field going personnel. There was only one emergency medical transport. The ATV mishap and the water tender incident were investigated and shared through the Rapid Lesson Sharing program in a timely manner. The IMT response to the evacuation of the dehydration/rhabdo patient was excellent. The patient was airlifted from division and receiving treatment within an hour. A good relationship between the Ops and safety sections was established and maintained. Only 2 reportable accidents were logged during the Alaska Teams rotation on this incident.

Steep hostile terrain with no viable escape routes or safety zones was a challenge to direct attack. It was decided the Team would continue to use indirect attack procedures. Driving was a big concern on this incident. The Safety team worked with the LOFR's and local agencies to place electronic reader boards on the PCH near the Molera camp and the Hill helibase and retardant site to slow and warn motorists of fire traffic in the area. Road guards and one way traffic were utilized to direct ingress and egress on steep one way roads that accessed the Coast Ridge Road fire line.



### Structures (confirmed to date)

Residences threatened	400
Residences damaged	3
Residences destroyed	57
Commercial threatened	10
Minor structures damaged	2
Minor structures destroyed	11

## Liaison

- ♦ Interaction with local cooperators including: CAL-Fire; Monterey County Sheriffs; CAL-Trans, PG &E. CA Parks and Recreation; Cachagua and Big Sur Fire Brigades; Office of Emergency Services; and local officials. Warner McGrew, local liaison along with Jim Butler, team liaison were essential in resolving cooperator issues. The process incorporated local knowledge and accelerated sense of community.
- ♦ Visit by Congressman Sam Farr and state Congresswoman Senator Loretta Sanchez and State Senate Majority Leader Bill Monning.
- ♦ Played a major role in evacuation warnings and orders to coordinate timing and content of messages between IMT (IC, SFO, PIO), cooperating agencies (Sheriff, County OEM, key contacts in area, etc).



- The Right Plan** (i.e., as informed by the Standards for Managing Incident Risk)
- In the Right Place** (i.e., where we have a reasonable probability of success).
- At the Right Time** (i.e., under favorable conditions for efficient and effective suppression).
- With the Right Assets** (i.e., only those suppression assets needed to safely implement tactics in support of reasonable objectives)
- And for the Right Duration** (i.e., release assets as soon as they are no longer needed or other actions to reduce exposure duration)

## Operations

- While maintaining a full suppression strategy we used direct and indirect tactics with the goal of preventing the firing from crossing the established control lines and threatening the VARs. Concurrent with these actions we engaged in tasks that increased our ability to avoid or minimize damage to private inholdings within established control lines.
- In support of the full suppression strategy we also utilized ground and aerial ignitions as appropriate to help secure the perimeter as the main fire continued advancing. Securing the perimeter in Branch VII had the highest priority due to the proximity of the main fire to control lines and the close proximity to VARs.
- Looked for and implement opportunities to minimize the final fire size and/or severity that had a high probability of success, present acceptable degree of risk, and were supported by the host agency.
- Provided IA support to the forest.
- Immediately reacted to multiple TFR intrusions.

## Air Operations

- At height of incident had 17 helicopters: seven Type 1, six Type 2, four Type 3. There were two air attack platforms.
- Split the air frequencies east to west, north to south, to assist air attack in maintaining positive control.
- Maintained a safe working environment with the numerous aircraft and personnel on site.



### Air Operations

Water Delivered	gallons
Gel delivered	0
gallons	
Retardant delivered	*
Cargo delivered	lbs
Passengers	
Flight Time	hrs

## Information Statistics

### Contacts:

Email Los Padres NF

Miles of trap-line 252

Total stops 49

### Social Media Contacts as of

Sept. 11

Facebook 1,841

Page Likes 929

Videos 2 per day

Views 73,211

People Reached 422,765

Post Engagements 108,917



## Planning Statistics

Total Acres Burned

IAPs printed

Extensions processed 0

## Training Statistics

Total trainees 839

Trainees recommended  
for certification 258

## Resources at Peak

Type 1 crews

Type 2 IA crews

Engines

Dozers

Water Tenders

## **Information**

- ♦ Ordering a PIO1(t) who is also a professional videographer turned out to be one of our best personnel decisions. Adding video to our SM contributions was extremely well received. Utilizing bi-lingual PIOs was also very important; the section did many media interviews in Spanish. Info also produced a video daily update in both English and Spanish.
- ♦ The IMT held two community meetings, 8/29 at Big Sur and 9/3 at Cachagua

## **Plans**

- ♦ The IMT maintained the outgoing IMT's contracted GISS trailer that included five GIS computers, ultra-fast plotters, and a rental laptop which acted as a server for geospatial data. This maintained a seamless transition. Additionally, the ICP copy service trailer assisted with map packet production, and had plotters available that could produce any size of product. Map products were distributed to the Molera camp via the ftp site and an additional copy service located there printed maps. This substantially reduced the vehicle time and exposure on Highway 1.



## **Logistics**

- ♦ One National Caterer was located at Toro ICP to support the north and east efforts and another was located at Molera Camp to support the west side efforts. The ICP Base and each of the three camps had shower units in place. Laundry units were available at Toro Base Camp and Molera camp.
- ♦ The Facilities Unit was ran and maintained four separate camps on the incident. Three camps were overseen from ICP with team support at two camps as available. One camp was run primarily as a standalone camp on the west side of the incident, Molera.

## Logistics Statistics

### Food Unit Aug. 31 –Sept. 9

#### Meal count total

Breakfast	4910
Lunch	3960
Dinners	8275

#### Hot Can Meals

### Facilities

Shower units	4
Laundry Facilities	2

### Communication

#### Radios Provided

#### Command radios

#### Logistics radios

Radio Repeaters	14
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### Supply

#### Orders

Cache
Expanded

### Ground Support

Rentals	65
Motor Vehicle Accidents	1
Drivers	26
Mechanics	6

### Finance

Cost Aug, 26—Sept. 11	\$33.9 M
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## Logistics continued

- ◆ The communications unit successfully managed and maintained 14 Command Repeaters, 3 mountaintop hubbing repeaters, an airlink unit and a crossband unit in support of the incident, linked into three separate tactical networks and an air support network.
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- ◆ The Communication Unit developed and installed a fire-wide (nation-wide) cell telephone-PA based briefing system that provided the ability for all camps to broadcast the Team's morning briefing over their Public Address system along with the ICP's Briefing to ensure a single, clear and current message.



## Finance

- ◆ Establishing an accrual in excess of \$30,000,000 for costs incurred by Cal Fire during the time they had financial responsibility of the incident. (estimated at 20% of the total fire cost as of 8/25/16).
- ◆ It took several days for the Finance section, working with Plans to clean the records up. All resources that were hired by Cal Fire had to be reassigned to a have a new resource order. If they didn't have a Viper contract, was released and a Viper contractor hired. This came at a critical time of the incident.



## Notable Successes

- ♦ Initiated a Rapid Lessons Sharing report of a WT2 that had cut a corner and had dual off the road. Inserted a firefighter liaison into Tassajara Zen center to mend/build relationships and provide a point of contact within the compound.
- ♦ During the event, a REMS team was successfully deployed and helped produce a successful outcome.
- ♦ Moving to an auxiliary camp format saved several thousand dollars in operator time and equipment usage. This reduced exposure of driving Highway 1, shortened shift length and provided firefighter presence on both sides of fire.
- ♦ Use of Google Earth map as a reference tool to illustrate the terrain, fuels and time/space issues the Operations section faced with making tactical decisions.
- ♦ The Situation unit created a 3 dimensional overview video of the fire utilizing Google Earth that showed the remote rugged terrain and limited access to the fire's edge. This proved to be a powerful tool to demonstrate how the strategy of utilizing accessible indirect control lines that held fires in the past minimized the overall risk to incident personnel. This also proved to be a powerful tool for conveying this message to the public and key political stakeholders. It received a lot of hits on Social Media when posted. Video products produced by the Info Section were also popular on Social Media.
- ♦ The Incident Commander visit to TZC provided a forum for open communication. Relationship building was a key factor in achieving a high trust state with the center administrators and helped achieve the management objective of enhancing community relations.
- ♦ The Communications Unit entered into an arrangement wherein the Tassajara Zen Center would, under certain clearly defined conditions, be allowed to connect into our incident communications system, thereby providing them access to emergency and situational awareness communication capabilities otherwise beyond them should the fire move down into their defended firelines.
- ♦ The COST unit was successful in cleaning the Cal Fire database to 90% accuracy.
- ♦ Training opportunities were provided to over 800 personnel from all Forest Service Regions in the nation, all Federal Land Management Agencies and 16 different State Governments, while ensuring the local forest and its cooperators maximized the opportunities given their personnel's availability.

