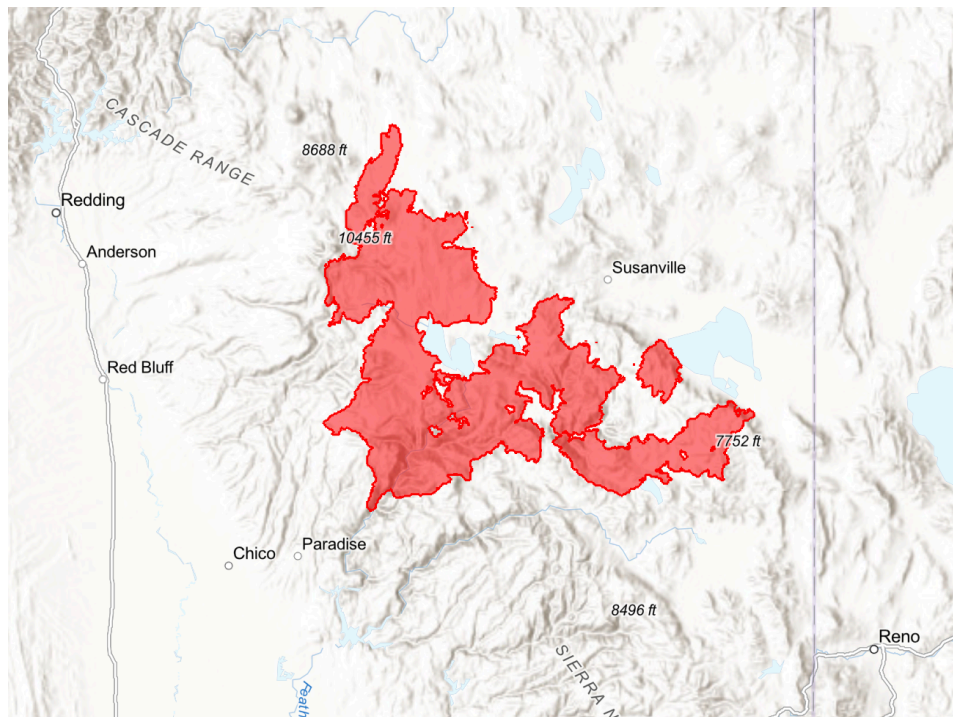


DIXIE DIARY

Day by Day Notes from
Lake Almanor West, CA
During the
2021 DIXIE FIRE



Compiled by
Dale E. Knutsen

August 2025

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Part 1 - Daily Notes	
Setting the Stage	4
Phase One - Preparations	6
Phase Two - The Attacks	15
Phase Three - Mop Up	19
Part 2 - Supplementary Material	
Dixie Fire West Shore Timeline	30
The West Shore Team	30
Local Air Quality	31
Sequential Maps	32
Some Images	39
Closing Comments	45

Dedicated to the “Fabulous Fifteen”,
the group of
West Shore Fire Department firefighters
who remained behind during the
evacuation period to defend
their community.

INTRODUCTION

Large wildland fires have become almost an expectation in the western part of the United States. Vast areas of natural vegetation and hot, dry summers conspire to produce the perfect combination of susceptible fuels, ready to burn with any kind of natural or manmade ignition. The counties of the northeastern part of California have experienced multiple large fires during the first quarter of the 21st century, and the 2021 Dixie Fire was one of them. All of those fires were destructive to natural resources, homes, businesses and infrastructure, but what made Dixie particularly noteworthy was its sheer size. By the time that it had been completely contained, Dixie had burned 963,309 acres (1505 square miles), making it the largest single-source fire in California history. Over the course of three and a half months it had impacted five counties: Butte, Lassen, Plumas, Shasta and Tehama. And it had displaced thousands of residents due to mandatory evacuations for extended periods.

One of the areas impacted by the Dixie Fire was the Lake Almanor basin, located in northern Plumas County. The area was noted for its abundant conifer forests, including private timberlands as well as portions of Lassen and Plumas National Forests. The lake itself covers almost 44 square miles and is ringed by small community developments along with the town of Chester at the northwest shoreline. The area had been threatened by large fires in the past, most directly by the 2000 Storrie Fire and the 2012 Chips Fire. But only the 2021 Dixie Fire actually made it all the way to the shore of Lake Almanor.

Dixie's direct attack on the basin caused mandatory evacuations of almost all of its inhabitants while firefighters did what they could to protect resources and structures. Some defenses held while others were overwhelmed. Even though there were thousands of firefighters involved in the struggle by the time the fire reached Lake Almanor, Dixie's large size, limited air support due to poor visibility and unfavorable winds made the conditions nightmarish.

That was basically the setting for the start of the material that follows. What you will find here is a series of eye witness notes and commentaries that were recorded by one individual associated with a small rural fire department. The material is NOT an overall review of the Dixie Fire. It focuses on a single community on the shores of Lake Almanor, with emphasis on about a six week period of time. While the discussion begins with the start of the Dixie Fire on July 13, 2021, it doesn't provide any insights into the early period of time when the fire was small and might have been extinguished more easily. Most of the material deals with the most active period in and around the west side of Lake Almanor, most especially the roughly 500 home community of Lake Almanor West. Consider it simply one person's on-the-scene observations of a natural disaster impacting one neighborhood out of many.

In many areas impacted by a natural disaster it is common for local media to cover the story and report findings. But there was no local newspaper, radio or TV media in the Lake Almanor basin in 2021, creating a public information void during a critical period. And that led to the author's informal reporting activity. As to the credibility of the observations, the author was and still is a resident of Lake Almanor West, having become a full-time member of the community in 1996. He is a retired engineer who worked most of his career for the U.S. Navy in the guided weapons field. Since retiring, he has been involved in local fire hazard mitigation efforts for more than two decades and has been associated with the local fire department as a member of its Board of Directors since 2003. During the Dixie Fire period he was the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) for the West Shore Fire Department and remained behind during the evacuations along with his wife who is a volunteer EMT and firefighter with the department. As Dixie evolved, and as outlandish rumors began circulating about the local situation, he gathered facts and regularly forwarded them as short summaries to the evacuees. After Dixie was declared contained, he and his wife presented information briefings on lessons learned from the fire to several community groups in Plumas County.

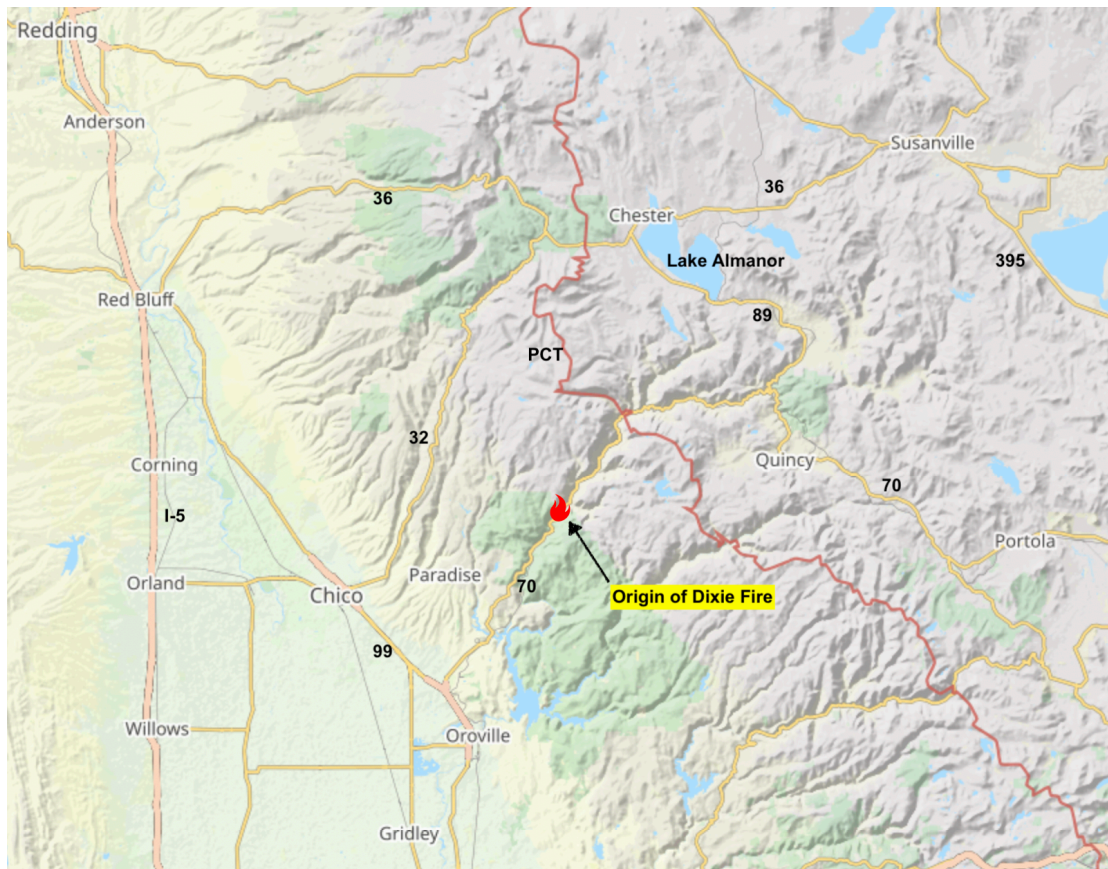
Part 1 - DAILY NOTES

Setting the Stage

The Lake Almanor basin occupies much of the northern portion of Plumas County, California. It basically marks the transition point between the northernmost Sierra Nevada range and the southernmost Cascades. Heavy, mixed conifer timberland surrounded the lake before the Dixie Fire, creating a haven for wildlife and offering a pleasant environment for human activity as well. The lake level is at about 4,500 feet above sea level while nearby mountains rise well above, with Mt. Lassen to the northwest exceeding 10,000 feet elevation.

To the southwest lies the canyon of the north fork of the Feather River. Along its alignment are found a state highway, a significant railroad line and major electrical power transmission lines associated with Pacific Gas and Electric Company's hydropower generation operations. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) also crosses the canyon and passes to the west of the Lake Almanor basin at roughly the midpoint of its length between Mexico and Canada. All of these features have played a role in occasional wildland fires in the region. The 2021 Dixie Fire was no exception.

The Dixie Fire began when a tree made contact with a high voltage electrical line along the Feather River canyon near Dixie Road, not far from Cresta Dam. The initial small fire spread into adjacent fuels (grass, brush, trees) and began working its way to the northeast following the canyon topography and aided by prevailing winds. There was nothing unusual about this basic behavior. It was the same general pattern associated with earlier fires that had originated in the canyon. But fighting a fire in that fuel-laden, difficult terrain has never been easy. And Dixie would prove to be almost unstoppable once it had grown to a mature stage.



Dixie impacted a large part of the region but the material that follows in this document focuses only on the Lake Almanor basin in general and the community of Lake Almanor West in particular. There is no slight intended to those other fire-impacted areas, but the author simply wasn't present there. It will be left to others to document events elsewhere.

The general orientation of the Lake Almanor basin is illustrated in the map below. The town of Chester sits along the northwest shoreline of the lake, with significant residential developments found on the peninsula and around the lake. The 615 acre (0.96 square mile) development at Lake Almanor West began in the mid 1970s and has slowly grown to include about 500 homes as of 2021. It is bounded by the lake on the east, a portion of Lassen National Forest on the south, and private timberland owned by Collins Pine Company on the west.



Phase One - Preparations

Dixie became a local concern soon after it had started. While initially small, it rapidly expanded in size, growing to nearly 10,000 acres in size within 5 days of ignition. Experience with previous fires that had originated in the Feather River canyon (e.g., Storrie Fire, Chips Fire) suggested that the local fire department begin contingency preparations in advance of formal directives issued by higher authority. As a result, the West Shore Fire Department began continuous monitoring of the fire's status and prepared to respond quickly if the spread remained unchecked.

In the sections that follow, transcripts of e-mail announcements made to residents (or later, to evacuees) are indicated in *italics* and quotes. The embedded graphics were part of the announcements.

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

This is the day that the Dixie Fire was ignited, just before 7 am in the morning.

Sunday, July 18, 2021

"Are YOU Prepared?"

Plumas County Search & Rescue and Sheriff's Office personnel have been called upon to provide evacuation notifications to residents in several parts of the county during recent days as a result of ongoing wildland fires. That should serve as a reminder to all of us that we live in a fire prone region with the possibility of a fire evacuation during much of the year. Fire officials point out that in addition to keeping our parcels defensible we need to have a personal plan in place should a fire occur nearby. If you already have your evacuation checklist prepared, take a few moments to review it to refresh your memory and make sure that it still fits your needs. If you don't have a plan yet, check the following link for suggestions:

https://www.plumasfiresafe.org/uploads/8/1/8/4/81849812/plumas_2013_evac_planweb.pdf

Monday, July 19, 2021

"DIXIE FIRE PROMPTS ADVISORY"

The West Shore Fire Department received a "heads up" call this (Monday) morning, indicating that west shore residents should anticipate receiving a CodeRed notification of the need to prepare for the possibility of an evacuation order due to the approaching Dixie Fire. An advisory means that we should get prepared. For example, we should review our evacuation checklist and locate critical items so that they can be quickly gathered up and loaded into vehicles should an order be issued. In the mean time, fire information is being posted outside the fire station on Long Iron Drive and more generalized material will be found on daily updates at www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin ."

Wednesday, July 21, 2021

The Plumas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) issued a mandatory evacuation order for the west shore area on this day as the fire reached the western edge of nearby Butt Lake. Telephone notifications of the order were made to all residents who had registered to receive such calls, but coverage was known

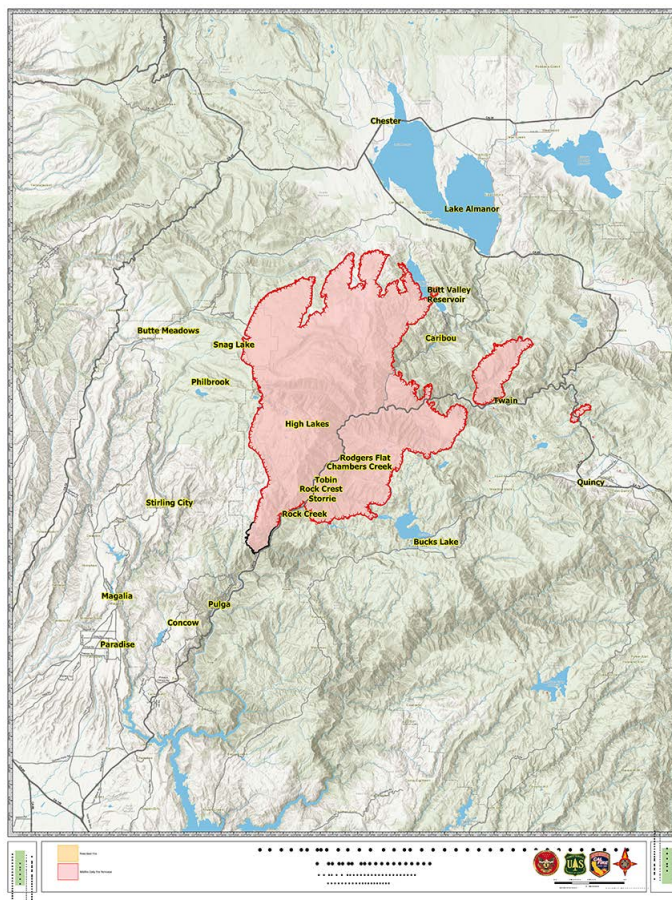
to be less than 100%. Fire department staff therefore supplemented the limited number of PCSO Search & Rescue (SAR) team personnel available locally to make door-to-door visits within the development, ensuring that all residents had been contacted. Colored ribbon was placed at the driveway of each residence to indicate that contact had been made. A log was created to indicate the name and address of any residents choosing to stay behind (very few). The evacuation was conducted in an orderly manner and without incident.

This was also the day that CalFire requested the formation of a small local task force of firefighters to assist visiting strike teams and to deal with specific local matters. In the case of the West Shore Fire Department, the assignment included protection of critical water supply infrastructure at Lake Almanor West as well as providing strike teams with information on such things as water sources, safe zones, trouble spots, etc., and coping with spot fires as they might emerge. Fire Chief Randy Fluke accepted the assignment and formed a West Shore FD team consisting of fourteen volunteers (EMTs and firefighters) plus the Public Information Officer (PIO) for administrative support and handling information flow to evacuees.

Friday, July 23, 2021

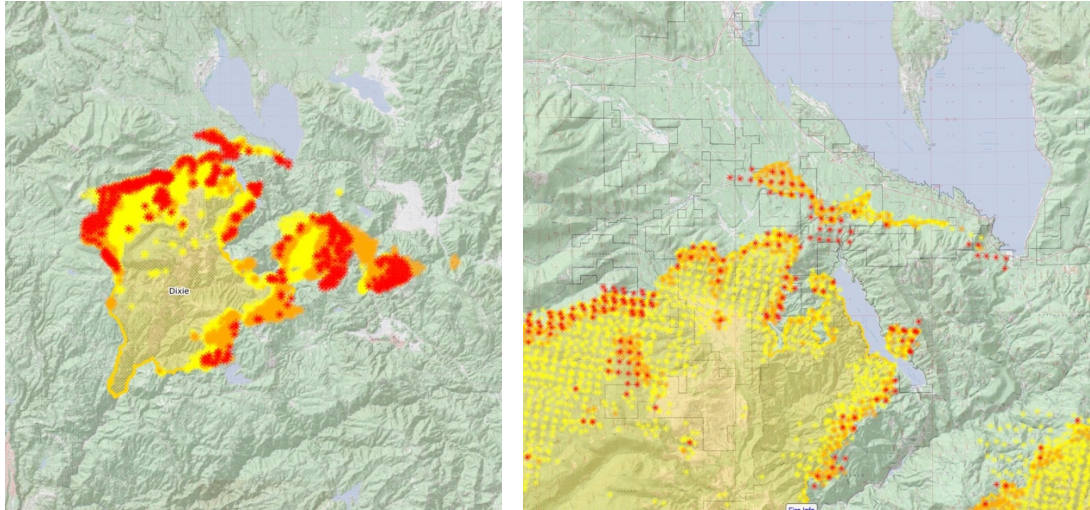
"The Dixie Fire continues to march on, with fire reported within just a few miles. Strike teams are supplementing local firefighters in setting up structure protection in Lake Almanor West and Prattville. Widespread evacuations have been ordered on the region to get people out of the potential path of fire while highways are open. Hwy 70 in the canyon is closed, as is the stretch of Hwy 70 between the Greenville Wye and Quincy."

Full details found at the following link: [\(link\)](#) "



Saturday, July 24, 2021

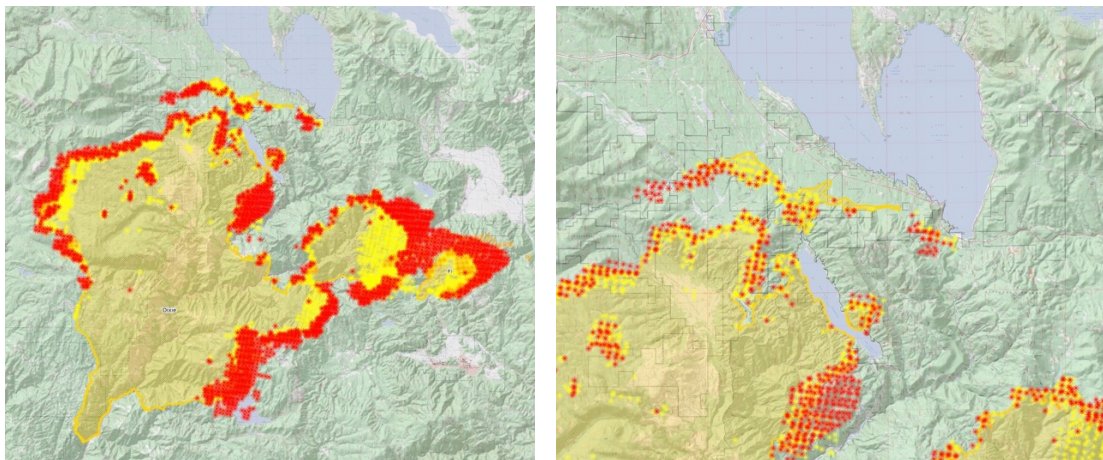
“Here are this morning’s infrared scans from SARTopo. The overview indicates the most active areas with red; lighter shades are not as intense. The closeup of the basin shows continued backfiring to the west of us (yay!), basically parallel with Hwy 89 and well ahead of the main front. Couple that with the timber falling on private land and there’s quite an effort going on to create a barrier. - Dale”



Note: CalFire was creating a backfire line starting near the dam and working off of dirt roads parallel to Hwy 89 until reaching Humbug/Humboldt Road, and then following Humboldt Road to Fanani Meadow and continuing towards Ruffa Ranch. Collins Pine was also rapidly felling trees on their land in a wide swath along the west side of Hwy 89, creating a wide defensive zone with only limited fuels present.

Sunday AM, July 25, 2021 – To The Local Firefighters

“The overview map shows a discouraging thrust to the east, basically from the Greenville Wye over Mt. Hough and on. It also shows fire at Bucks Lake. The detail view of our region has a more encouraging message with the backfiring stretching from the dam northwest to Humboldt Road and then following Humboldt Road to the west. “



Sunday, July 25, 2021 – To the Evacuees

“For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends (currently evacuated) ...

Five days into the mandatory evacuation and the fire is still nearby. If you have been following the Facebook postings on the fire status, you already know that the Dixie Fire has evolved into a truly huge monster. It is rapidly approaching 200,000 acres in size, with roughly 21% containment as of this morning. For reference, the large Chips Fire in 2012 was a mere 75,000 acres.

Evacuation status remains stable, with Chester, the peninsula and east shore under an evacuation WARNING (repeat ... WARNING ... Chester has NOT been told to evacuate.) Canyon Dam, Big Meadows, Prattville, Lake Almanor West and all other portions of the west shore (and points west) continue to be under a mandatory evacuation order. Sorry, you can't return just yet. Regarding regional access, Hwy 89 is currently closed from the nearby Hwy 36 junction clear down to the Greenville Wye (where fire is on both sides of the road). Hwy 32 is closed from the Hwy 36 junction on the north down to Lomo (the Butte Meadows turnoff) on the south. Hwy 70 is closed in the Feather River canyon as well as from the Greenville Wye to the north edge of Quincy. So the only open route is Hwy 36, from Red Bluff to Susanville.

Now for the good news. First of all, Lake Almanor West is well staffed with visiting strike teams along with the small group of West Shore Fire Department people who volunteered to stay and fight. The firefighters conduct roving patrols, day and night, keeping an eye out for possible spot fires ignited by airborne embers. Second, they are supplemented by roving law enforcement units who patrol the west shore as a deterrent to anybody with thoughts of entering vacant homes. I don't think there have been any such incidents at Lake Almanor West but there was one report of a possible encounter in Prattville.

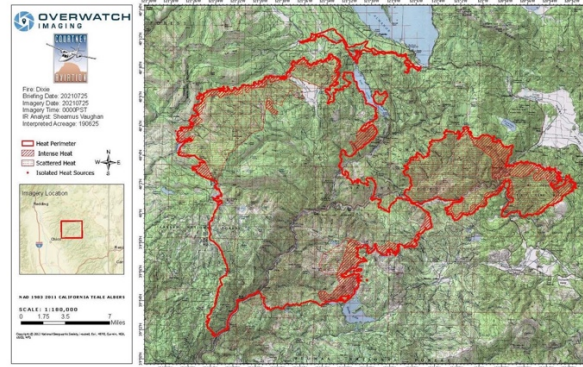
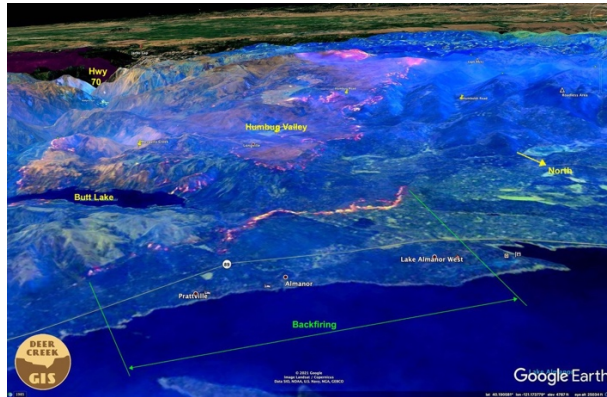
Of major importance is the work done by CalFire and private timber owners in the area west of Hwy 89. The backfiring that began two days ago has continued and is creating a fuel-free band that starts at the dam, parallels Hwy 89 until the area of Humboldt Road, and then follows the alignment of Humboldt Road towards Fanani Meadow. In the first attachment, you get a view of the area as if you were atop Dyer Mountain looking west. The bright line closest to the lake is the backfiring undertaken during that very first period on July 23 (the heat further west is the main Dixie Fire). The backfiring operation has created quite a stir locally since it is highly visible from the Chester causeway and the peninsula, especially at night. The second attachment is a current fire map. The detached fire outline closest to the lake is again from the backfiring operation, and it now shows the turn to the west along Humboldt Road. We're not quite sure what the next segment will be, but some planning discussion apparently suggests that the backfiring may turn northwest near Fanani and follow the alignment of Soldier Creek, clear up to the Hwy 36 area. However, that's just speculation at this point.

Associated with the backfiring is a tremendous amount of work done by Collins, SPI, etc., in creating a fuel break on private timberlands. They started along Hwy 89 and are continuing in other areas as well. Trees are cut and pulled out of the open zone and dozers are used as necessary to ensure there are no large fuel beds. It's amazing to see how much has been done in a matter of a couple of days.

Overall, we are optimistic about the situation on the west shore. While there is a concern about today's unsettled weather, everything is being done to keep the fire at arm's length (and deal with any spots that pop up). Tomorrow should be a more stable day, and National Weather Service has even forecast a 40% chance of showers on Tuesday (which would be wonderful).

So hang in there and be patient. It ain't fun for anybody right now, but you have a large force of folks working very hard to keep your homes safe from fire. Hopefully in a few days the threat to the west shore will pass and we can reopen the community.

- Dale”



Sunday Evening, July 25, 2021 - Postscript

“The small group of West Shore Fire Department firefighters who volunteered to stay in place during the mandatory evacuation took a short break Sunday evening to have a delicious dinner hosted by Carol’s Restaurant. After a long shift in heavy smoke, nobody smelled very good and some looked a little scruffy, but Carol welcomed the group with her characteristic hospitality and served up some wonderful and welcome food. It definitely put a smile on everybody’s face. And in case you were wondering who in their right mind would stick around and face an inbound fire, here’s the cast of characters.”



(Note: Not all of the WSFD team was present for the photo.)

Tuesday, July 27, 2021

"Day 7 of the Dixie Fire evacuation and today it rained! Not a brief thunderstorm but rather a light, steady rain. Hopefully it will be with us for a few hours, helping to cool down everything. Whether that does anything to significantly alter the firefighting efforts or change any timelines remains to be seen, but any kind of moisture is definitely welcome."

Thus far there have been no reported spot fires north of the backfire lines protecting the west shore area. However, the Dixie Fire has definitely attempted to start spot fires. The attached photo is of a large piece of charred bark that was lifted aloft by the fire and then carried forward a considerable distance by upper winds, landing on a parcel on Osprey Loop. Fortunately, it landed on gravel rather than on something combustible. This is precisely why we have roving patrols in place, trying to catch minor ignitions before they become a serious fire. And this is also why the Firewise people and fire departments preach over and over the message of keeping our yards and roofs cleaned up and free of layers of pine needles, accumulated litter or trash. Please take the message seriously — it only takes a single glowing ember to ignite common combustible materials or debris."



Wednesday, July 28, 2021

"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends:

"When will the evacuation order be lifted?" That's a question that we're all pondering. Everybody is anxious to get back to their homes as soon as possible, and the authorities are well aware of that. The cold hard fact is that there is currently no official estimate available on when the west shore (or any other evacuation area) will be reopened. Any rumors you may hear are simply that.

With pressure building to return, it may be tempting to try to "run the roadblock" or find some back way around the checkpoints. Please don't. The evacuation order is a lawful order issued by the Sheriff. Willfully violating it would incur some legal repercussions. Even more importantly for the safety and security of your home, meandering around the community would get in the way of the emergency teams that are working here. That could become a serious problem if we were to experience a rapid response to a spot fire.

Currently there are roving strike teams in large fire trucks, a few home protection teams hired by selected insurance companies, law enforcement personnel keeping an eye out for potential looters, and the

occasional state or county vehicle making the rounds. There are even a few of the emergency personnel assigned to the fire who have rented homes within the development (it beats living in a tent at fire camp!).

The past two days the air has actually been breathable, with minimal smoke at ground level. But we know that the weather is forecast to heat up again and we're likely to have more bad air days. Anybody with breathing problems definitely should be elsewhere.

As soon as there is an official indication of when the mandatory evacuation order will be lifted on the west shore, it will be posted on www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin, sent out to the Neighborhood Watch e-mail list, and shouted from the rooftops! Believe me, we're all anxious for that moment. (Of course, the bear(s) will probably be annoyed by all the returning folks, but so be it.)"

Friday, July 30, 2021

"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends, currently evacuated:

Ten days into the Dixie Fire evacuation and the situation at Lake Almanor West continues to hold steady. In spite of some scary examples of large charred pieces of bark falling onto the development, we have thus far avoided any spot fires. You can attribute that to yard cleanup, cold embers or just plain old good luck, but we'll happily accept the results however it happened. We're in the midst of an unsettled period of weather, where things can get erratic and unfavorable very rapidly. Flare ups, pyrocumulous cloud formation and thunderstorms are all associated with these kinds of conditions, so none of the firefighters are relaxing just yet.

The good news is that the fire maps are showing bits of black line (containment lines) in the area closest to the development. The first attachment contains some of those black lines, mostly along Humboldt Road. Unless something dramatic happens, the anticipation is that those black lines will grow, creating a far safer setting on the northern front of the fire. That's the result of heavy backfiring, dozer lines and hand crew activity in the face of the fire.

If you have having difficulty relating to the size of the fire as presented in the daily Incident Command releases, we might be able to put it into perspective for you. As of this morning, the fire was listed as covering 240,595 acres, which is the same as 376 square miles. If you are into circles, that would equate to a circle almost 22 miles in diameter.

And miracle of miracles, the development still has electricity! We'll all hope for an uninterrupted continuation of that commodity. - Dale"



Saturday, July 31, 2021

(Note: This was when the first mandatory evacuation order was reduced to a warning. However, the warning status did not last long.)

"Some Great News!

Evacuation status changes as of Saturday morning:

- Chester, peninsula and Hamilton Branch are no longer under an evacuation warning
- The mandatory status for the east shore (Hwy 147 area) has been reduced to the warning level
- **The mandatory status for Lake Almanor West has been reduced to the warning level**
- All other local evacuation orders remain in place.

Highway status:

- Hwy 32 is now open
 - Hwy 147 is now open from A13 to Old Haun Road
 - Hwy 89 is now open from Hwy 36 to Humbug-Humboldt Road
 - Drive with extra caution due to the presence of heavy fire apparatus traffic
- If you are returning to your home, be prepared to cope with periodic episodes of heavy (hazardous) smoke.*

The fire is definitely NOT out, nor is it fully contained. Returning residents will need to remain alert to the possibility of sudden changes."

Saturday, July 31, 2021 – Addendum

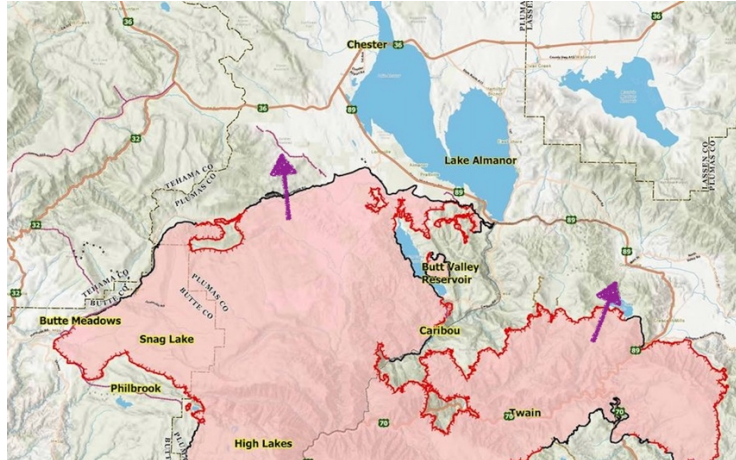
"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends:

*Now that the development is re-populating in the wake of the Dixie Fire mandatory evacuation, we're starting to hear comments about visiting the burn area. **Please be advised that the forest is CLOSED** and will likely remain so for quite some time as hot spots are slowly subdued and hazards are dealt with. The closure applies to National Forest lands, Collins lands, Sierra Pacific lands, etc. The only people who should be out there in the mean time are authorized emergency personnel and forest managers.'*

Monday, August 2, 2021

"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends:

Here's a quick look at the Dixie Fire issues that developed late Monday, 2 August. The fire escaped its perimeter in two areas, as illustrated by the purple arrows on the attached map. The one closest to Lake Almanor was a northward push from the Humboldt Road line, starting roughly at Fanani Meadow and heading towards Soldier Meadow. The other one was a downhill run from the vicinity of Round Valley Reservoir towards nearby Greenville. In both cases, new evacuation orders have been issued and new highway closures are now in effect. For details (and subsequent follow-up), please go to: www.PlumasNews.com and www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin."



Tuesday, August 3, 2021 (early AM)

"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends:

As of 7:30 am on Tuesday, 3 August, the communities on the west shore of Lake Almanor were under an evacuation warning. However, the fluid nature of the fire to our west makes it apparent that we should be prepared for the distinct possibility of a mandatory evacuation order once again. Please take whatever steps are necessary to allow you to rapidly respond to such an order IF it occurs. Also be advised that Hwy 89 is now closed to routine traffic; while it is a little unclear at this moment, if you leave you may not be able to return until the highway reopens. A good practice is to always carry identification (or a utility bill) that includes your name and local address."

Things had remained reasonably calm in the neighborhood during this first phase of the evacuation. Numerous strike teams had driven through the development, sizing up the situation, and then stopped at the fire station for a briefing on safe zones, water supply points, etc. All had positive reactions to the relatively cleaned up nature of the development, thanks to two decades of hazard mitigation effort; a common comment was "We can defend this." The strike teams (and visiting law enforcement personnel) were appreciative of the availability at the fire station of (a) a ready supply of cold water and Gatorade, and (b) an actual, indoor restroom!

The local firefighters' usual routine was to attend the morning briefing held in Chester and then return to Lake Almanor West for a day of roving patrols for possible spot fires and maintenance of fire apparatus. The area continued to receive lots of ash and ember fragments, as well as heavy smoke, which meant that spot fire patrol visibility was limited. The patrols included both the streets in the development and the adjacent off-road areas. While things were calm, a water supply line was run from a hydrant at the water company maintenance building to the adjacent Hwy 89, allowing two water tenders to refill simultaneously without having to drive into the development to find a hydrant.

There was also an unplanned additional task that had to be undertaken. When the (first) mandatory evacuation took place on July 21, a number of residents had placed their garbage cans by the street in anticipation of garbage pickup the following Monday. However, the evacuation status meant that there would be no garbage pickup service for the duration. But the local bears happily accepted the "donations" and managed to create an unsightly and unhealthy mess along the streets. So the firefighters found themselves raking up the debris, loading it into dump trailers and hauling the refuse off to a dump site.

Phase Two - The Attacks

The relatively calm conditions that had existed at the end of July didn't last. Winds began creating problems for firefighters and concerns over the fate of the west shore area soon caused the evacuation warning notice to be upgraded to an order. Late in the afternoon of August 3 a narrow, wind-driven flame front jumped Hwy 89 and aimed directly at the eastern portion of Osprey Loop and the Lake Almanor West boat launch area. That was followed two days later with a larger and much more dangerous crown fire that blew in from the west.

Tuesday, August 3, 2021

"West Shore Mandatory Evacuation (8:40 am, 3 August):

The Plumas County Sheriff's Office has just issued a mandatory evacuation order for the communities on the west shore of Lake Almanor. These include Big Meadows, Prattville and Lake Almanor West."

Wednesday, August 4, 2021

"For the Lake Almanor West Neighborhood Watch group and friends:

Where to begin? I just realized that the last mass mailing was yesterday morning when Lake Almanor West was again placed under a mandatory evacuation order. A lot has happened since that time. The fingers of the Dixie Fire that escaped northward moved quickly, leaving that black "containment" line far behind. Of particular note was a sudden surge to the northeast from the area near the Hwy 89 rest stop. Fire crews who were there found themselves having to move quickly when they discovered spot fires behind them, probably from embers picked up by the afternoon wind. That particular outburst proceeded with the help of wind as a narrow but rapidly moving flame front that took a bead on part of Lake Almanor West.

Very rapidly there were large numbers of strike teams and hand crews pouring into the development and working along the lower half of Osprey Loop and in the forest immediately south. The fire was stubbornly torching vegetation until it hit the south property boundary of the development, where the firefighters had made their stand. Several bulldozers were working in the path and flanks of the fire, as were several large hand crews. There were fire trucks in every driveway from the boat ramp area up the hill towards Manzanita Drive. Flames were easily visible from a couple of hundred yards away, but the barrier created by the firefighters held fast. By about 10 pm the worst was over, and as far as we know, there were no structural losses or serious damage.

The overnight shift kept a lid on the smoldering path of the fire and by this morning much of the burn area had cooled substantially. Today the mop-up activity began, again with bulldozers and chain saws but with firefighters at the ready should anything flare up. By late afternoon, the immediate danger from that particular fire seems reduced substantially. However ... we are in the midst of a Red Flag day with windy conditions, hot temperatures and extremely low humidity, so nobody is turning their back on a fresh fire zone.

And that brings us to some less pleasant news. Those other fire breakouts from yesterday continued to push forward, threatening both Hwy 36 and Hwy 89. As a result, earlier today the Sheriff issued mandatory evacuation orders for Chester, the peninsula and Hamilton Branch, along with the outlying areas north of Hwy 36 (e.g., Feather River homesites, Warner Valley, Drakesbad, etc.). That pretty well covers our end of Plumas County. And, as of late this afternoon, fire crossed Hwy 89 between the Hwy 36 junction and the entrance to Lake Almanor West. Anybody who chose to ride out the mandatory evacuation here is currently stuck in place. Of course, there's also a bunch of firefighters stuck here with us, and the odds are pretty good that emergency traffic will be able to pass through the burn zone soon.

All local highways are currently closed, with the exception of Hwy 36 from Chester east towards Susanville. Part of the Hwy 89 closure south of the basin is due to a major fire push that barely skirted

Greenville and proceed north across the highway and into the rising ground northwest of Greenville. Don't have any details on damage in or around Greenville, but the rush of flames yesterday was pretty scary.

This is now day 15 of continuous duty for the local West Shore Fire Department. They continue to suit up to do battle each day, attend the mandatory morning incident briefing (in Chester), and patrol the neighborhood. Today and tomorrow will be critical days as they look for possible spot fires erupting within or adjacent to the development. Fortunately, they have some fresh eyes on the job during the night shift when the visiting strike teams take up the task. And, knock on wood, thus far we have not had any significant spot fires at Lake Almanor West. We're hoping to keep it that way!"

Friday, August 6, 2021

"On the afternoon of Thursday, Aug. 5, an intense wind-driven fire on the west side of Goose Bay sent a blast of extreme heat and embers into the development, starting multiple simultaneous spot fires. Firefighters on the ground, supported by water-dropping helicopters, worked hard to save as many structures as possible. Sadly, a small number of structures were lost or damaged. Those owners will be contacted directly.

Today, in extremely smoky conditions, a fresh group of strike teams are on scene, patrolling for flare ups and new spots. The damage assessment process has barely begun, but from a brief tour of the development several things stand out as remarkable. First, it is amazing that so few homes were lost. A substantial number of homes within the burn scar survived without obvious damage; there is burn residue all around the house but the house did not ignite. Second, the orientation of the burn scar shows a clear path of the outbreak, coming from the Hwy 89 entrance area and pushing up the slope, driven by the heavy winds that existed at the time. Basically a blow torch effect. Third, numerous adjacent spot fires were ignited by embers, but those were successfully put out by alert firefighters.

The fire emergency is not over. While Lake Almanor West is probably safer now, with burned but cooling areas nearby, but the possibility of spot fires caused by flying embers is still present. Firefighters remain on scene, 24 hours a day, to deal with whatever arrives."





(Entrance road, looking south)



(Water tanks on Eagle Crest)

Saturday, August 7, 2021

"For the Lake Almanor West evacuees (7 August) ...

The good news is that late Friday and overnight there were no new spot fires reported within or immediately adjacent to Lake Almanor West. As was noted in the infrared map posting earlier today (www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin), there still are nearby hot spots, plus a lot of continued smoldering within the burn zone. The bad news is that still air overnight led to exceptionally bad air quality this morning. The attached snapshot captures the essence of visibility down to perhaps 100 feet and a posted air quality index of 834 at 9:50 am in Chester. That's basically off the color scale, where purple is deemed "hazardous" and starts at an AQI of 300. Wearing an N95 mask is essential today, including some indoor locations that aren't tightly sealed (like a fire station).

There still is no word on when power will be restored. It has now been off since 5:45 pm on Tuesday, August 3. Landline phone service is also largely missing. And, as you are probably aware, all local highways are closed. There's no US Mail going out or coming in, and there is no garbage pickup service. Other than that, it's all good in the basin.

Visiting strike teams and hand crews continue to supplement the small contingent of local firefighters as they scout for flareups and spot fires. From what we can observe, the boundary areas around Lake Almanor West are becoming safer as burned areas cool and new dozer lines are put in place. Nobody is relaxing just yet, but each day without a significant local flareup is considered a very positive step towards recovery.

WHEN the roads are reopened and the evacuation order is lifted, there will be a few items for you to consider as you return. First, the appearance of the nearby forest is probably going to be a shock, due to both the fire safety preparations and the burn itself. Don't be too discouraged as you approach the development ... things are much better once you get inside.

Second, there are some safety-related topics that you will want to keep in mind when you get here. These include the following:

- Watch for hazard trees alongside the streets or on your parcel. Burned trees that are still standing may be structurally unsound and could topple over without warning.*
- Watch for rocks on slopes that may have lost some of their support due to the fire and may be prone to rolling downhill.*
- Be especially careful about walking in any burn area due to the above two items AND the possibility of stepping into a hot ash pit; for example, glowing coals may be lurking just below the surface in a spot*

where a stump has burned.

- Be sure to check your propane level at the tank, especially if you have an automatic-start generator.
- Also check your interior smoke alarm batteries; after a morning like this, many alarms are probably going off. (The fire department has already responded to a smoke alarm call from exterior smoke getting inside.)

Finally, just a reminder that wildlife tends to get pushed into unburned areas after a major fire, so don't be surprised to find more than the usual number of encounters with forest critters in the coming months. They're just looking for some place to survive until new growth appears in the forest.

There's a garage barely visible across the street in this photo from this morning ... can you see it? "



Sunday, August 8, 2021

" Yesterday afternoon electrical power was restored to Lake Almanor West, but to this point most landline phones are still inoperative. The one notable exception is the phone at the fire station. For reasons we don't understand, it has remained usable throughout the fire onslaught. And so, even though we've asked people to refer to websites for information, calls still arrive at the fire station asking about fire matters. Most are what you would expect, inquiries about the status of structures in or near the development. But this morning there was a twist. The caller, from Sacramento, asked **"Is the lake open for fishing?"**

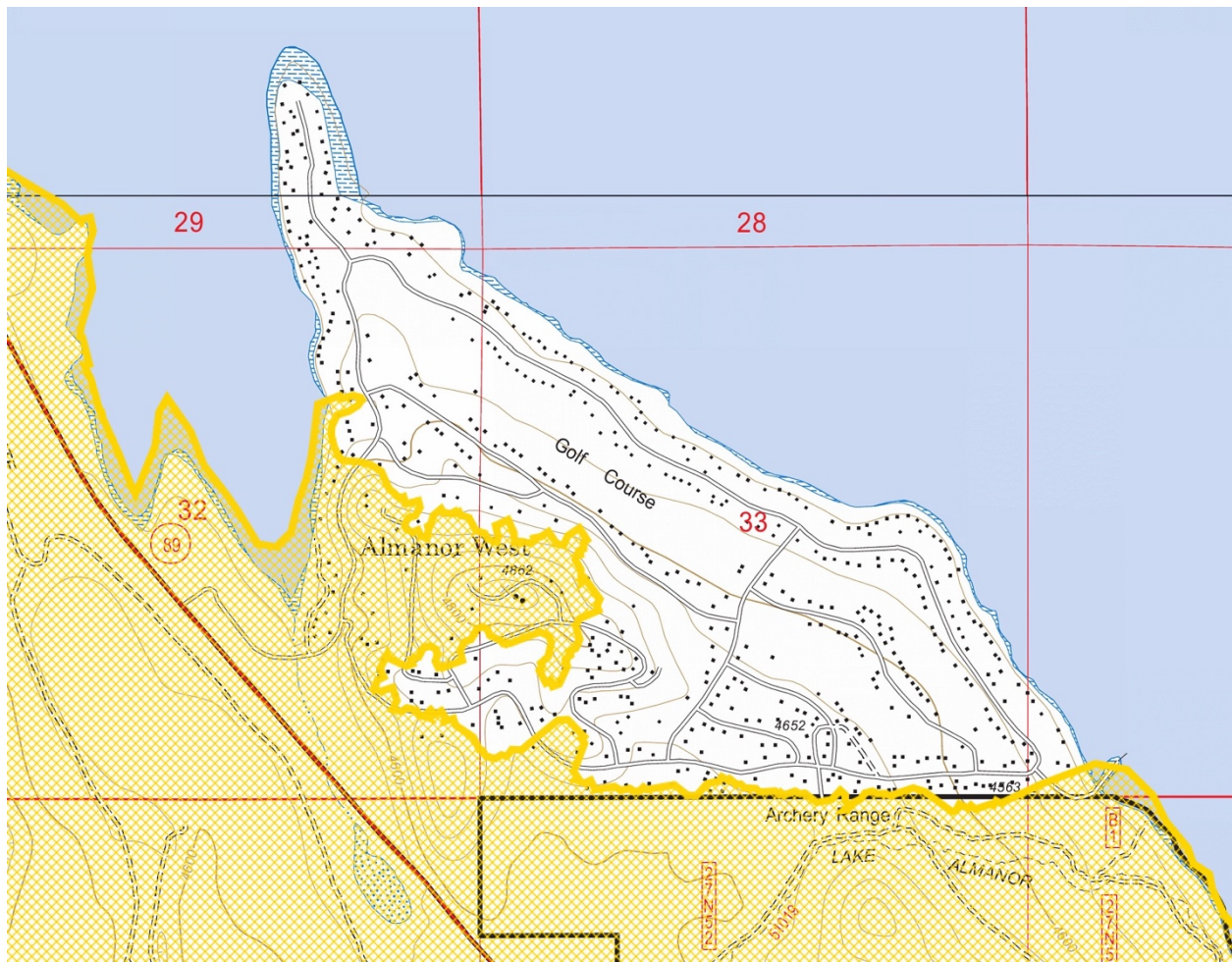
Lemme see ... it's a mandatory evacuation area and all of the access routes are closed. Wait ... do you have a seaplane and are you instrument rated?"

Phase Three - Mop Up

While the main fire front raged on to our north, the situation around Lake Almanor West was gradually becoming more manageable and safer. But the threat of reignitions and spot fires continued, requiring constant attention (day and night). There was also the matter of damaged trees falling across roadways or threatening structures. Local firefighters were joined by a pair of tree fallers who skillfully dropped hazard trees (some of them still burning) so that the threat could be minimized.

Sunday, August 8, 2021 (PM)

"According to SARTopo, the Dixie Fire incursion into Lake Almanor West covered the area marked in yellow in the attached map segment. Small spot fires outside that zone are not depicted, and were extinguished before they could develop into a measurable blaze. It is truly a wonder that more homes weren't lost. - Dale"



(Note: Three homes and a detached garage were lost to Dixie, while a number of other structures suffered varying amounts of damage. However, at least 39 homes inside the burn zone had been saved.)

Monday, August 9, 2021

"It Isn't Over Yet

Sunday afternoon at Lake Almanor the inversion broke, visibility improved significantly, and a breeze came up. That was sufficient to cause hot coals to reignite in numerous locations. West Shore Fire and visiting strike team units were very busy, dealing with about a dozen flareups and a couple of new spot fires within the development or right along the edges. Fortunately, their vigilance paid off and all of the hot spots were subdued. But it was a stark reminder that while the major flames are no longer with us (right here), the potential for new fires lingers on.

Hard and continuous duty is starting to wear on the team and the equipment. Looking at the calendar, this is day 28 of the fire, day 20 of continuous deployment of the local fire team, and day 7 of the second mandatory evacuation, with a 4 day power outage thrown in there for good measure. Vehicle maintenance is underway to keep the apparatus fully functional, and the team is trying to get reasonable rest after physical exertion in terrible air. But nobody is backing away from the task.

Today (Monday) started smoky again with a very high AQI. The morning has been relatively calm, with a forecast for some clearing and air movement this afternoon; basically similar to yesterday but hopefully with a little less wind. The anticipation is that this will be another active afternoon for flareups. Water tanks are full, strike teams are still nearby, and the team is braced for another episode. The Dixie Fire is not just a battle or two ... it's a drawn-out campaign."

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

"Preparing to Return

The local mandatory evacuation order is still in place at Lake Almanor West, but the authorities are starting to prepare for the eventual reopening of the place. However, before everyone gets too excited, you need to be aware of some important issues and safety matters that must be addressed first.

Safe access to local highways is a must. Crews are already out cutting hazard trees, stabilizing hillsides and otherwise making sure that the routes will be safe for the public, not only for returning residents but also for essential goods and services.

Among those goods and services that have been suspended during the evacuation are fuel and food deliveries to local retailers, mail deliveries to the post office, solid waste removal, and so on. An influx of residents right now would face depleted grocery shelves, limited fuel supplies, etc. Early returnees will need to arrive with sufficient fuel in their vehicles and enough food to last a number of days while local retailers are resupplied.

When you arrive home you will need to carefully check your refrigerator and freezer. Remember that we had a four day power outage, during which time those appliances were off ... unless you had an automatic start generator and sufficient fuel to last 4+ days. If not, the food thawed or warmed, and even though it may now be rechilled or refrozen, it should be disposed of as a health risk. If you are unsure, get rid of the food.

And that brings us to waste disposal. Currently we have no trash pickup, and according to the contract terms of our garbage service, there won't be any trash pickup until the area is completely free of evacuation notices. Going from a mandatory evacuation level to an advisory or warning level doesn't count; the trash trucks don't roll until there is no evacuation notice whatsoever.

Another safety consideration is air quality. Presently and in recent days our air quality index (AQI) has been extremely hazardous, often running in excess of 800. Anybody with respiratory issues or sensitivities should not be in the area when the AQI is anywhere near that level. You will need to be the judge of your own risk tolerance on that matter, but it is not a trivial concern.

Telephone service is another missing item at the moment. Lack of such service may or may not be a major factor in deciding when to reopen the basin, but it most assuredly will be a consideration.

Also, Seneca Hospital is presently closed, and it will take some time for it to get restarted. That means that we have extremely limited medical support in the basin, and our terrible visibility due to smoke means that air ambulance service is generally not available. If you have a medical condition, you probably should stay away until Seneca is back up and running and the air is clear enough to support helicopter service. You should also be extra careful in your activities here to avoid accidents requiring medical care.

Finally, there are some issues regarding behavior in the local area. Once the communities are reopened you will be restricted from entering the nearby forested areas for safety reasons. You will also need to be careful right in your own backyard if it was subjected to fire. Damaged trees, hot coals from burned trees or stumps and loosened rocks may be present. Best advice is to avoid burned areas entirely until the threat subsides. This may take months.

Yes, we're all anxious to put this behind us. But we don't want to rush into a situation that is dangerous. We don't know when the evacuation order will be reduced or eliminated, nor do we know what kind of constraints may be put in place. For example, there could be a lessening of the order to a warning level coupled with a restriction that only residents will be allowed to enter. In that case, you will need to be able to verify that you are indeed a resident of Lake Almanor West. If your driver's license has your local address, it's pretty straightforward. If not, you will probably need to present a utility bill with your name and local address. Again, patience, patience, patience.

P.S.: The fire folks still here really want you back soon, for the simple reason that you will be additional eyes to spot flareups and hot spots, and you will have quick access to your garden hose to help cool those things down while the firefighters are enroute to your place."

Thursday, August 12, 2021 (AM)

"Encouraging Signs

Yesterday afternoon and again this morning we have observed propane company representatives in the development, checking tanks and connections for any signs of damage. Rumor has it that we should soon anticipate other utility and infrastructure emergency service personnel doing similar things. (Hopefully that effort would revive our current telephone service outage.) Tree fallers have also been busy along the highways, dropping trees that would pose a hazard to traffic. In short, efforts are definitely underway to make the place safe for repopulation. We simply do not know when that might occur, but you can rest assured that as soon as there is an official announcement we will broadcast the good news (along with any restrictions that might be attached).

In the mean time, local fire crews continue to patrol for flareups and spot fires within the development. They typically have to deal with anywhere from 10 to 20 of those each day, mostly in the afternoon hours when temperatures rise and a breeze shows up. And it is likely that even when residents return there will still be occasional hot spot episodes; an intense fire such as we experienced is slow to completely cool down.

Finally, we wanted to pass along a bit of good news regarding the nearby burn area. Some of you are aware that for several years WACC and the Fire Department have complained to the Forest Service that a slash pile they created just south of the development was a hazard and should be disposed of. Well, the Dixie Fire took care of that. Attached are before and after photos of the pile and adjacent forest. No more phone calls or letters are needed to the Ranger District!"



Thursday, August 12, 2021 (PM)

“Organizing Chaos

At the present time the West Shore Fire Department is focused on dealing with flareups and spot fires within Lake Almanor West. Secondly, it is prepared to support any other fire suppression activity needed on the west shore, or mutual aid needs in Chester. It’s a fairly straightforward assignment. But things are much more complex when you consider the overall fire.

Fighting something as big as the Dixie Fire involves a huge team of people. Currently there are more than 6,000 assigned to this particular fire, spread out over multiple counties. Keeping efforts focused on the best chance for success is an organizational challenge much like a military campaign. And with that many people and a great many pieces of equipment involved in a dynamic and far flung environment, there is a serious planning effort associated with the battle.

One of the tools used by Incident Command is a thing referred to as the “IAP”, the Incident Action Plan. This is a daily fire plan distributed to team leaders at the early morning briefing. It is a 24 hour plan that starts at 7 am on the day it is published and carries through to 7 am on the following day.

The package consists of a printed document, typically 60+ pages in length, plus a set of 60+ detailed topographic maps that each cover an area roughly 5 by 4 miles (20 square miles) in size.

The IAP begins with a statement of overall objectives, which are more of a set of very broad generalizations, followed by a page of organizational assignments. You can think of the latter as a non-graphical organizational chart. Following that is the daily weather forecast and fire behavior outlook.

The next 30 or so pages are a series of single page unit assignments that list the resources (people and equipment) that are assigned to a specific portion of the fire, along with their specific work assignment for that period (e.g., “Mop up 600 feet.”). These assignments and the related detail map are what the people in the field focus on.

Towards the back of the document are found an air operations summary that identifies the aircraft, bases and frequencies involved. Next are an overall radio communications plan with all of the frequency assignments, medical and safety plans, logistics, supply and support information, finance directives,

public information notes and miscellaneous items including current evacuation orders. All together, the IAP might be considered the conductor's score for a daily symphony, with many players and a variety of instruments.

The real purpose of all this planning activity is to achieve a coordinated overall effort while minimizing gaps, overlaps, radio interference and unsafe situations. Of course, "safety" is a relative term when it comes to fighting fires. Anybody who would voluntarily face such a beast has already indicated some level of tolerance for dangerous conditions!"

Saturday, August 14, 2021

"Saturday, 14 August, is another smoky day at Lake Almanor West. Power and landline phone service remain out, but we did get an internet connection back sometime overnight. That's still a mystery, but we'll take it! We were without a 'net connection with the outside world for about 36 hours, which explains why there was no update yesterday.

If you look at the infrared maps of this region it shows things generally cooling around the west shore, which is exactly what we've been hoping for. There still are troubling hot zones threatening the peninsula and Westwood, but L.A.W. and Prattville are looking safer each day. However, local firefighters are still having to respond to numerous flareups and spot fires within the community and nearby. They were also called upon to assist Chester and Peninsula departments when things got out of hand Thursday night near Johnson Grade (Hwy 36) and County Road A13. They didn't return to the fire station until after midnight on that one, and then last night there was a flareup at a spot on the southern boundary of L.A.W. that kept them on scene until late evening. After 25 continuous days on duty, the local team is getting mighty weary and a bit disheveled; we're thinking of renaming the group the West Shore Irregulars.

The aborted plan to start repopulating Chester and the west shore didn't help anybody's morale. As of early Saturday morning we have heard nothing official about when they might try again. Getting electrical power back would seem to be an important step in making that happen, and PG&E has offered no estimate of when that might occur. As far as we know, there are no fire-related issues on the electrical transmission line from the Canyon Dam substation to Lake Almanor West.

Regarding the overall outlook for the Dixie Fire, it seems noteworthy that Incident Command no longer publishes an estimated date for full containment. However, rumor has it that they are now preparing requests for proposals for snow plow services."

Sunday August 15, 2021

"Smoky Sunday Morning at Lake Almanor

It's a bad air day again, with the Chester air quality index (AQI) registering 756 at 9 am this morning. Sunday or not, local firefighters suited up and reported to the fire station as usual. This makes 26 continuous duty days for the team from Prattville and Lake Almanor West, and they continue to encounter flareups. Yesterday afternoon, for example, they were doing a patrol on one of the local streets when the top of a smoldering tree fell to the surface and burst into flame. The fire just doesn't give up.

All things considered, the west shore area is doing well. Gradual cooling is evident in the infrared (heat) maps. We no longer see bright red areas or spots near our west side community areas. But there are plenty of those in other parts of the fire. The infrared maps posted on www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin provide some insights on where the overall fire is moving. There's also a posting there on a new process being set up by the Sheriff's Office to allow owners of burned properties to be escorted in to inspect those properties.

We're still hopeful that the current mandatory evacuation order for the west shore will be downgraded to a warning (or lifted entirely) in the near future. The main threat to the west side seems to have passed. But we definitely need electricity restored for that to happen, and PG&E has not yet posted an estimate of when that might occur. Landline phone service is also out, but it is less critical to repopulation than electrical power.

WHEN you are allowed to return, there are a couple of new comments we need to share. First, the burned forests that you will encounter as you approach Lake Almanor are NOT indicative of what exists within the developed areas. Most (but not all) of our neighborhood trees survived the onslaught, thanks to some very hard work on the part of firefighters.

Second, when you get to your home you may find things “disturbed”. That’s because strike teams undertook what they call “structure preparation” on many of the residences here, ahead of or during the fires, to improve the survivability of the structure. You may find deck or yard items moved away from the structure, needles or combustible items pulled back from the structure, hoses in different locations than when you left, etc. In some cases you may find trees limbed or flammable vegetation removed. It was all part of the effort to save homes.

As was mentioned in an earlier note, our power outages have created a health hazard in refrigerators and freezers. Unless you had an automatic start/stop generator providing power to those appliances, you face an ugly mess of spoiled food upon return. Getting rid of that food and residue will be an early task.

Don’t be surprised to find burned spots in your yard or nearby. Hopefully it will be nothing more than some blackened ground or minor burned vegetation. But if you should discover actual burn damage to your home, please contact your insurance company before you undertake any cleanup or repairs. Follow the guidance provided by your insurance company on what steps to take.

Finally, please do NOT enter burned areas other than your own residence. Your safety is paramount, and we still have a lot of hazards in the nearby forest. “

Monday, August 16, 2021 (AM)

“The official figures from Incident Command this morning (Aug. 16) indicate that the Dixie Fire has now burned 569,707 acres (890 square miles) with 31% containment. The containment figure hasn’t improved in days since additional black line is being overtaken by additional acreage. And, as usual, the basin has terrible air quality again (AQI of 556). But there is some good news to report ... we have electricity back. Power was restored about 1 am this morning, after nearly three and a half days of absence. The earlier outage (3 thru 7 August) lasted about four days.

This morning’s briefing by Incident Command emphasized some serious concerns about weather during the next couple of days. The forecast calls for Red Flag conditions, meaning very low humidity, high temperatures and, most importantly, significant winds. These conditions are expected to arrive this afternoon and will likely test the fire lines, especially to our north and east. The predominant wind direction should be out of the southwest, pushing the fire northeast, but terrain effects will channel surface winds as well. Because of those dangerous conditions, the general consensus here is that there probably won’t be any lessening of evacuation orders until the impact of this Red Flag event has been settled. Because we have been without garbage pickup services for several weeks now, county OES has arranged for some large trash bins to be placed in the west shore communities. These are huge, 8 ft wide by 8 ft tall by about 20 ft long steel containers. They arrived in the middle of the night, with no prior notification, are were placed at two locations at Lake Almanor West: the clubhouse parking lot, and the tennis courts parking lot. To drop off trash, you need to open the right hand door on the end of the container by pulling a steel locking pin, swinging the latch bar outward, and pulling the door open. Please place your trash as far forward as you can so that we maximize the capacity of the bin. Very importantly, when you are done, please close the door, push the latch bar inward to secure the door, and drop the locking pin into place. If you don’t, the bears will gain entry and we will have a royal mess (not to mention possible up close encounters with a bear!).”

Monday, August 17, 2021 (PM)

“Food Safety

The west shore area has experienced two separate power outages related to the Dixie Fire: (1) a four day outage, from 5:45 pm on August 3 to 5:15 pm on August 7, and (2) a three and a half day outage from 6:25 pm on August 12 to 1:00 am on August 16. Anyone without a backup generator running during that period will find cold but spoiled food in their refrigerator and freezer upon their return. Such food should be considered hazardous and promptly discarded.

IF you have an automatic start/stop generator system that provides power to your refrigerator and freezer, your stored food may be safe IF you had sufficient fuel for the generator during the entire period. For example, if you return home and find that you still have propane in your tank (and the tank is turned on), then it would appear that your backup electrical system would have kept things properly chilled. But if the tank is empty or was turned off as a protective measure during the fire, then there are serious doubts about the safety of the food. When in doubt, toss it out.

The link below will take you to an article with specific guidance on the safety of chilled food after a power outage.

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/food-safety-during-power-outage>

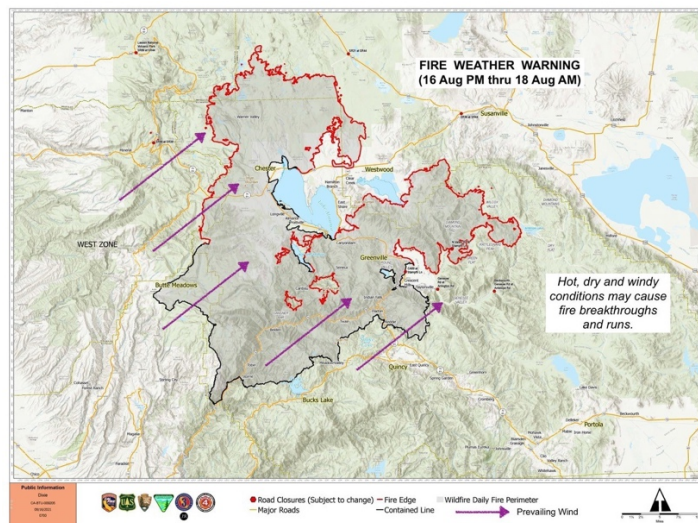
P.S.: If you should experience a power outage while you are actually at your residence and you do not have a backup generator, remember that very important bit of mountain wisdom ... EAT THE ICE CREAM FIRST!"

Tuesday, August 17, 2021 (AM)

"If you have been following the weather forecast, you already know that the next couple of days will be a real test of the fire lines on the Dixie Fire Incident Command has called a Red Flag warning for the fire area due to the forecast hot, dry and windy conditions that should start this afternoon At Lake Almanor, our visibility has suddenly improved from 1/4 mile to about 3 miles and a breeze has come up. Current temperature at our house is 92 degrees, with a 14% relative humidity. The feared conditions are arriving.

The general flow should be as indicated by the purple arrows on the attached map (which is this morning's fire perimeter map). In general, this will push the fire away from the Lake Almanor basin, but local channeling of the winds by terrain can cause some twists to the pattern. The Lassen County Sheriff has issued a "heads up" to the Susanville area to be alert for possible evacuation notices should the fire make a run for that area. They've had several such experiences during the past 20 years so they are a bit wary of things coming at them from out of the west.

Hopefully we'll see nearby fire lines hold and manageable growth to the northeast. Wednesday AM can't come soon enough! "



Tuesday, August 17, 2021 (PM)

"We're part way through the Red Flag period and thus far the Lake Almanor basin is looking OK. Yesterday's winds out of the southwest pushed the fire closer to Susanville and points east. A very significant development was a spot fire launched about 6 miles ahead of the main front that rapidly grew in size and eventually crossed Hwy 395 between Milford and Janesville. The fire also pushed further into Lassen Park. The forecast is for more wind today and tonight, initially out of the southwest (like yesterday) but later shifting to a northwest wind and finally to a northeast wind (exactly opposite of yesterday's direction). These shifting winds are causing major concerns on the fire lines as firefighters attempt to keep things in check while avoiding getting trapped.

The local consensus is that the next 36 hours will be pivotal to determining when the basin will be reopened to residents. If the nearby lines hold and no new nearby threats develop, the betting pool suggests that Thursday is probably the earliest day for reopening. But again, that's speculation ... there is no official estimate. Don't cancel your room reservation just yet.

The size of the fire is now over 600,000 acres. If it continues into the brushy grasslands east of the crest along Hwy 395 it could grow rapidly. That's also an area where the very large air tankers (VLATs) can operate very effectively as long as visibility allows. The possibility of rapid eastward movement must have been on the minds of the Incident Command team who modified their management objectives in this morning's briefing to the troops. Instead of stating that their goal is to hold the fire west of the crest line, they now indicate that the goal is to keep the fire west of the Nevada state line.

Closer to home, the local firefighters dealt with a number of flareups yesterday and expect to find more today (hopefully fewer in number). It's not just down trees or stumps that reignite. Occasionally they come across a tree that is burning on the inside in a hollowed out area; weird, but it happens. The firefighters are really anxious to have all of you back in residence, keeping an eye out for smoke or flames and able to use your garden hose to take quick action to water down the hot spot.

One reminder for your return is that there is a complete ban on open flames in the region. That applies to yard debris fires, campfires, "warming fires", fire pits and any wood-burning external appliance such as a bar-b-que. Because of our extremely dry vegetation, there will be ZERO TOLERANCE for any such fires until CalFire lifts the ban after we have received sufficient autumn moisture. If you rent your home, it would be prudent to not only advise renters of this restriction but also to remove any tempting fixtures. At this point all of the basin communities with the exception of Canyon Dam have done well. The firefighters are working hard to keep it that way. "

Wednesday, August 18, 2021 (AM)

"As of noon on Wednesday, the Lake Almanor basin is starting the reopening process. Local mandatory evacuation orders are being reduced to warnings, which means that residents (only) will be allowed to return. However, due to fire hazards along nearby highways, only a few roads are currently open:

- From the west, Hwy 32 will be open, connecting with Hwy 36 and on into the basin*
- Hwy 36 west of the Hwy 32 junction remains CLOSED due to fire near Morgan Summit and Mineral*
- Hwy 70 is open with delays up the canyon*
- Hwy 89 will be open from the Greenville Wye to Hwy 36*
- Hwy 147 will be open*
- Nothing was specified about Hwy 36 east to Susanville, and there is active fire along part of that route; probably not a viable route except with an escort*

The official announcement is attached. (And by the way, power went out on the west shore again at 11:50 am.)"

And with that, the evacuees started to return.

Wednesday, August 18, 2021 (PM)

"Just a quick update:

Power was restored a few minutes ago (about a 3 hour outage). Just did a quick run into town and most places are closed. The only establishments that seemed to be open were gas stations and Holiday Market (including its gas pumps). I didn't check on Holiday's hours, but they have been open for limited periods during the past couple of days.

For those asking about residency requirements, we've had no further clarification, but a driver's license with a local address on it will certainly work. For part-timers, a utility bill with their name and Lake Almanor address works as well (it's something that is recommended in evacuation checklists). Failing that, just quote your local address if checked. "

Thursday, August 19, 2021

"Welcome Back to the Lake!

The West Shore Fire Department is really glad to see residents returning. Seeing some familiar faces is a boost for our mental outlook, after a month of isolation, heavy smoke and flames. Not only that, you add to the safety of the neighborhood by becoming additional eyes checking for flareups. Yes, we still encounter such things weeks after the main fire. Furthermore, you and your garden hose are the first line of defense in dealing with those pesky hot spots.

For those unsure about when to return, our advice is don't be in a rush. The town is just now starting to reawaken and it may take a couple of days to get principal stores fully functioning. Seneca Hospital will take a little longer, so if you have medical issues it might be wise to hold off until Seneca is open (it will be announced). And then there's the air. Yesterday was the nicest air we've had in weeks, and early this morning was looking pretty good. But our air quality index is still in the Unhealthy range (184 this AM). Anyone with breathing issues will want to monitor the Chester AQI for a bit before making the return decision. (Check <https://aqicn.org/city/california/plumas/chester/>.)

When you do return, there are a few cautions and chores to deal with. There are some posters found at the mailbox clusters that point most of these out, but here's an overview:

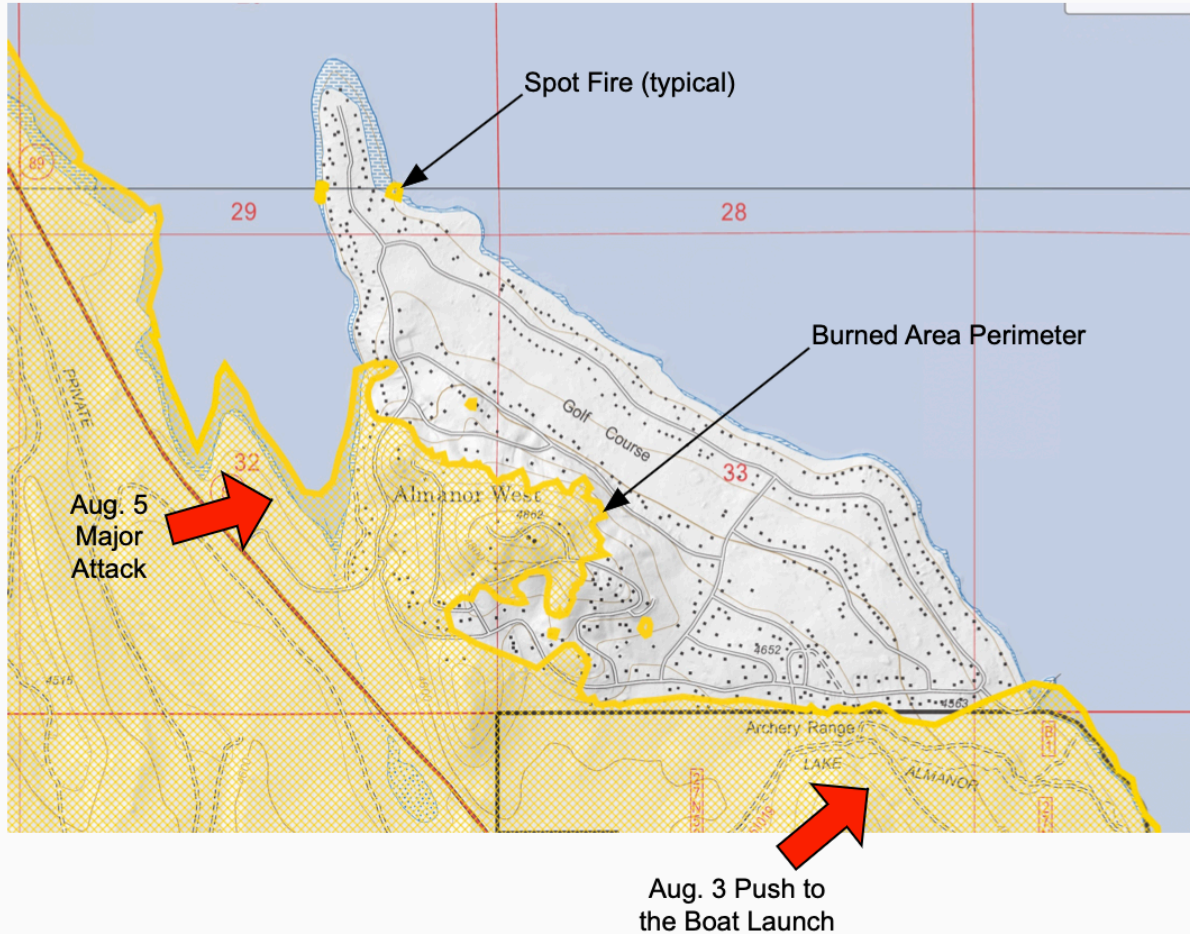
- Be careful of ANY burned area in the development (hot coals may be just under the surface, and burned trees may be hazardous)*
- Inspect your property for damage, and if you find any, contact your insurance agent*
- Be sure to check your propane tank: damaged? valve on? sufficient quantity?*
- Dispose of spoiled food (if the refrigerator or freezer were off during our 7+ days of outages, get rid of the food!)*
- Large, walk-in disposal bins are found at the clubhouse parking lot and the tennis courts parking lot*
- Be aware that wildlife has been pushed into the development by the fire*
- Do NOT enter any of the nearby forest area; it is closed due to hazards"*

Thursday, August 19, 2021 (AM)

"All:

As Lake Almanor West starts getting repopulated there will likely be gasps and looks of horror when residents see the nearby devastation. The Dixie Fire ravaged this region, but Lake Almanor West largely survived as a green island in a sea of black. The attachment provides some detail of where the fire burned, both around and within the development. The yellow outline of the burn zone indicates the final extent of the fire perimeter, with a few yellow spots identifying the primary spot fires that also erupted. It was only through the incredible skill and persistence of a large force of firefighters that the neighborhood was saved. Most of those firefighters were strike teams and hand crews from outside the area who had no vested interest in Lake Almanor West but who willingly jumped into action, aided by the small force of local volunteers. The teamwork was amazing to observe."

DIXIE FIRE BURN ZONE at Lake Almanor West



Thursday, August 19, 2021 (PM)

"About Those Hoses"

Lake Almanor West parcels in or around the burn zone may have some heavy-duty fabric covered firefighter hose laying around. If it has been rolled up or bundled up, it should have been picked up by departing firefighters. If it's still there, please place the bundle by the street and let the Fire Department know; someone will come by and retrieve it.

If the hose has knots in it, please do NOT untie them. That's an indication that the hose is defective in some way, and the fire department will dispose of it rather than placing it back on the ready rack. Also, if a long segment of hose is still stretched out, LEAVE IT IN PLACE. It's there to quickly supply water to some kind of inaccessible area, and it may still be needed in that location.

Finally, and just for a chuckle or two, if you see firefighters driving down the street, give them a little extra room. Basically, treat them as student drivers. After a month of free-range driving in isolation with no other traffic on local roads, they are gradually having to relearn core skills, like staying in the right lane, watching for oncoming traffic at intersections, etc."

Friday, August 20, 2021

"Final Update for Evacuees

With repopulation of the west shore ongoing now, this will likely be the final e-mail update to the evacuees. There are just a few closing notes to pass along.

If you arrive back at your place and discover a missing sprinkler or garden hose, look around the neighbors' parcels. It may well be that during the fire fight, somebody grabbed a hose and sprinkler and put it to use wetting down an adjacent area. Just a case of borrowing a tool and not getting it back in the proper location after the fact.

We are learning of a few cases where automatic start/stop generators went into a safe stop mode, not for lack of fuel but for insufficient lubricating oil in the engine. Be sure to check the oil level in your generator and make sure that it falls in the acceptable range. Check it especially after it has run for more than just a few hours. Otherwise, it may shut down to protect the engine if the oil level falls below a safe level.

Don't bother bringing up off-road motorcycles or ATVs this season ... all of the nearby forests, including the roads, are CLOSED. They are likely to remain so until well after the snow starts to accumulate.

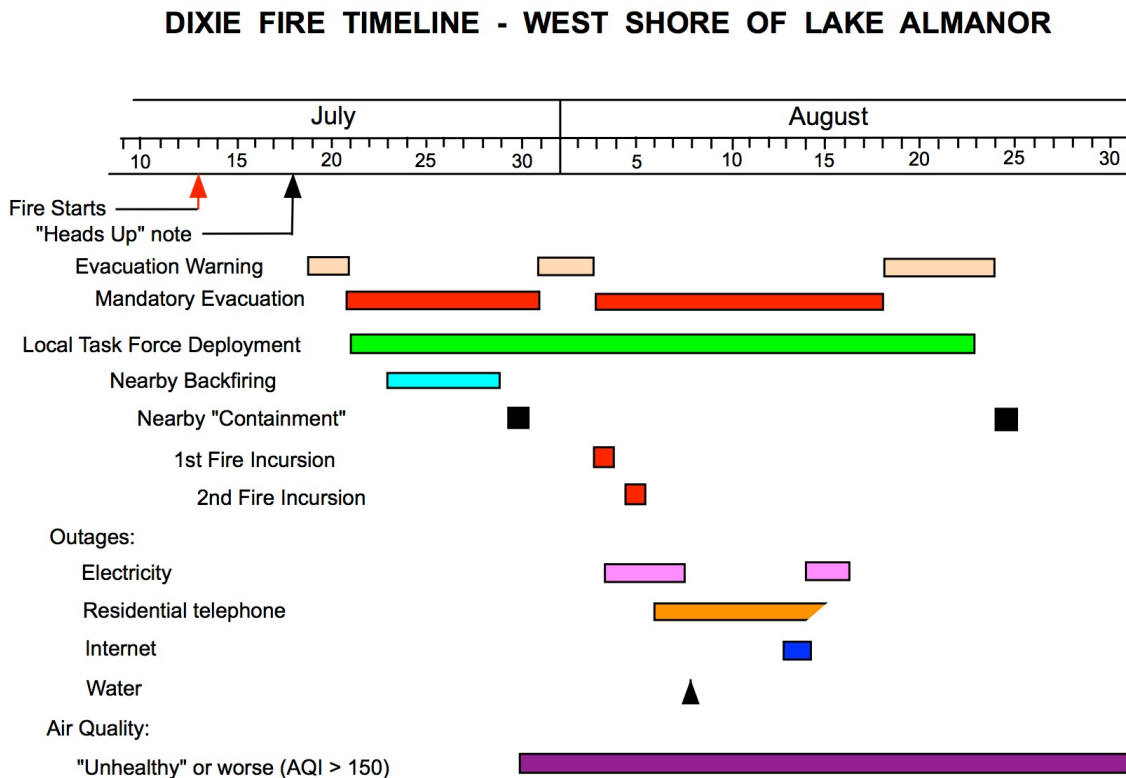
Finally, a number of returning people have graciously asked how they can thank the firefighters that remained behind. To be honest, right now what they need most is some quiet time to recuperate. They have been through an extended and intense period of long hours, ugly air and uncertain conditions, and really need some down time. There's probably an element of PTSD present as well. So a smile, a wave, a quiet "thank you" and maybe a hug would be great ... just not an extended conversation for the moment."

Part 2 - SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

This portion of the document contains a variety of related information that wasn't part of the regular e-mail message traffic sent to Lake Almanor West evacuees. Some of what you find here was reconstructed after the fact and may not have been fully known (or appreciated) at the time of the fire.

Dixie Fire West Shore Timeline

Some of the key events during the period of primary interest to the west shore are depicted in this chart.



The West Shore Fire Team

The small group of West Shore Fire Department personnel who remained behind during the evacuations were part of a designated CalFire task force that included west shore, Chester and peninsula personnel. The west shore team members consisted of:

Fire Chief / Paramedic Randy **Fluke**
Assistant Chief / EMT Ken **Wilson**
Fire Captain / EMT Mark **Murray**
Firefighter / EMT Georgia **Knutsen**
Firefighter Dale **Bornhorst**
Firefighter Matt **Cardinet**
Firefighter John **Fourcroy**
Firefighter Gordon **Ginno**

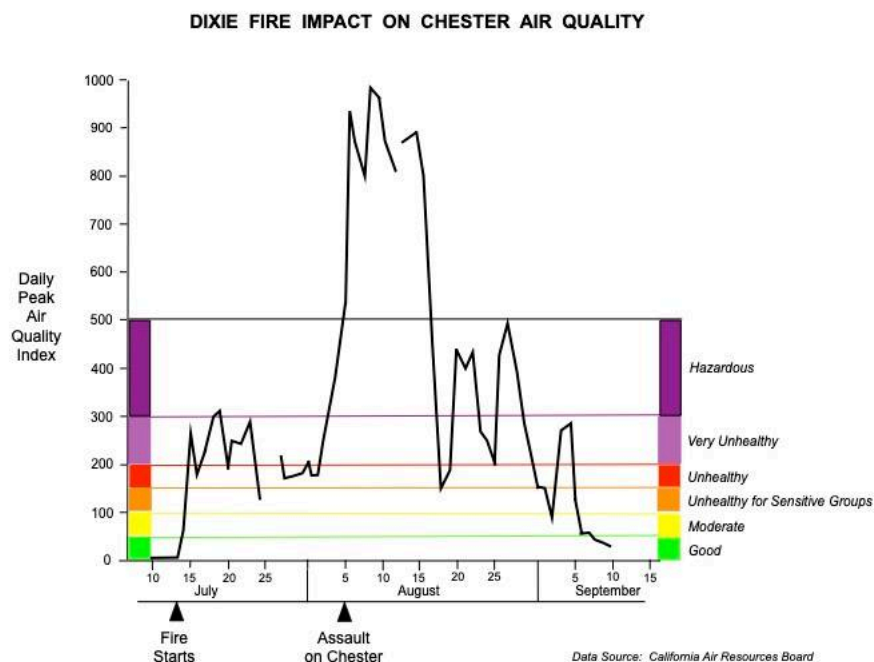
Firefighter Tim **Grewis**
Firefighter Rich **Hawkins**
Firefighter Dick **Horn**
Firefighter Jim **Pope**
Firefighter Troy **Ward**
Firefighter Chris **Young**
Firefighter Rick **Young**
PIO Dale **Knutsen**

As a gesture of appreciation for their service, a small pin was commissioned and presented to each of the above. It consists of a simple red circle with the words “Dixie Fire” in white:



Local Air Quality

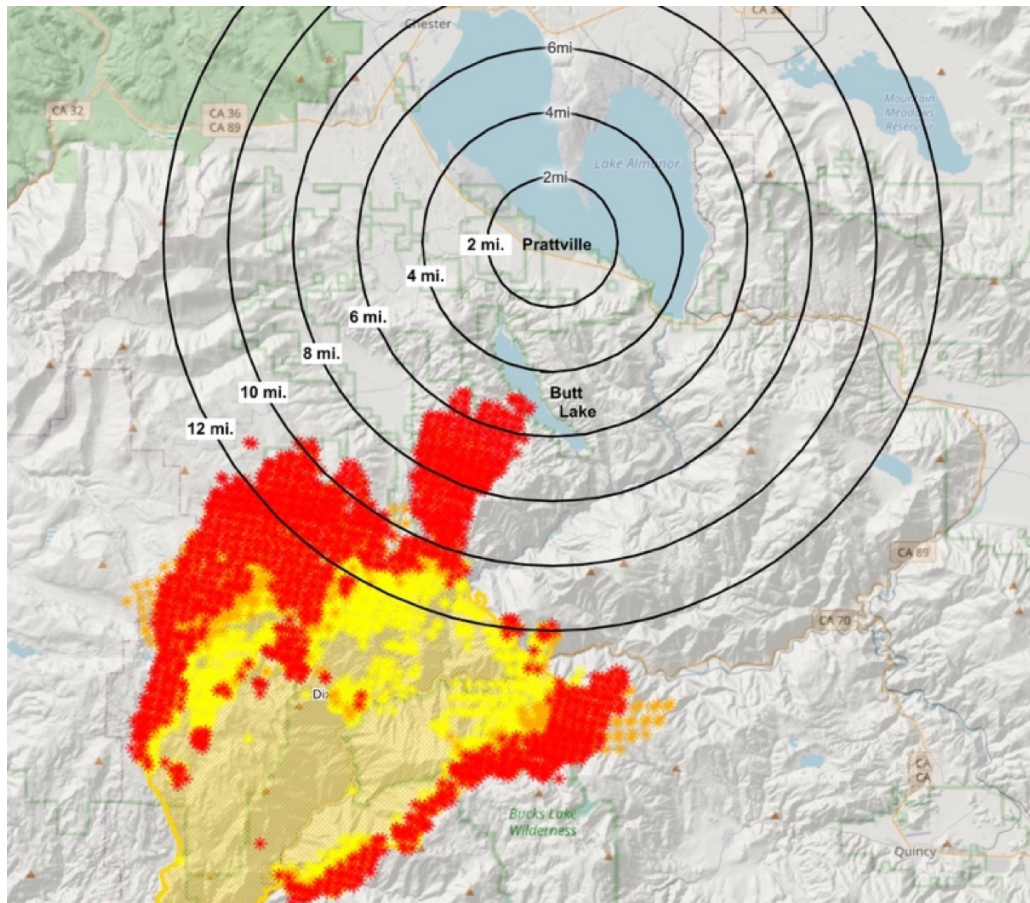
Smoke was drifting in to the Lake Almanor basin well before flames arrived, and significant amounts of ash were falling from the sky while the fire was still some distance away. Visibility was often reduced to levels that prevented air tankers or helicopters from operating safely. There was an air quality sensor in downtown Chester that posted preliminary, real-time measurements on a website that was regularly checked, leading to occasional comments about the poor air. However, some of the highest preliminary readings turned out to be conservative. When the California Air Resources Board analyzed the data after the fact, they determined that what we had thought were the peak readings in the range of 840 or so were low by more than 100 points. The corrected AQI readings are found in this chart.



Sequential Maps

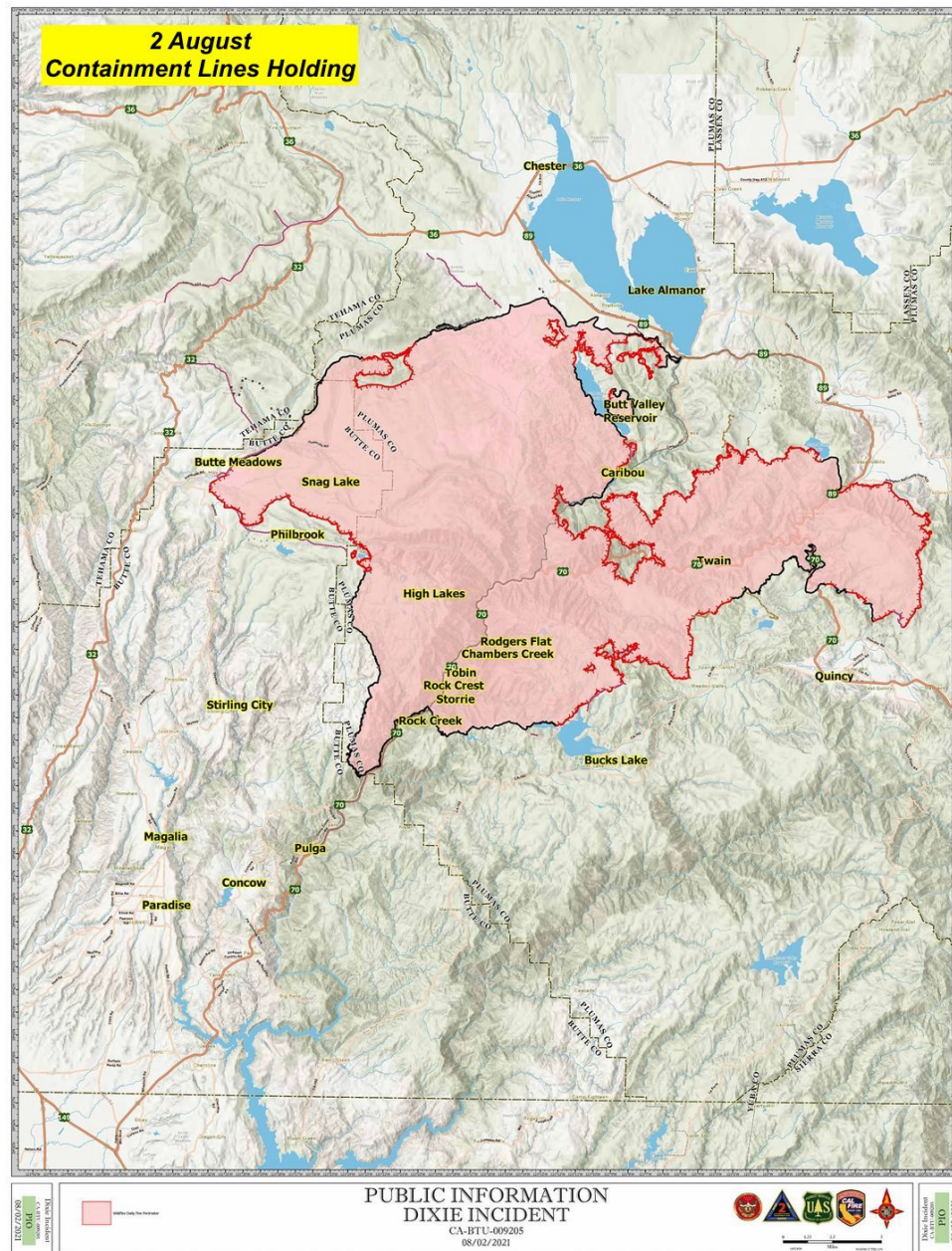
Fire perimeter maps released by Incident Command were large files that were not well suited for e-mail transmission, but were often posted on a website (www.facebook.com/WestAlmanorBulletin). Similarly, heat maps indicating the current relative intensity of the fire were posted as well. The heat maps were obtained from an online mapping service (www.caltopo.com) that used overhead satellite infrared images to approximately locate the highest temperature sources. A sampling of some of those posted maps is found below.

July 21, 2021 Heat Map (with range rings);



The range ring maps were used by West Shore Fire Department in contingency planning activities as the fire approached.

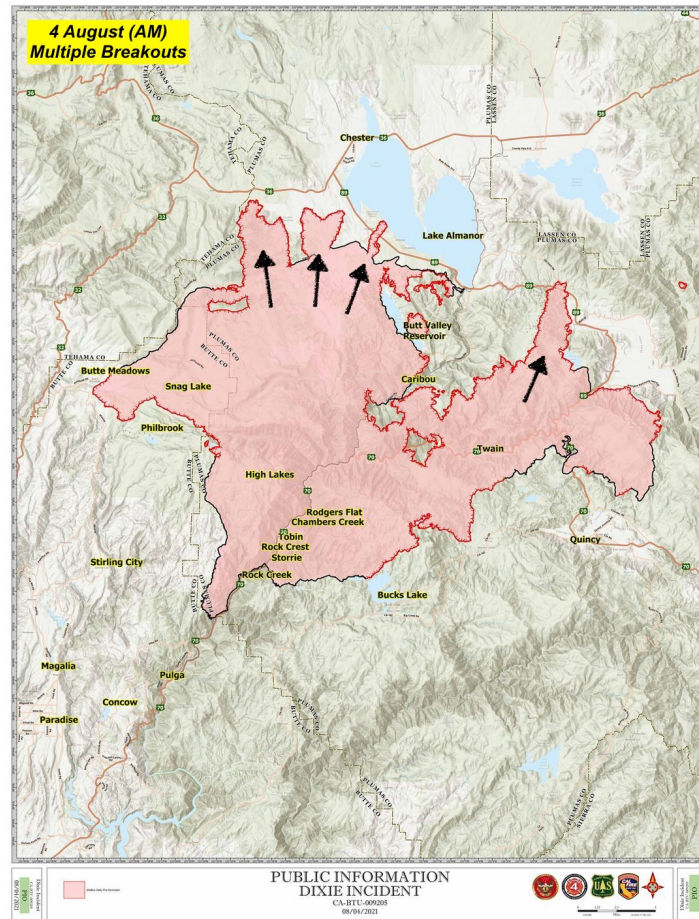
August 2, 2021 Fire Perimeter Map:



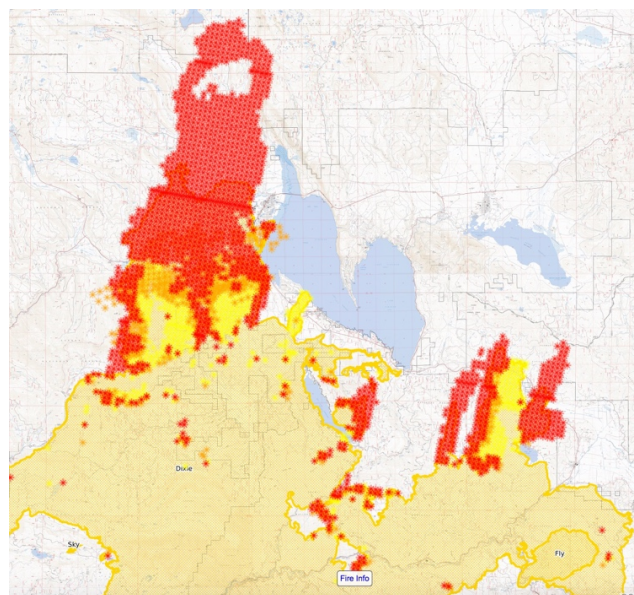
Typical of fire perimeter maps released by Incident Command.
Black outline indicates “contained” status (good);
Red outline indicates “uncontained” (bad).

These maps were prepared in the very early hours
of the indicated dates, and basically show what
existed late the day before.

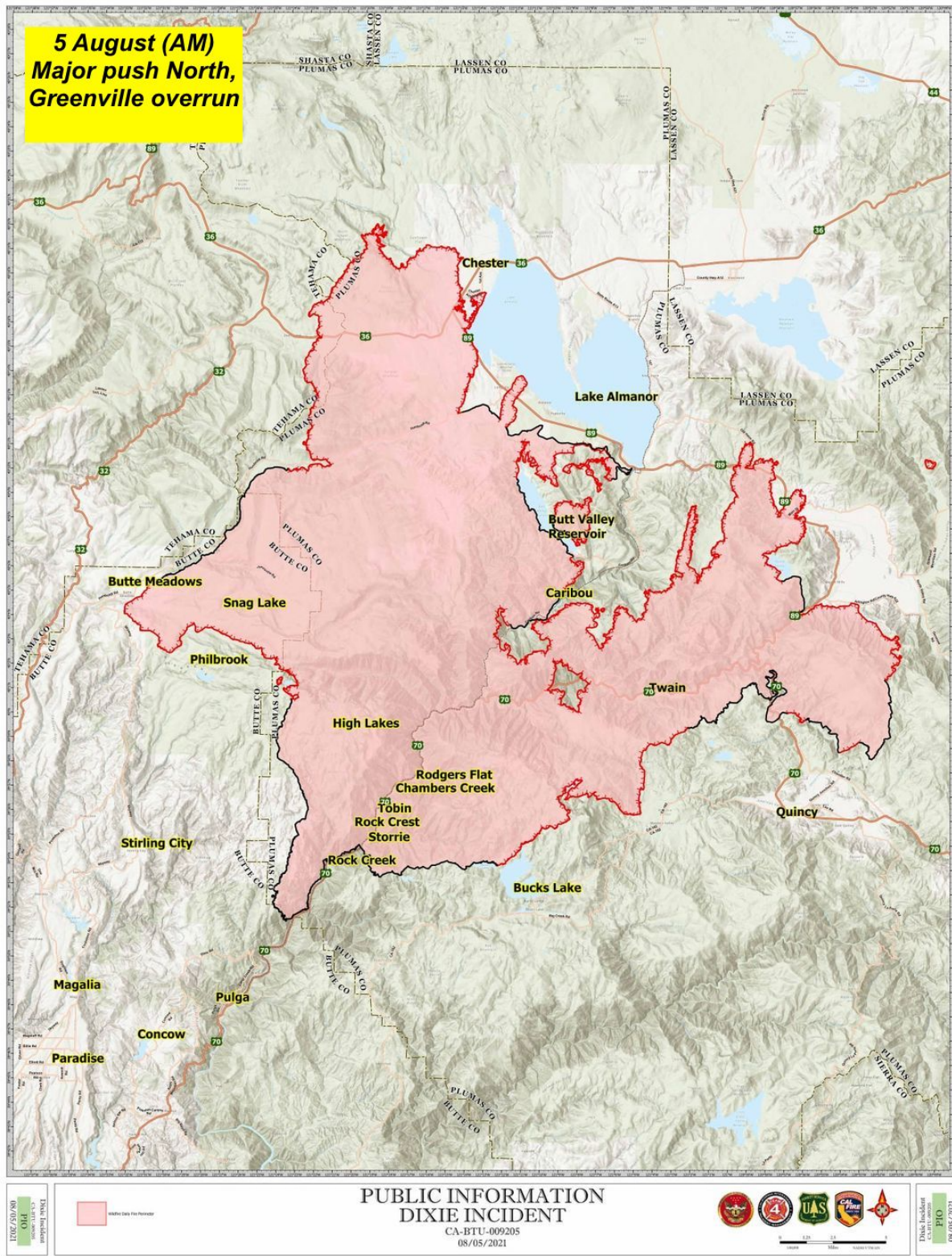
August 4, 2021 (AM) Perimeter Map:



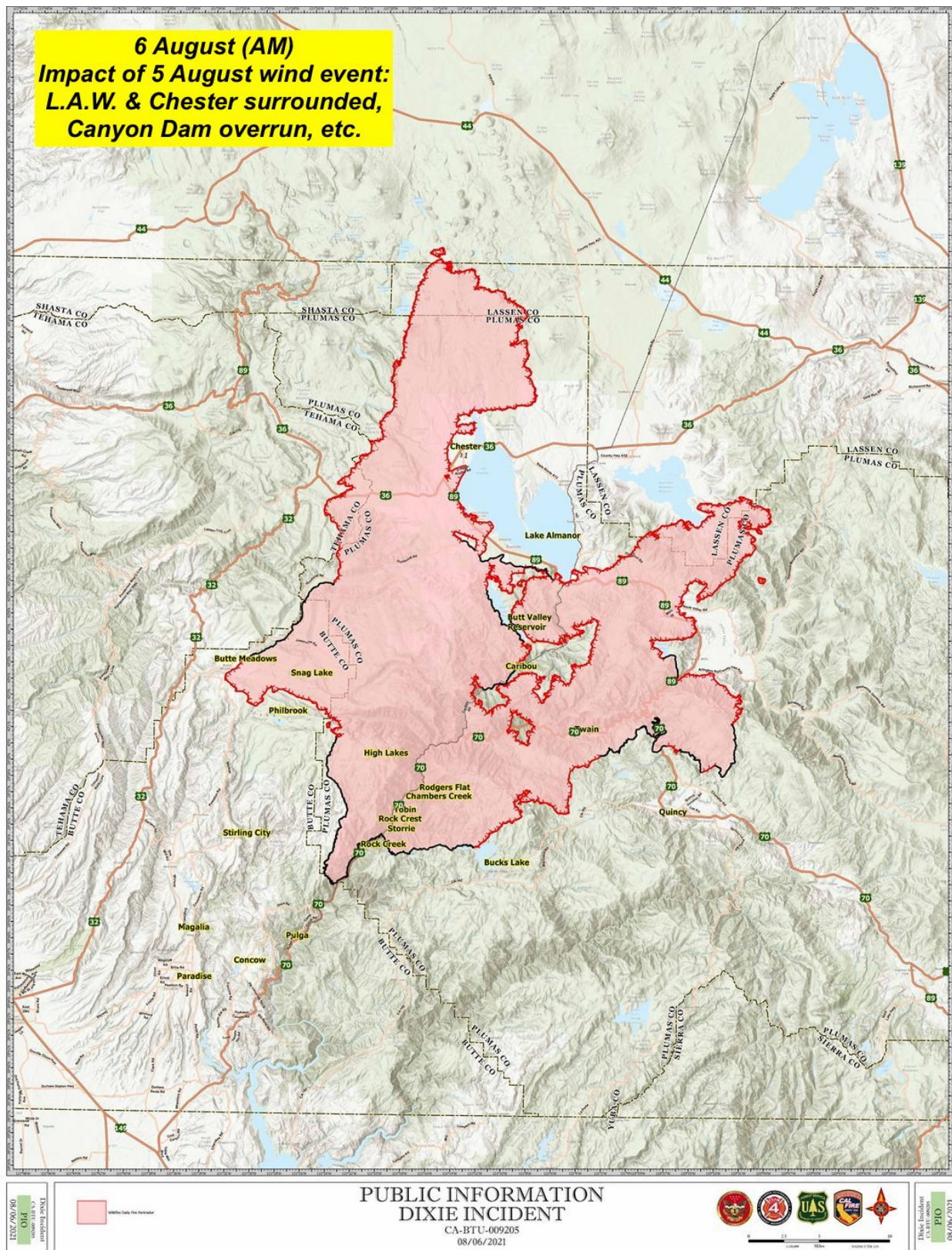
August 5, 2021 (PM) Heat Map:



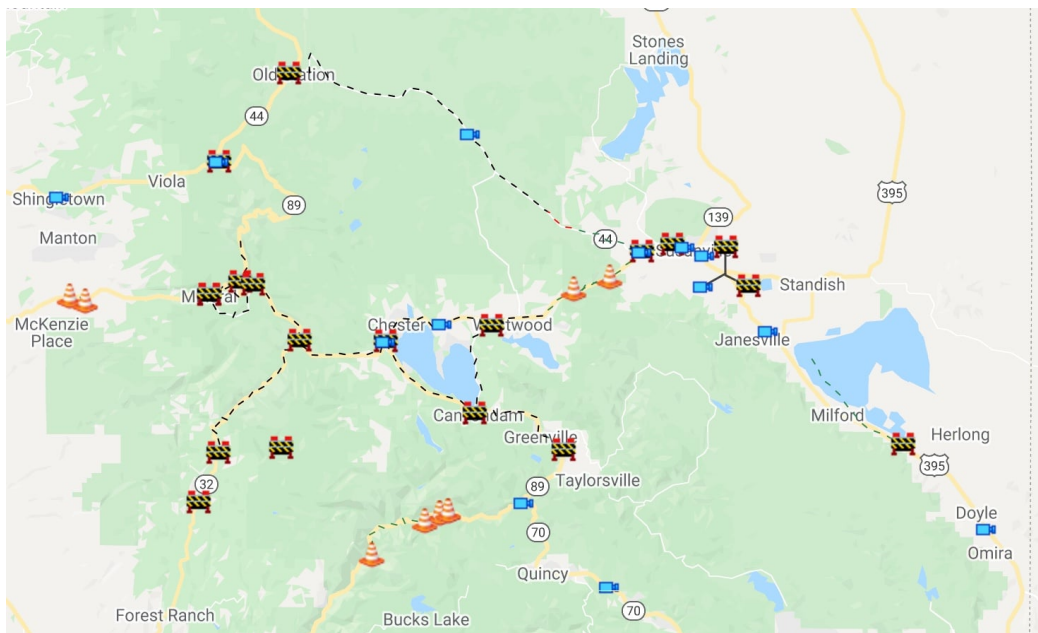
August 5, 2021 (AM) Perimeter Map:



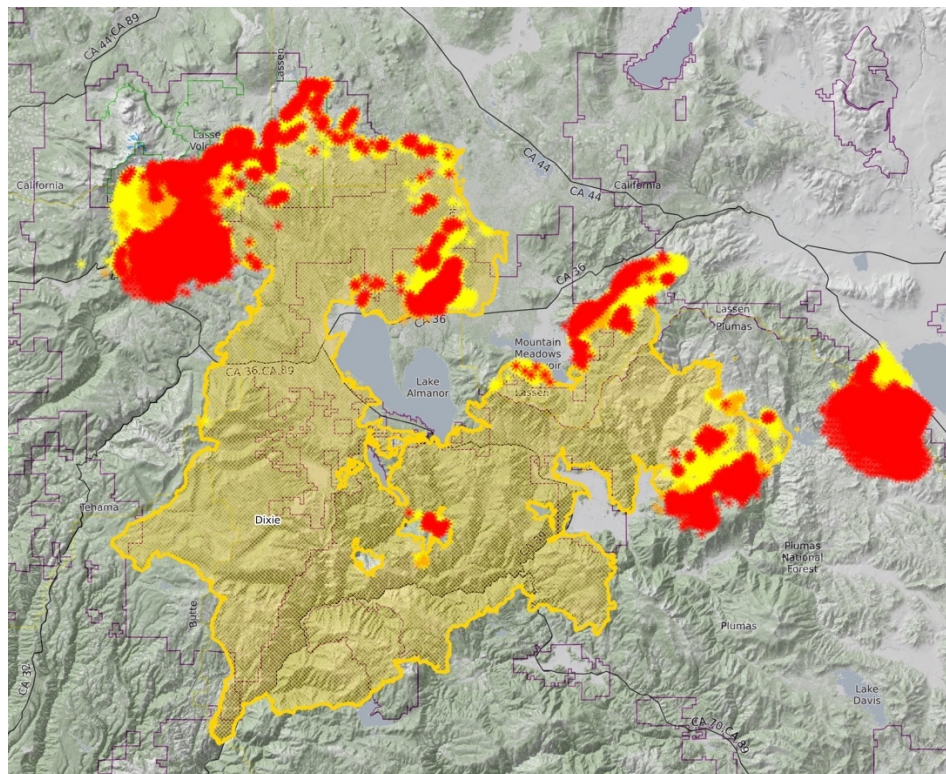
August 6, 2021 (AM) Perimeter Map:



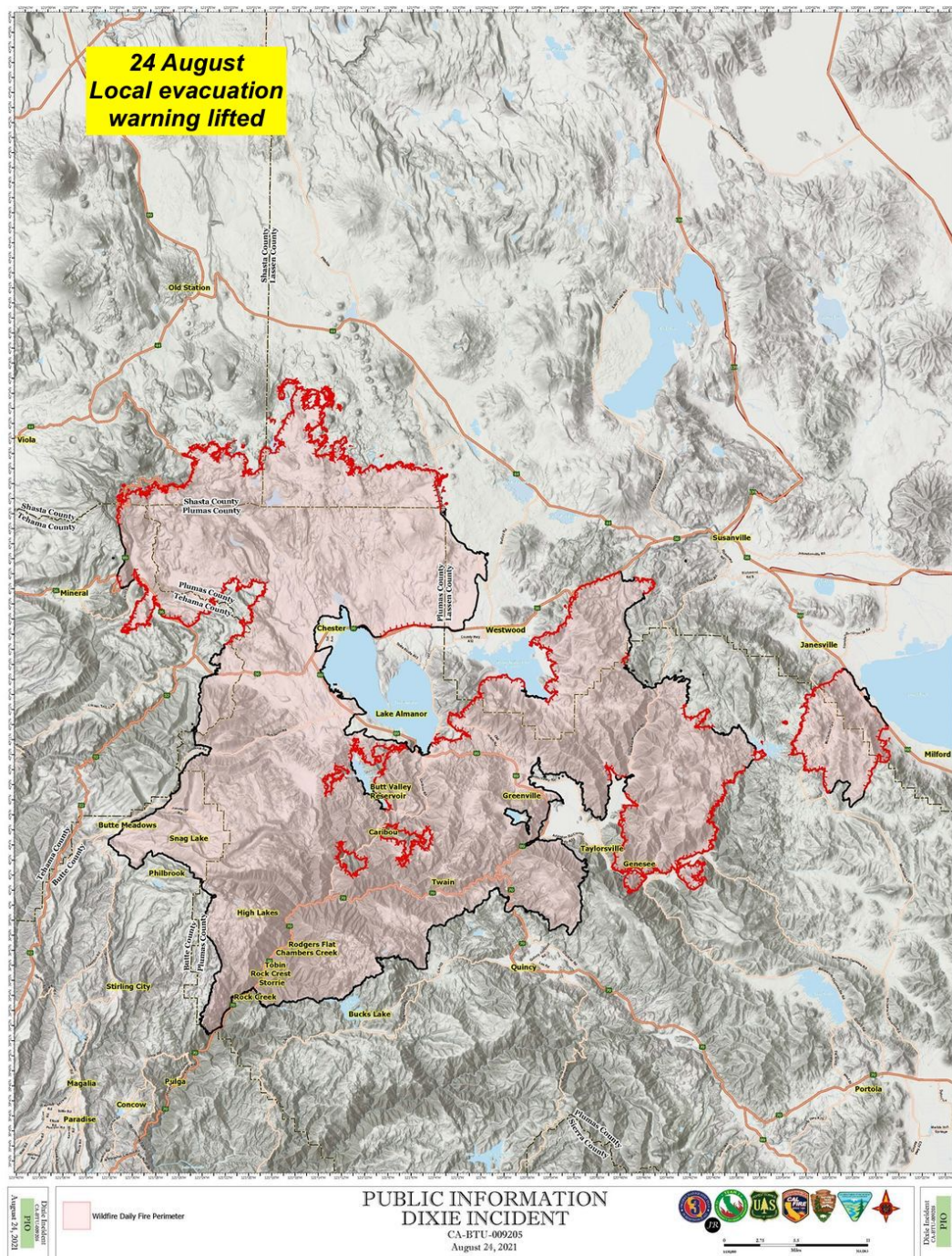
August 17, 2021 Highway Closure Map (from CalTrans):



August 18, 2021 Heat Map:

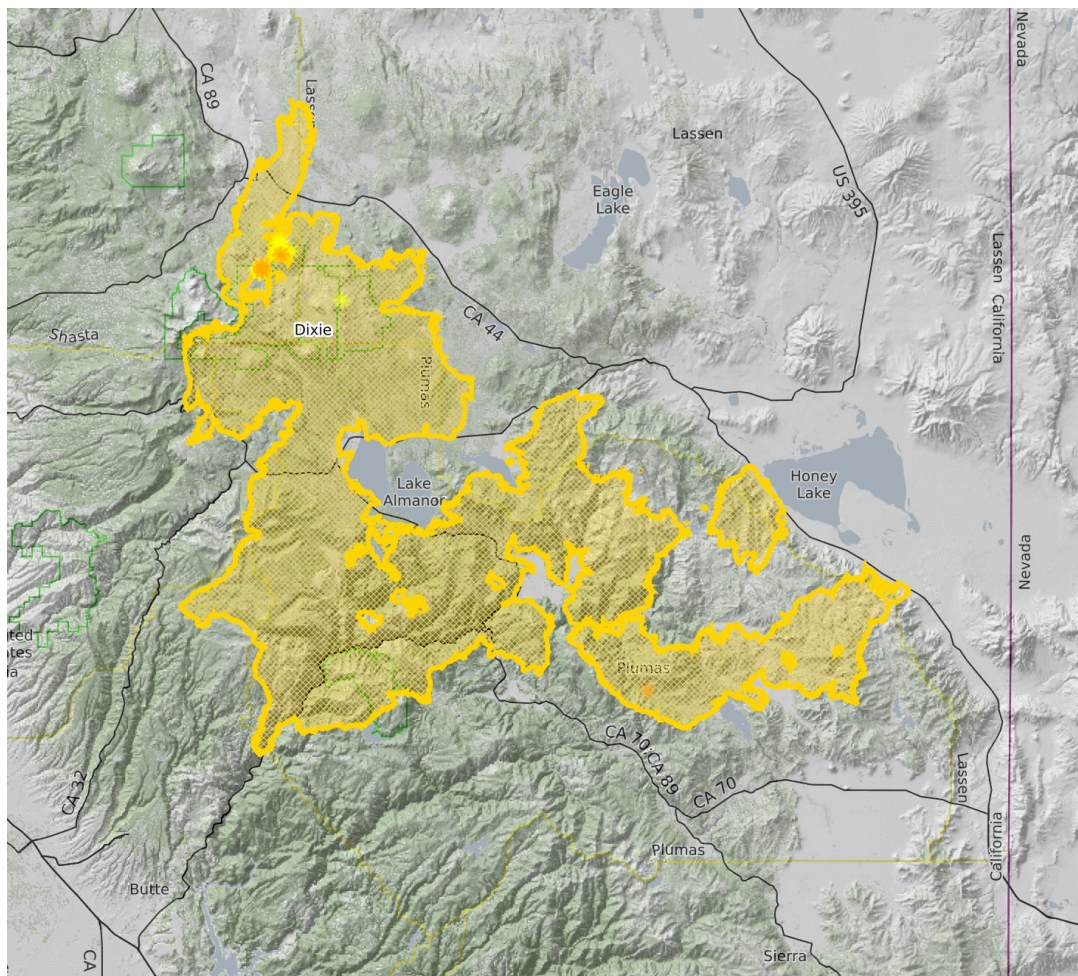


August 24, 2021 Perimeter Map:



Local repopulation allowed to begin.
Fire continues, primarily to the north.

September 28, 2021 Heat Map:

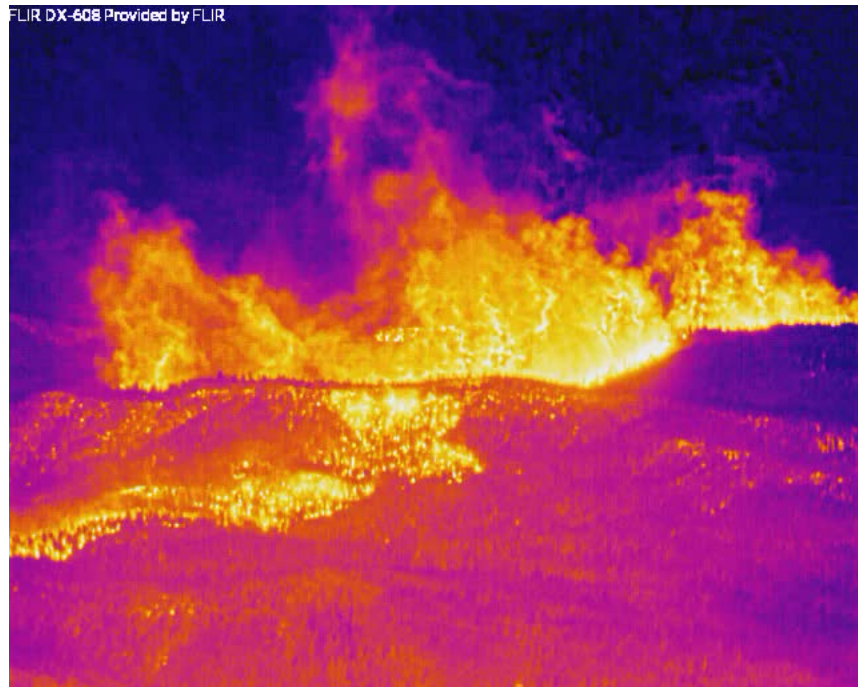


The fire was basically done expanding at this point, even though it was another month before it was declared fully contained.

Some Images

The local team was too busy dealing with the fire to do much personal photography, but there were other sources of images relevant to Lake Almanor West. Among those were the infrared cameras situated on Dyer Peak to the east, documenting the flame fronts from that elevated perspective. Many of those infrared (IR) images were posted online. Unfortunately, the IR images tended to generate fear in many observers since they appear to show incredible flame lengths above the trees. In reality, what was captured in the image was both the actual flames AND the heated air above the flames, creating an impression of much greater flame lengths than actually existed. Following are an example IR image plus several “regular” photographs from the primary area of interest.

Typical Infrared Image from Dyer Peak (looking west):



Before the Fire Arrived:



Typical overnight ashfall



Typical quarter mile visibility

Early August:



Crews staging on Hwy 89 (rare clear day)



WSFD Firefighter Rich Hawkins

August 3, 2021 on Osprey Loop:



A fire truck in every driveway

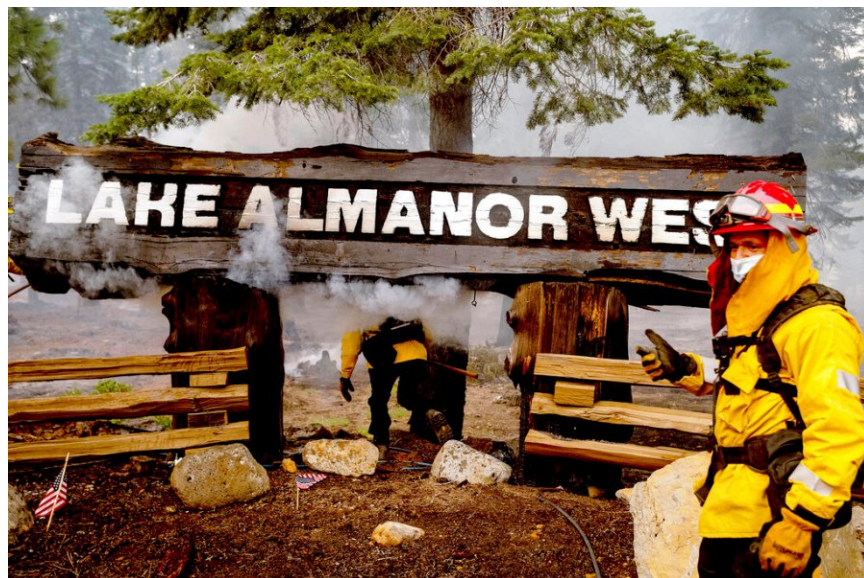


Fire right behind the houses

August 5, 2021 at the front entrance:



Photo taken by an El Dorado County strike team from a location along the private driveway, looking west into the WACC greenbelt parcel (Hwy 89 beyond). The photo was taken just before heavy winds arrived, which blew the fire 200 yards across the open area into vegetation on the east side of Goose Bay.



CalFire photo of visiting strike team members at the entrance sign.

Archery Range Road (looking west) , before and after:



Boat Launch Area (looking west), before and after:



(in 2024)

Overhead (satellite) Views, before and after:



Closing Comments

During the first part of the local task force mobilization, before the fire got close, the preparation activities were orderly and measured. The mood was relatively optimistic. We had faced inbound fires before, with the 2000 Storrie Fire and the 2012 Chips Fire, and there was hope that Dixie could be held short of Hwy 89 as well. The relatively slow movement of the fire during the latter part of July tended to support that optimism. But increasing wind activity dashed those hopes.

The mood became more somber when Dixie pushed across defensive lines and the second mandatory evacuation order was issued. It was becoming increasingly clear that there was going to be a dangerous fight on home turf very soon. Tensions rose significantly as the fire pushed into the development, but there was no hesitation on the part of the local fire team. Even when fire cut off highway routes and basically encircled the development, there was no panic. Questions were later asked: "Weren't you afraid?" The honest truth is that everybody was so busy doing their job that there was no time for fear. There was lots of stress and exhaustion, but the team relied on each other and simply stayed on task, day in and day out. We all knew where the safe zones were located (including the lake), and everybody had a fallback plan in mind if things really turned deadly. Thankfully it never came to that.

Large numbers of visiting firefighters were on the west shore during the critical periods of the Dixie Fire. It was difficult to determine exactly which crews were on duty here on any particular day, but all were focused on defending the community. Each team (ours included) had specific task assignments, so there wasn't a lot of discussion opportunity between teams since everyone was busy. The presence of professional strike team members was also a psychological boost to the local firefighters. And the fact that the local firefighters were willing to stand and fight had a motivational impact on the visitors as well. If the locals had decided to call it quits, there would not have been much incentive for the visitors to stay and fight.

Once the worst of the fire had passed by, the local focus was on reignitions and new spot fires, and there were plenty of each. There was at least a week of frequent activity to put out such flames in and immediately around the development. Some were annoyingly persistent; put the fire out and then return later to find that it had reignited once again. But with time the frequency and distribution of these fires slowly decreased.

Fatigue was becoming more of an issue by that point, as may have been apparent in some of the later e-mail messages to evacuees. CalFire regulations call for strike teams to rotate out for rest and recuperation after fourteen days of duty. During extreme conditions, or when it appears that the fire is almost out, that duty period can be extended to an absolute maximum of twenty eight days. However, our local task force remained on duty, with 12 hour daily shifts, for thirty two continuous days before they were released. Yes, they were definitely exhausted at the end.

Equipment maintenance was also becoming a concern at the end of the period. Most items were relatively minor, but one West Shore vehicle had to be taken out of service when its steering mechanism failed.

Once the ground had cooled and the air had cleared, we could gather our thoughts and share observations about what had taken place. It turns out that no single individual had a complete view of what was going on at the time. We were all constrained in our daily movement and had only a partial view of the immediate area due to heavy smoke. But conversations after the fact allowed the team to reconstruct things in a more complete manner. That process leads to the series of comments that follow.

General Fire Resiliency of the Development:

- Two decades of fire hazard reduction activity helped the development survive
- "Defensible space" really does matter
- Wider than normal building setbacks provide additional protection

Water Supply Infrastructure:

- The existing pumps, tanks, piping and hydrants were vital to the defense of the development
- Running a water tender refill line out to the highway greatly reduced turnaround time
- Visiting firefighters (most from more temperate climates) had to be advised to keep turning the freeze-proof valves on our hydrants to get the water flowing

Citizen Preparations:

- Creating an evacuation checklist and departure plan in advance is very important
- Doing a home contents inventory is vital for insurance claims
- Establishing and maintaining defensible space is critical
- When fire threatens, move combustibles off decks and away from structures

Auto-Start Electrical Generators:

- A very helpful accessory to keep refrigerators and freezers working during power outages
- Adequate fuel and motor oil is essential during extended outages

Concerns Noted by Firefighters:

- Firewood stacked too close to structures
- Combustible items on decks, under decks, against structures
- Conifer needles on roofs, in gutters, against structures
- Fire-prone vegetation near structures (junipers, manzanita)
- Windows (and doors) inadvertently left open during a rushed evacuation