

CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



SAN DIEGO UNIT

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Cause of Gavilan Fire Determined

San Diego County- February 10, 2002 at 12:01 A.M., the North County Fire Protection District (NCF) and the California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CDF) responded to a reported vegetation fire in the Fallbrook area, Ranchitos Fire. The Ranchitos Fire burned 1/2 acre of leaf materials and vegetation with spot fires into the adjacent persimmon and avocado grove of the Evans Ranch off Via Del Gavilan Road. CDF Investigators have determined that airborne embers from a permitted agricultural burn pile that was burned on Thursday and Friday, February 7th and 8th were the cause of this fire. On Friday, February 8th, at 8:00 A.M., the CDF San Diego Unit declared a "No Burn Day" by Proclamation. North County Fire Department and the San Diego Unit of CDF were informing all burn permit callers that no burning was allowed on this day.

On Sunday, February 10, 2002 at 11:10 A.M., there was a report of another vegetation fire in the same area. This fire, the Gavilan Fire burned 5,763 acres and 45 homes. 145 homes along the canyon rims were ultimately saved by the firefighting efforts. There were approximately 900 Firefighters, 12 helicopters, 100 fire engines and 37 state handcrews assigned to the incident. This fire was driven by 35-55 mph northeast winds, a 4 % relative humidity and higher temperatures than normal. Sparks from the Gavilan Fire created at least seven spot fires before reaching the Santa Margarita drainage to the west.

After an extensive investigation for origin and cause, CDF is confident that the cause of the Gavilan Fire was hot material from the earlier fire that had blown into unburned vegetation unnoticed.

CDF Investigators determined that both fires were the result of an escape from the burn pile, which had been burned on Thursday (OK Burn Day) and Friday (No Burn Day) and fanned to life on Saturday night by the dry Santa Ana winds, continuing into Sunday.

