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## Worst Fire Season Ever?

By Nick Marnell



Deer Hill Road fire brightens sky July 29  
Photo courtesy ConFire

went right back to work. No one else was injured, no cattle were injured and no homes were damaged.

A 10-acre vegetation fire broke out along Deer Hill Road in Lafayette the previous day. The fire was reported at 4:10 a.m. and nearly 70 firefighters brought it under control by 5:30 a.m. Contra Costa County Fire Protection District fire marshal Robert Marshall said that the brush fire threatened a home 100 feet from the flames, but no structures were destroyed, no injuries were reported and the only property damage was to a cellular phone tower.

The cause of each fire remains under investigation.

On Aug. 5, ConFire and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection announced the arrest of James William Wilson, who was booked in the county jail in Martinez on eight counts of arson. Investigators said that Wilson's activities were attributed to more than 30 fires since April along State Routes 4 and 24, and all three Lamorinda communities were affected. "Brush, grass and landscaping, as well as outbuildings, were threatened, including occupied residences," said Cal Fire division chief Jim Crawford.

The arson investigation is ongoing, and officials would not confirm that either the Natalie Drive fire or the Deer Hill Road fire were the doings of Wilson.

Earlier this year, ConFire chief Jeff Carman predicted that this fire season was going to be catastrophic. "I think we're seeing that in so many ways, most notably fire spread," he said. "I just keep holding my breath that we don't lose any firefighters."

With 11,000 firefighters battling 19 active California wildfires in early August, and two firefighters killed while in action, catastrophic may be too mild an adjective to describe what lies ahead.

Two large vegetation fires that required a combined response of more than 190 fire personnel seared Lafayette and Moraga during a late-July heat wave.

On July 30, firefighters extinguished a vegetation fire in a cattle ranch near Natalie Drive in Moraga. More than 120 fire personnel from various agencies responded to the 4-alarm fire, which charred approximately 40 acres.

"It's the largest vegetation fire I've seen here in my 10 years with the district," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighter Mark DeWeese. The fire was reported at 12:35 p.m. and was contained in slightly more than one hour.

MOFD fire chief Stephen Healy praised the efforts of the rancher who had recently mowed the area near the site of the fire. The fire threatened structures in the nearby neighborhood but crept no closer than 100 feet to the nearest yard.

One firefighter received a minor injury and



MOFD engine parked in neighborhood driveway during wildfire attack July 30 Photo courtesy MOFD

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