

Prelude to the Siege 2007

Rainfall totals for the winter of 2006-2007 were far below average, leaving Southern California far drier than normal at the beginning of the 2007 fire season. Conditions were particularly dry at higher elevations, prompting concern for potentially severe fires. Early “green-up” of vegetation at mid-and-higher elevations produced lower than normal peak Live Fuel Moisture (LFM). The annual drying cycle began in May, and by June, moisture levels in live and dead vegetation were declining one-to-two months ahead of normal. LFM’s fell below the critical level of 60% by July. By early September they had fallen to the mid-50-to upper-40 percentiles.

January 11, 2007

An Arctic cold front swept through the state, killing native and ornamental vegetation, creating an above-average volume of dead fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface.

January 29, 2007

The Building Standards Commission adopted the updated California Building and Fire Codes. This new code requires ignition-resistant construction for new building in State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in Local Responsibility Area (LRA).

Insect damage and drought stress combined to produce visible mortality in upland forests. Lower elevation coastal areas trended closer to normal in terms of moisture due to marine influences. Heavy frost in January 2007, caused considerable die-back of vegetation in Ventura, Orange, and San Diego counties.

March 11, 2007

The 241 Fire was reported along State Route 241 near the Wind Ridge Toll Plaza in Orange County. Influenced by high winds, high temperatures, and low humidity, this unusually early fire event burned 2,036 acres in less than three hours. One residence was damaged and two outbuildings were destroyed.

May 8, 2007

The Griffith Park Fire burned 817 acres in Los Angeles City. High power transmission lines were destroyed causing a loss of power to local neighborhoods. Over 400 structures and the Observatory were threatened. Fire caused the evacuation of over 1,000 people from the Los Angeles Zoo, Golf Course, Gene Autry Museum, Zoo Magnet School, and Griffith Park Boys Camp.

May 9, 2007

Governor Schwarzenegger issued an executive order directing CAL FIRE to mobilize additional resources and to work closely with federal, state, and local government agencies to maximize fire fighting and prevention capabilities within California.

May 10, 2007

The Island Fire started on Santa Catalina Island, 26 miles off the coast of Los Angeles. Extreme fire behavior was reported with spotting 1/4 to 1/2 mile in advance of the head of the fire due to low relative humidity, high erratic winds and low fuel moistures. More than 3,800 people were evacuated from the island via the Catalina Island Express to the city of Long Beach. While 4,750 acres were burned, threatening more than 900 structures, only one residence and five outbuildings were destroyed; four outbuildings were damaged.

June 20, 2007

USFS issued a Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory for low fuel moisture and potentially severe fire behavior.

June 24, 2007

An unattended campfire in the area southwest of South Lake Tahoe set off the destructive Angora Fire. Driven by strong erratic winds in heavy timber with a large dead and down component, the burn exhibited extreme fire behavior causing the evacuations of several subdivisions within the first burning period. The fire was contained on July 2 at 3,100 acres, after destroying 242 residences and 67 outbuildings.

July 4, 2007

The Zaca Fire started in the rugged, inaccessible area 15 miles northeast of Buellton, in Santa Barbara County. High temperatures and low relative humidity combined with steep terrain hampered control efforts. Fuel moisture levels were at levels typically seen in late August or September. The Zaca Fire, the second largest fire in California history, was contained at 240,207 acres two months after it started.

July 25, 2007

Following the Angora Fire, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Nevada Governor Jim Gibbons signed a joint memorandum of understanding which established the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission. The joint fire commission was charged to conduct a comprehensive overview of forest management in the Lake Tahoe Basin, including effective fuels management, to help prevent fires from starting or escalating.

July 30, 2007

CAL FIRE issued a Fire Behavior Alert discussing the potential for extreme fire behavior this season, based on low fuel moisture conditions.

Summer weather was seasonably dry with very little precipitation. By October, Southern California remained dry, with much of San Diego and desert regions near the border with Baja California extremely dry. All these factors increased the potential for severe fires in the fall.