



Shasta County

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March 13, 2019

Kate Gordon, Director
Commission on Catastrophic Wildfire Cost and Recovery
Governor's Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

Subject: Carr Fire
Synopsis of Historical Land Use

Dear Ms. Gordon:

The 2018 Carr Fire was a very destructive disaster in our community. We appreciate the assistance of state and federal agencies in aiding our recovery. We also appreciate the Governor's initiative in charging the Commission to explore root causes. California wildfires have been growing in number and severity and the underlying causes should be explored.

Land use management has been mentioned as one potential contributing factor to the growth in fires ("Bad Planning"). We support this line of inquiry with the caveat that facts should control the narrative. Critiques should be based upon detailed inquiries into specific land use histories within recent fire areas. With this in mind we offer the following historical narrative to the Carr Fire:

In 1850, massive sulfide ore deposits were found near the Town of Shasta. Thousands of people settled within the Shasta Mining District (Carr Fire footprint). The Town of Shasta became the County seat. Over the next sixty years, millions of tons of copper and zinc were mined and processed in the Shasta Mining District. Thousands of parcels were created through federal patents, grant deeds and town plats. The community was prosperous but not idyllic. Smelter fumes killed all vegetation and degraded public health. Acid mine drainage led to massive fish kills.

In the 1880's, the railroad bypassed the Town of Shasta in favor of a valley route to Redding. The County seat moved to Redding but mining activity continued in the Shasta Mining District.

The mining boom ended in the 1910's. Agricultural interests in the Valley won legal injunctions to shut down the smelters. Folks continued to use the existing infrastructure (roads, bridges, buildings, parcels, etc.). Mining activities continued sporadically. Denuded lands grew brush which eventually led to high fuel loads.

In the 1890's, the California Legislature passed the first precursors to the Subdivision Map Act. Local agencies were eventually enabled to regulate land use within their respective jurisdictions.

The last century has been an era of renewal for the former Shasta Mining District watershed. The Iron Mountain Mine was shut down and cleaned up (it had been the worst polluter of surface waters in the United States). The Trinity Project was constructed with attendant water supply and recreation benefits. Local planning efforts gradually redressed the thousands of pre-existing roads, buildings, parcels and contaminated sites in the watershed. Small townsite parcels were consolidated and large-lot developments were approved with proper roads and infrastructure. Trail systems were developed. Mature trees emerged from the dense understory which remained despite controlled burns and other measures. Redding's urban area has recently expanded into the watershed. The total population within the former Shasta Mining District has fluctuated but did not exceed Nineteenth Century numbers until very recently.

In July 2018, the Carr Fire swept through these lands. The fire was preceded by weeks of high temperatures. A vehicle traveling along State Route 299 sparked a fire which quickly spread to adjoining federal lands. Crews battled the flames for several days. High fuel loads and strong winds eventually created a fire tornado. A thousand homes were destroyed and eight people died in the conflagration.

The Carr Fire should be viewed in its historical context. It was an echo of unmanaged land uses in the Nineteenth Century. The Twentieth Century brought renewal through local land use management. The Carr Fire was a singular traumatic event for our community and also a step towards recovery. The brush is gone. Debris cleanup is complete and rebuilding has begun. Ongoing projects will mitigate future fire damage through permanent restoration of watershed ecology. Progress has been made and the processes should continue.

If you have any questions, please give me a call at (530) 225-5661.

Sincerely,



Patrick J. Minturn, Director

PJM/ldr