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**Governor discusses urgent need for fuel reduction this wildfire season**



Photo Steven Danziger

**Gov. Newsom outlines North Orinda Fuel Break program.**

**By Nick Marnell**

Gov. Gavin Newsom traveled to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District April 23 to outline his major statewide fire prevention plan, encompassing 35 projects he approved for areas in California most vulnerable to a devastating wildfire.

When Newsom took office in January, he asked the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for a list of state areas in urgent need of fuel reductions and other preventive measures to ward off wildfires. Cal Fire submitted a list of 35 statewide projects, including the North Orinda Fuel Break, a 14-mile shaded fuel break from near the top of Eagle's Nest Trail, down Wildcat Canyon Road to Bear Creek Road and along Lafayette Ridge to Pleasant Hill Road.

"This is one of the larger projects of the 35," Newsom said, speaking at a press conference in Tilden Park, about one mile from the site of the 1991 Oakland Hills fire and adjacent to the western terminus of the North Orinda Fuel Break project, and within MOFD jurisdiction. The 1,700-acre north Orinda project, No. 9 on the Cal Fire list, affects more than 500,000 people in 30 East Bay communities. "You are as vulnerable as Butte County," said Newsom, referring to the 2018 Camp Fire, which killed 85 and destroyed more than 13,000 homes.

The governor said that

the 1991 Oakland Hills fire was seared into everyone's memory, and it has presented new standards and expectations. "We've been scatter-shot, but not as deliberate as we are today," Newsom said. "I signed a declaration of emergency in advance of an emergency."

Newsom acknowledged that transferring the money to the jurisdictions that are spearheading the projects has been a complex process. MOFD, which will partner with various public agencies to complete the north Orinda project, had not received a contract with grant terms from Cal Fire by the date of the press conference. But Cal Fire Director Thom Porter said that the agency is committed to having state workers and contractors on the job in north Orinda in early May. "We'll also see some National Guard that we've pulled off the border to do some real work," Newsom said, a dig at President Donald Trump.

Porter also said that the MOFD North Orinda Fuel Break grant has been increased to \$6 million. Once the contracts between Cal Fire and MOFD have been finalized, the grant will go to the fire district board for acceptance.

Newsom echoed what MOFD officials have been stressing now more than ever. "We can't do it alone," the governor said. "We need folks to work on defensible space. Nothing is more important than localism."

**At last, redwood trees removed from Orinda mini park**

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but now, with the greater awareness of fire safety, that has stopped. PG&E brought in a bucket vehicle and checked the trees for nesting birds and bees. According to PG&E spokesperson Megan McFarland, here were no bird nests or nesting birds in any of the trees removed. There was an active bee nest. Apiary enthusiast Brandon Drew of B&B Family Farms was called upon

to help relocate the bees.

Drew advised waiting until early morning to remove the nest, which was actually located in an old squirrel's nest – a first for Drew. Early in the morning, all the bees would very likely be in the hive, as they don't fly when the temperature is cool. Using the bucket vehicle, the nest was removed and placed in a bee box in the morning. In the evening, it was transported to another location. It will be re-

located back into the same area in about two to three weeks. By that time, the old worker bees will have died, as their natural lifespan is about three weeks, and so the bees won't try to return to the original location. Drew said that the bees had not been traumatized by the tree removal and were likely out foraging over their two- to three-mile flight pattern. The team responsible for the tree removal included an arborist.

**MOFD ramps up fire prevention efforts to allay rough fire season ahead**

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Only vegetation can go through the chipper, trees must be less than 6 feet in diameter and the chipped vegetation will not be hauled away but repurposed on the property. The program is intended for neighborhoods, not individuals, and complete program details can be found on the MOFD website.

The board approved the purchase of two utility pickup trucks, one of which will be used in the chipping program and the other for out-of-county

deployments by personnel who travel to wildland mutual aid incidents. Fire Chief Dave Winnacker said that through these deployments, district personnel gain invaluable experience on large-scale wildland incidents that is transferable to the local area.

MOFD further beefed up its apparatus fleet with the board-approved purchase of a new Type 6 fire engine, a small vehicle used to transport firefighters to the scene of hard-to-reach wildland fires, like those that could occur in district high

fire hazard severity zones.

A major component of any fire prevention plan is the cooperation of district residents. Rein said that everyone needs to comply with the fire code and maintain a defensible space on their property, and observe the district June 15 weed abatement deadline. "We're all in this together and we're all part of the solution," Rein said. "We need the residents to do their part to prepare for a very rough fire season ahead."

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