



2009

WILDFIRE TIMES

A firefighter's recollection:



An interview with Garrett Needles, of Fire Station 33 in Magalia

You were a fire fighter during the Camp Fire of 2008?

Yes, I was assigned to a structure protection group at the Camelot Subdivision on Windermere Lane in Concow.

What was the condition of the wildfire where you were working?

As an engine company, we were just to the left side of the approaching fire front. The fire was burning very hot and fast, consuming ground fuels as well as burning in the tree crowns

How important was defensible space to you when protecting the home?

The structure that we were protecting when the fire came through the subdivision had great clearance, both around the house and around the property. Having such defensible space made it an easy choice as it offered protection for the firefighters and equipment as well as giving us a chance to defend the property with minimal work—when time is of the essence.

What happened to other homes and areas without defensible space?

Some homes survived in these areas but many were lost due to a lack of defensible space and also the fire conditions at the time. As I tell many residents in Magalia, defensible space helps us greatly but is not a guarantee for the house to survive a wildfire.

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Dante's Inferno Remembering the Humboldt Fire

As told to Jill Wallace
Upper Ridge Fire Safe Council

Note: Dante Musarra owns and has lived on his property in Paradise, California for 5 ½ years. He was interviewed exactly 11 months after the Humboldt Fire of June 12, 2008 which blazed through 21 acres. The fire burned a cabin, two working trucks and 1,376 trees in Dante's nursery.

Defensible space was critical for me during the Humboldt Fire. I cannot take 100 percent of the credit for clearing the property because soon after moving in, Allstate came out to my property and said they were going to cancel my insurance if I didn't clear a 100 foot perimeter around my house. Our insurance agent said, "It's not a matter of 'if' the fire will come, it's a matter of 'when'."

It was a beautiful property. We had deer, mountain lions, bears, pheasant, quail and doves. However after you walked 20 feet away from the house you couldn't go in any direction without having to crawl because the brush was so thick.

In the beginning of the Humboldt Fire, about 36 hours before the fire reached my house, the fire chiefs came through and told me it was a mandatory evacuation. I decided to stay.

Until 25 to 30 minutes before the fire, I was on a bulldozer, trying to expand my defensible space even wider beyond 100 feet. I had defensible space and I had a 22,000

water bladder (tank).

The fire came up like a storm. The winds were 40 to 60 mph gusts.

The first thing that surprised me [about the fire] was the absolute roar. It sounded like 10 Huey helicopters and seven freight trains all at once. It was before you could see the fire. You could see the smoke. I turned to the firemen and asked, "What is that sound?"

"That's the fire," they said.

"Are we going to leave? What are we going to do?" I asked.

"There's nowhere to go now," they told me. "You have the single most (defensible space) in the area. You have saved your home."

I was amazed at how fast the fire crossed over Skyway and went up into the canyon. That wall [of fire] was 300 to 500 feet tall and got taller as it went. It came through at almost 80 mph. It flashed through here like you can't believe.

Some of those neighbors parked their quads, cars, and boats on my property during the fire, on that area where I had stripped off the land and made a protective barrier.

I was not in fear; I was in awe! It was the most powerful force I've ever seen. It came within 50 feet of my back

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A good neighbor in time of need! Creating a wildfire safe neighborhood

*Calli-Jane Burch
Executive Director*

During last year's Palermo, Humboldt, Lightning Complex and Craig fires—ravaging thousands of acres across Butte County—neighbors helped each other both during the wildfires and throughout the aftermath.

With the continuing threat of wildfire our communities face, examples of neighbors working together to reduce their wildfire risk in the past year are numerous.

In Concow and Yankee Hill, in conjunction with the Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council, neighbors have created defensible space around their homes and implemented community shaded fuel break projects along roadways to improve firefighter access.

In Feather Falls, neighbors have cooperated together in an eight-mile shaded fuel break project along Lumpkin Road.

In Forest Ranch, neighbors are working together to host fire safety home visits through the Forest Ranch Fire Safe Council.

In Paradise, trees for replanting in burned areas were distributed through the Paradise Fire Safe Council.

Forbestown residents have visited their neighboring fire safe councils in Berry Creek and Feather Falls to learn how to create an evacuation plan for their community.

Butte County Fire Safe Council is also active as a good neighbor. We help you reduce flammable vegetation with the Chipper Program, reduce risks to neighborhoods and communities through our shaded fuel break projects, and prepare our youth for the future with the sixth grade wildfire safety edu-

cation program.

We help people who are unable to clear around their home with our Residents Assistance Program, provide support to community fire safe councils, and educate residents through fire safety events, presentations, brochures, our website, and much more.

Now, we need your help to ensure we can all live safely in Butte County's high fire risk communities. As you know, it takes time and money to accomplish all of this. Many of you have contributed with volunteer hours and financial contributions in the past and we appreciate your commitment to wildfire safety.

We invite you now to join the Butte County Fire Safe Council's "Wildfire Safe Neighbors Membership Program."

This new program forms the core of support for fire safety activities in your community. Members will be part of our team, supporting the many programs that help our communities.

Members will receive quarterly invitations to "Wildfire Safe Neighbor" events where we can share as neighbors across the county how we are making our communities fire safe. The first 25 members to sign up for an individual membership will receive a Wildfire Safe Neighbors bumper sticker!

Please join us by using the membership envelope included with this newsletter.

Neighbors reducing wildfire risk—working together.

Thank you!



THE FACTS: 23 communities in Butte County are officially listed as high wildfire risk areas. Another 29 are eligible to be listed. Among the listed communities are: Paradise, Magalia, Berry Creek, Concow, Feather Falls, Oroville and Forest Ranch.

Firefighter remembers...

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As an Engine Captain what was your role in overseeing the safety of your crew?

During the Camp Fire, I had myself and three firefighters assigned to the engine, two of which only had one month on the job. My main focus is on firefighter safety and providing direction and supervision. Communication is a key factor especially when conditions are deteriorating.

What would you want other homeowners to know about defensible space?

Defensible space really does help the firefighters do their best to protect homes. The less time we use to prep a house gives us more time to prepare for the fire front that, in most cases, is rapidly approaching

Since fire season is not the right time to create defensible space what can homeowners do now to protect their homes during fire season?

Homeowners can maintain what defensible space they have already created. Rake around all structures, keep the roof and gutters free of leaves and needles and keep the understorey of deck clear of organic litter. Make sure that your house is properly addressed for emergency personnel. Lastly, have a pre-arranged plan for evacuation if asked to leave as not to hamper the fire department's operations.

Dante's Inferno...

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deck. I had prepared for five years. I spent 33 hours a week pruning the land on my Bobcat and I can tell you honestly, I wasn't prepared for fire.

Eleven months later, Dante is still cleaning up burned vegetation and wreckage from the fire. He's added five fire hoses to his property and has begun replanting on his land, receiving some trees from the Paradise Fire Safe Council's Community Tree Fund.

If you know someone who was affected by any of last summer's wildfires and needs trees to replant, call the Butte County Fire Safe Council at 877-0984.

Community Wildfire Workshops



*** Forest Ranch/Cohasset**

July 11th

Forest Ranch Community Center

*** Oroville/Berry Creek/
Forbestown/Feather Falls/
Palermo - July 25th**

Feather River Recreation and Park District

*** Upper Ridge/Paradise**

July 18th

Paradise Pines POA

*** Concow/Yankee Hill**

August 1st

Yankee Hill Grange Hall

Workshops are scheduled
from 9am-4pm

Topics Include:

- Creating defensible space
 - Wildfire impacts to your property and watershed
 - Reducing risks and increase values on your property
 - How to prepare yourself before, during, and after wildfires
 - Practical steps to improve natural resources on your property
- Potential funding opportunities for forest and rangeland stewardship



Jason Haley/Chico Enterprise Record

All workshops are from 9am to 4pm and include lunch. The cost of the workshop is \$15 and scholarships are available. Please register one week in advance. For more information contact the Butte County Fire Safe Council at (530) 877-0984 or visit www.buttecountyrcd.org or www.buttefiresafe.org





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Wildfire experiences-
Read all about them!

Wildfire safety resources in your community:

- Evacuation plans (Magalia, Paradise, Berry Creek, Yankee Hill)
- Emergency radio stations (Magalia, AM 1250; Paradise, AM 1500; Berry Creek, AM 1250; Yankee Hill, AM 1630)
- Chipper Program for Defensible Space
- Sixth Grade “Wildfire in the Foothills” education program (Magalia, Paradise, Berry Creek, Feather Falls)
- “Homeowners’ Guide to Fire Wise Landscaping” brochure
- “Maintaining Your Defensible Space” brochure
- www.Buttefiresafe.org

Check out the activities from your local fire safe council at Buttefiresafe.org—

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| • Butte County Fire Safe Council | • Palermo Fire Safe Council |
| • Upper Ridge Fire Safe Council | • Berry Creek Fire Safe Council |
| • Forest Ranch Fire Safe Council | • Paradise Fire Safe Council |
| • Oroville Fire Safe Council | • Feather Falls Fire Safe Council |
| • Yankee Hill Fire Safe Council | • Forebestown Fire Safe Council |

