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LASTING IMPACTS

Wildfire reshaping coastal wilderness at Point Reyes



SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

A bull elk is in the foreground of the Woodward fire in the Point Reyes National Seashore in Inverness on Saturday. The fire

Blaze can alter the landscape, leave wildlife habitat unsuitable

By Will Houston
whouston@marinij.com

The Woodward wildfire burning in the Point Reyes National Seashore is altering the landscape and ecology there in ways not seen for almost 25 years.

Wildfires can have lasting impacts — for good or ill — on the region's natural environment and inhabitants, from pines to moths to mountain beavers.

Some plants such as the bishop pine require fire for their seeds to germinate. The flames can also clear away dense vegetation, making way for other species that had been crowded out for decades.

But fires can also destroy key habitat for wildlife such as the Point Reyes mountain beaver, which is unique to

the park, and other species already under threat, such as the northern spotted owl or steelhead trout.

"In some areas, it may be quite some time before it's suitable wildlife habitat again," said Dave Press, a wildlife ecologist with the Point Reyes National Seashore.

As of Saturday, the fire had burned 3,072 acres with 10% containment.

The last major fire to occur in the park can offer some insight into what the Woodward fire's lingering environmental effects might be. However, there are key differences between the two conflagrations.

The Mount Vision fire was sparked by an illegal campfire in October 1995 and rapidly grew over three days. The fast-mov-



ALAN DEP — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

The fire is burning in an area also scorched in the 1995 Vision Fire. Trees killed 25 years ago can still be seen in Point Reyes National Seashore.

ing blaze burned more than 12,300 acres in the Inverness Ridge area and the Point Reyes National Seashore and destroyed 45 residences. It was the first major fire to occur in the region for nearly 60 years and led to a large restoration effort in the years that followed.

Former Marin County fire chief Ken Massucco, who was a captain at the time, said the combination of low humidity, wind and years of built-up organic litter turned the thick bishop pines into torches that scattered embers. The Woodward fire shares similarities

ELK » PAGE 2

NORTH BAY, SANTA CRUZ

Crews gain on two Bay Area wildfires

By Leonardo Castaneda
Bay Area News Group

Firefighters increased containment on at least two of the major complex fires ravaging the Bay Area, as officials work to continue lifting evacuation warnings and allowing residents back into their homes.

The LNU Complex Fire in the North Bay — now the third-largest and 10th most destructive fire in recorded California history — grew by 980 acres to 373,324. Containment increased to 41 percent. On Friday, fire offi-

cialists lifted evacuation warnings in parts of Sonoma, Solano and Napa counties, Cal Fire reported.

Damage inspection teams were in the area, where already 1,080 structures have been destroyed and 272 damaged. The fire has already resulted in three deaths in Napa County and two deaths in Solano County.

The CZU Complex Fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains grew by 202 acres to 83,335 acres and containment increased to 29 percent. Fire-

WILDFIRES » PAGE 2



ANDA CHU — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP VIA AP

Carol Schafer walks past what remains of her home along Cantelov Road destroyed by the fires in Vacaville.

MARIN PANDEMIC

Residents impacted by virus get help

MCF gives \$1M for needy with financial hardships

By Richard Halstead
rhalstead@marinij.com

The Marin Community Foundation is providing \$1 million in direct cash aid to low-income Marin residents who are experiencing financial hardship from the pandemic.

"We want to reach 2,000 families with increments of \$500," said Thomas Peters, the foundation's chief executive. Priority is being given to people who are ineligible to benefit from federal programs.

The foundation is working with nine Marin County community organizations — North Marin Community Services, West Marin Community Services, Performing Stars of Marin, the Marin Childcare Council, Canal Alliance, the San Geronimo Valley Community Center, Community Action Marin, the Multicultural Center of Marin and the Center for Domestic Peace — and the Family Independence Initiative, an Oakland-based nonprofit, to get the money into the hands of the people with the greatest need.

"These community-based organizations have built trust with their individual and family clients, so they really know their needs," Peters said. "They know best how to spend the money."

Socorro Romo, executive director of West Marin Community Services in Point Reyes Station, said, "We already know the clients who are experiencing hardship."

Under the system being used, the nonprofits never actually handle any of the money. The foundation allocates a certain number of \$500 credits to each community organization. Each credit has a unique code.

The nonprofits in turn award the codes to the

GRANTS » PAGE 2

CONVENTION

GOP challenged to defend Trump on race, gender

Party found Black, women speakers to back president

By Adam Nagourney and Sydney Ember
The New York Times

The Republican convention last week marked an extraordinary effort to recast President Donald Trump's image on issues of race and gender, with the party stretching to find African Americans who would testify that Trump is not racist, and lining up women to describe him as sensitive and empathetic — qualities he rarely displays in public.

This vouching for Trump, as he was nominated for a second term, was without precedent. Never before has a convention by either major party felt compelled to call such a diverse array of speakers to defend the character of a sitting president.

And it was done with a crucial political goal in mind: making a divisive leader appear more palatable to white moderate voters, who have turned against the Trump-led GOP in recent elections,

TRUMP » PAGE 4

DEMONSTRATIONS

Protesters march for Blake in Kenosha

About 1,000 demonstrators gathered outside a Wisconsin courthouse Saturday to denounce police violence. PAGE A14



OBITUARY

Chadwick Boseman dies; his roles portrayed icons

Chadwick Boseman was privately undergoing a battle with colon cancer, his family said in a statement. PAGE A7

SEVERE WEATHER

Louisiana begins cleanup after Hurricane Laura

Residents in Louisiana embarked Saturday on the epic task of clearing away ripped-off roofs and power lines. PAGE A12

ONLINE

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TODAY IN HISTORY

1967

The Senate confirmed the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first Black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

1983

Guion S. Bluford Jr. became the first Black American astronaut to travel in space as he blasted off aboard the Challenger.

2002

With just hours to spare, baseball averted a strike; it was the first time since 1970 that players and owners had agreed to a new collective bargaining agreement without a work stoppage.

2007

In a serious breach of nuclear security, a B-52 bomber armed with six nuclear warheads flew cross-country unnoticed; the Air Force later punished 70 people.

2010

An enormous drill began preliminary work on carving a half-mile chimney through solid rock to free 33 men trapped in a Chilean mine.

2017

The former Hurricane Harvey completed a U-turn in the Gulf of Mexico and rolled ashore for the second time in six days.

Birthdays

Cartoonist R. Crumb is 77. Comedian Lewis Black is 72. Actor Cameron Diaz is 48. TV personality Lisa Ling is 47. Actor Raúl Castillo is 43. MLB pitcher Adam Wainwright is 39. Tennis player Andy Roddick is 38.

Star report

Singer R. Kelly attacked while in federal detention

The lawyer for R. Kelly said the R&B singer, who is awaiting trial on child pornography and other charges, was assaulted by a fellow detainee at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago. Attorney Steve Greenberg revealed in a tweet that he learned of the attack on his client Wednesday. Greenberg says he has received conflicting information on the extent of Kelly's injuries. A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, citing privacy and safety reason, wouldn't confirm or deny Greenberg's report of the attack on Kelly.

— The Associated Press

LOTTERY

WINNING NUMBERS

Daily 3 Afternoon: 0, 4, 5

Daily 3 Evening: 3, 5, 7

Daily 4: 3, 5, 3, 2

Fantasy 5: 3, 26, 29, 32, 33

DAILY DERBY

1st: 1, Gold Rush

2nd: 2, Lucky Star

3rd: 7, Eureka

Race time: 1:42.09

SUPER LOTTO PLUS

Saturday's drawing: 5, 10, 29, 42, 46

Mega Number: 2

Wednesday's estimated jackpot: \$19 million

MEGA MILLIONS

Friday's drawing: 3, 9, 50, 53, 64

Mega Number: 1

Tuesday's estimated jackpot: \$78 million

POWERBALL

Saturday's drawing: 5, 21, 22, 29, 43

Mega Number: 10

Saturday's estimated jackpot: \$47 million

Elk

FROM PAGE 1

in that some areas have not burned in decades, he said. "Similar to what the firefighters are experiencing on the Woodward fire, the vegetation is so dense out there you can't really physically walk through it," Massucco said. "You have to cut your way through it."

About half of the acres burned in the Woodward fire previously burned in the Vision fire, according to Alison Forrester of the National Park Service.

Forrester, who is advising Woodward fire crews on how to prevent damage to park resources as part of their suppression efforts, has recorded how significantly fires can alter the West Marin landscape. As part of a 2011 study, she and other researchers found fire-dependent species such as bishop pine and the ceanothus scrub were able to drastically expand their distribution as coastal scrub was burned away by the Vision fire.

While the Woodward fire is not burning as much bishop pine, it is burning the regrown vegetation from after the Vision fire as well as untouched areas such as Douglas fir stands, which have more difficulty recovering.

"It'll be really interesting to see how the vegetation shifts," Forrester said. "I would expect there to be some pretty big changes but I'm not sure what they will be. I think the landscape might have some surprises for us."

The landscape can quickly begin to regrow, though some trees will take far longer compared to scrub or manzanita, she said. However, park managers will need to be on watch for invasive species trying to claim the open landscape.

Ongoing drought conditions and the upcoming rain season will also have an impact on the landscape's recovery, she said.

Much of the regrown bishop pine from the Vision fire, for example, has been affected by both drought and a non-native pathogen called pine pitch canker, which has weakened and killed trees.

Should the Woodward



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Woodward fire incident commanders canceled an evacuation warning for areas south of the blaze on Saturday. Areas within the canceled warning are shaded green. Areas with a continued warning are in orange. The area with the evacuation order is in red. The border of the fire is outlined in red.

fire move closer toward these pine stands, it could potentially become problematic, Massucco said.

"I would consider the footprint of the Vision fire to be in far worse shape now than when it burnt in 1995 because of the drought and the amount of bishop pines that were killed," he said.

The National Park Service recently began a study to determine the fire risk among these infected trees, Forrester said.

Some wildlife species suffered heavy losses in the Vision fire, but the impacts of the Woodward fire are not known at this time, Press said.

The scorched earth left behind from the Vision fire revealed thousands of Point Reyes mountain beaver burrows that were previously unknown. However, the flames were so intense that only an estimated 0.4% to 1.2% of the 5,000 beavers estimated to inhabit the fire area survived, according to a federal study.

The Woodward fire appears to be burning in the mountain beavers' range once again, but the impacts remain to be seen.

"Again, it's one of those situations where the impact may depend on how hot the fire burns," Press said. "If it's a low-intensity

fire then the mountain beavers may survive OK down in their holes."

The Woodward fire has burned through potentially two known northern spotted owl territories as well. The owl, which is recognized as a threatened species, nests in older trees. However, the fire appears to be burning mostly in the understory and is slow moving, which may reduce the habitat damage and allow owls plenty of time to escape the flames, Press said.

"Fortunately we are not in the nesting season right now," Press said, noting that the season ends in early June.

Loss of vegetation can also lead to erosion, which can impact local creeks and threatened species such as California red-legged frog and steelhead trout, Press said.

The iconic tule elk herds at Point Reyes are not under any immediate threat from the Woodward fire, according to Press.

The closest herd to the fire, the 164-member Limantour herd, can sometimes range to the open chaparral and grassland near Coast Campground, Press said.

"Based on the slow growth initially of this fire, the elk would have had

plenty of time to move in the northwest direction to the Muddy Hollow and Glenbrook drainages to move away from the fire," Press said.

The 138-member Drakes Beach herd is separated from the fires by Drakes Estero.

Much of the attention among environmental groups and activists has been on the 445-member Tomales Point elk herd, despite it being 9 miles to the north of the fire.

Even before the fire began, Diana Oppenheim — a former park volunteer and founder of the forELK advocacy group — said she and others have called on park officials to allow the elk to pass through the 3-mile, 8-foot-tall fence that separates the elk preserve from ranching land to the south. The group is one of several advocating for the removal of ranching operations in the national seashore in favor of tule elk.

Opening the gates or removing the fence entirely, she said, would address two issues: It would allow the elk a chance to escape from the peninsula should the fire move closer and allow them to search for more water sources. Oppenheim said observers have found that there are very few water sources in the pre-

serve, with stock ponds left behind from the former ranching activity drying up. At least five dead elk have been found in the preserve, she said.

Oppenheim argues there are similarities to the drought conditions experienced when 250 of about 500 elk in the preserve died between 2012 and 2014.

"We talked to biologists and ecologists and we are kind of seeing this as a red flag toward another mass elk dieoff," she said.

Press said the concerns are based on misconceptions about the water sources in the preserve. The stock ponds regularly go dry, but the elk have other water sources such as seeps and springs, including one that runs to McClure Beach, Press said. These sources have been monitored since July, he said.

"We feel comfortable with the levels of water we're seeing out there," Press said.

Oppenheim argues there isn't enough water in the preserve to sustain the herd and that, at a minimum, water should be trucked into the preserve at a minimum.

As for the dead elk, Press said the number and cause of the deaths has not been confirmed. Park staff perform a census on the elk herds once a year and do not actively survey for dead elk within the park throughout the year, Press said.

As of now, the drought conditions are not as severe as when the 2012-14 die-off occurred, Press said.

"On the other hand, we don't know when the significant winter rains are going to return this year, so we will need to keep our eyes on the situation out there," Press said.

Trucking water into the preserve is not warranted at this time, but water could be brought out to troughs should the need arise, Press said.

Should the fire become a threat to the Tomales Point herd, Press said the park could open the fence. However, he said, the fire is currently burning north so the elk would likely flee further north on the peninsula.

"This Woodward fire is a major event and it's affecting our park significantly but it will not impact Tomales Point," Press said.

Wildfires

FROM PAGE 1

fighters have been challenged by the rough terrain in the mountains, and as repopulation continues crews have had to clear out fire-weakened trees, downed power lines and burned-out stumps. The fire has destroyed 620 single-family homes, one multi-family home, 56 commercial buildings and 222 other minor structures. The fire has resulted in one civilian death.

Crews have been expanding containment lines, including some near Davenport, as well as near Bonny Doon. Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek, once under heavy threat from the encroaching wildfire. On Saturday afternoon, officials lifted an evacuation order for parts of the town of Felton.

"That area is looking fantastic as far as, we're getting a line put in, it's getting improved constantly," Cal Fire Chief Mark Brunton said early in the day. "If you haven't been in there — steep terrain, a lot of heavy

fuels, a lot of duff."

Crews are mopping up parts of the fire and are working to reopen Highway 1, officials said in a Saturday morning briefing. They're also hoping to allow more residents to return home. The California Highway Patrol announced Saturday morning the reopening of roads in Zayante, Lompico and Bear Creek Road east of Amber Ridge Loop as part of the repopulation process.

"We're getting there. We're one step at a time," Brunton said.

The SCU Complex Fire in part of Santa Clara County and beyond remained at 374,471 acres, making it the second-largest wildfire in California's recorded history after the 459,123-acre Mendocino Complex Fire of 2018. The fire is 40 percent contained and has destroyed 53 structures, 20 of which are considered minor structures.

Firefighters are starting and continuing controlled fire plans along the south and northwestern edges of the fire zone, which will allow them to contain the park before it's



JANE TYSKA — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Artist Marcia Ritz pauses while looking through the rubble of her manufactured home at the Spanish Flat Mobile Villa trailer park in Lake Berryessa.

able to spread further into Henry W. Coe State Park in the south and into other protected areas to the west. Crews have already burned 5 miles of fire lines, Cal Fire Chief Scott Corn said in a video about the operations. The controlled burns create a buffer zone by burning fuel ahead of the advancing wildfire.

"We're fighting fire with

fire," he said. "The operation is slow, it's methodical, it's well planned out."

The controlled burn operations have been aided by the weather and flame retardant dropped by firefighting aircraft. Corn expects the operations to "have great success" and last between 48 and 72 hours. At an afternoon media briefing, Cal Fire offi-

cialists said the operations had been going well and were allowing firefighters to battle the wildfire in more favorable terrain. But, they reiterated, the massive fire remained a threat.

"We're still at the edge of our comfort zone," Santa Clara Unit Chief Jake Hess said. "Part of that is due to the complexity of the size and the scope of this incident and the resource that we have."

On Saturday afternoon, evacuation warnings were lifted for parts of Santa Clara County east of Gilroy, as well as for portions of Alameda and San Joaquin counties. Officials directed evacuees to the returning home checklist at Ready-ForWildfire.com, which includes guidance on checking homes for gas leaks, disposing of tainted food and avoiding tap water.

A Saturday morning marine layer brought cooler temperatures and higher humidity to much of the San Francisco Bay Area but temperatures were forecast to start rising Sunday with highs in the 90s for some inland areas most of next week.

Grants

FROM PAGE 1

needy. The grant recipients go to a website operated by the Family Independence Initiative (FII), insert their code and fill out a form, which requires them to indicate what they plan to use the money for.

FII issues payments to recipients by directly depositing money into their bank accounts or issuing them a debit card or virtual card that can be used online.

This is the second time the foundation has used this approach for pandemic aid. In July, it used FII and many of the same Marin community organizations

to distribute \$250,000.

Felecia Gaston, CEO and founder of Performing Stars of Marin, said the money couldn't have come at a better time. Performing Stars was one of the organizations that received an allocation in July.

"We just issued our last code yesterday," Gaston said Wednesday, "and I was already envisioning people starting to call my office."

Gaston said earlier in the pandemic Performing Stars received \$100,000 in donations to assist needy that she was required to pay the money directly to third parties such as Pacific Gas and Electric Co. or credit card companies.

Recipients were often required to share their Social Security numbers or log-in passwords for other accounts with the non-profit.

"It was a lot," Gaston said.

Romo said, "This approach gives the recipients more power, more control over how they're spending the money."

Cheryl Paddock, chief executive officer of North Marin Community Services, said her organization distributed \$175,000 in direct cash aid during the July round.

"We're looking forward to distributing more," Paddock said. "I'm not sure what amount we'll be getting this time, but I know

we'll easily be able to distribute them, especially with the eviction moratorium ending at the end of September."

Grace Peter, an associate director of national partnerships with FII, said during the earlier round of direct cash disbursements in Marin, the most common use of the money was to pay rent. Food purchases and utility payments were tied as the second most common use.

Aideen Gaidmore, executive director of the Marin Child Care Council, said she expects to receive about \$65,000 in credits in the new round, about the same amount she received in the previous round. She said the people her organi-

zation awarded credits to last time used the money to either pay rent or buy food.

"That is the biggest crisis for these families," Gaidmore said.

Peters said before the coronavirus pandemic hit, Marin Community Foundation was in discussions with FII regarding its philosophy of providing direct aid to the needy, an approach similar to providing a universal basic income.

"The data for where people place that money is so persuasive," Peters said. "I can tell you for sure that on the other side of COVID we're going to expand that kind of direct assistance, because it builds on the principle of trust in the individual families."