

PRELUDE TO THE SIEGE

1900
Population of
California
1,485,053

1940
Population of
California
6,907,387

1950
Population of
California
10,586,223

1960
Population of
California
16,517,370

1970
Population of
California
20,987,853

1980
Population of
California
23,667,902

1990
Population of
California
29,760,021

2000
Population of
California
33,871,648

“Predict the future by studying the past—look at what happened in 1980, 1993 and 2003. What will happen in 2013?”

Tom Harbour, U.S. Forest Service
Deputy Director of Fire and Aviation Management
Washington Office

YEAR 1923

Berkeley Fire destroyed 584 structures. Embers falling on wood shingles accelerated the spread of this fire.

YEAR 1932

Economy Act was passed by U.S. Congress affecting use of military resources in peacetime events. Intent of Congress was to encourage civilian employment prior to committing military resources.

YEAR 1946

The California State Board of Forestry declared the San Bernardino Mountains around Crestline and Lake Arrowhead as a “Zone of Infestation” for forest insects.

YEAR 1950

The State of California, all 58 counties and nearly all city governments signed a “Master Mutual Aid Agreement”.

YEAR 1960

California Public Resource Code 4291 established to require a minimum of 30 feet clearance of flammable vegetation around structures.

YEAR 1961

Santa Ana winds fanned a wildland fire in Los Angeles County through the community of Bel Air destroying 484 homes, many owned by Hollywood stars. Study of the fire’s after effects created a demand for regulations limiting expansion in the wildlands and improving structure survivability.

YEAR 1970

After the devastating fire season of 1970, the California fire services were severely criticized for failure to provide leadership in solving the issues of cooperation, command and control, communications and training. As a result, in 1971, state and federal legislative action authorized funding for a five-year research program coordinated by OES called FIRESCOPE (Firefighting Resources of Southern California Organized for Potential Emergencies). As a result, the following elements were designed:

1. Incident Command System
2. Multi-agency Coordination System
3. Information Management System
4. Technological Support
5. Common Communications

YEAR 1971

The President of the United States created the “National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control”. The commission completed a report in May 1973, titled “America Burning”. The report covered structural and wildland fires and stated, “Fire is a major national problem”.

YEAR 1980

Major wildfires occurred in southern California. At least 325 homes were lost in a non-forested community in San Bernardino. The fires prompted Federal, State and Local officials to study the problem of fires coming from the wildland into communities. CDF Vegetation Management Program (VMP) established to reduce hazardous fuel conditions.

This aerial photo clearly illustrates the issue of tree mortality in populated areas. Such settings contributed to the huge number of homes destroyed during the Fire Siege of 2003.



YEAR 1987

Pebble Beach Fire in Monterey County destroyed 31 structures. Roof type, window type and vegetation clearance were determining factors of structural survival.

YEAR 1989

The Legislature added the FIRESCOPE program to the California Health and Safety Code and authorized OES, in cooperation with CDF and the State Fire Marshal, to carry out the program.

YEAR 1990

Painted Cave Fire in Santa Barbara County destroyed 641 structures. Structures had a 90% survival rate based on roof type, and 99% survival rate based on road and vegetative clearance.

YEAR 1991

In October 1991 the Oakland Hills fire burned 1,600 acres, killed 25 civilians and destroyed 3,403 homes. The fire was completely within the city limits of Oakland and Berkeley and was considered an urban conflagration rather than a wildland or urban intermix. Again, combustible roofing material implicated in the spread of fire. The high density of structures contributed to extreme radiant heat that spread fire to adjacent structures.

YEAR 1993

The Laguna Beach fire alone destroyed 400 homes, while the other fires in the October fire siege in southern California resulted in four fatalities and 1,200 structures destroyed. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection developed the "California Fire Plan," a framework for reducing costs and losses from wildfire. The Fire Plan emphasized that the problem can't be solved by government alone, citizens must take the lead. Fire Safe Councils were established with the help of grants and assistance programs. The U.S. Forest Service increased the program to train local fire service personnel in fire fighting tactics in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

YEAR 1993

The California Legislature passed the Standardized Emergency Management System Act for California. SEMS required state agencies responding to emergencies to use a standardized management system. ICS is a component of SEMS.

YEAR 1995

The increase in firefighter fatalities, particularly during the 1994 fire season in which 34 firefighters were killed, led the five federal wildland fire agencies to review the federal fire management policy and program. The result was a new federal fire management policy, enacted in 1995.

- The *first priority* in wildland fire management is the protection of human life.
- The second priority is the protection of natural resources, cultural resources, and property.
- Wildland fire, as a critical natural process, must be reintroduced into the ecosystem.

YEAR 1996

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the State Fire Marshal published a report entitled "California's I Zone." This report is nationally recognized for its in-depth study of past and projected problems of wildland/urban intermix fires (I-Zone).

YEAR 2000

In August 2000, President Clinton directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop a plan to respond to severe wildland fires, reduce their impacts on rural communities, and assure sufficient firefighting capacity in the future. This became the National Fire Plan (NFP). Key points of direction were to increase firefighting capabilities to better protect natural resources, to reduce the threat to adjacent communities and reduce costs of fighting large fires.

YEAR 2001

U.S. Forest Service was funded to begin implementing key points of the National Fire Plan by building up fire preparedness and suppression resources beyond historic levels. NFP assigned the highest priority for hazardous fuel reduction treatments to communities at risk, and other important local features, where conditions favor uncharacteristically intense wildfires. California Wildfire Coordinating Group (CWCG) identified communities at risk from wildfire and recorded them in the Federal Register.



YEAR 2002

The MAST (Mountain Area Safety Taskforce) was organized to address public safety and forest health issues on both public and private land in San Bernardino and Riverside counties. This was one of the most extensive, pre-event planning efforts to ever take place. The three part strategy deals with; 1) emergency preparedness response, 2) fuel reduction around communities and key evacuation routes, and 3) long term planning and treatments to restore forest health. In San Diego County, new county fire code required 100' clearance around structures and Forest Area Safety Taskforce (FAST) was formed.

Undamaged homes overlook one that burned on the Pass Fire, one of fourteen wildfires included in the Fire Siege of 2003.

YEAR 2003

Local, State and Federal agencies focused on identifying priority Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas in California to better establish protection strategies that resulted in meaningful changes in fire behavior and severity of fire effects at watershed scale. These strategies proved consistent with the interagency report: *A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment, Western Governor's 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan and the Memorandum of Understanding for the Development of a Collaborative Fuels Treatment Program.* <http://www.fireplan.gov/reports>

A multi-agency Joint Information Center (JIC) operating plan was developed in conjunction the MAST plan to coordinate information release to the community and the media.

Since the National Fire Plan, all national forests in southern California have begun needed environmental analysis to increase the scale and intensity of vegetation treatments to protect communities from wildland fire. Several completed projects proved successful to strategic fire operations during the 2003 Siege. The U.S. Forest Service plans to double the number of acres treated over the average of the previous three years.