

also was placed on the

Love Creek Slide

1-10-82

Search Suspended

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The search for bodies beneath the Love Creek Heights mudslide was suspended Saturday after geologists declared the area unsafe.

Sheriff Al Noren told The Sentinel geologists decided the area could be "unstable." The declaration came after three more bodies were recovered Saturday.

The discoveries brought the county storm's death toll to 15, and authorities believe as many as four more bodies will

be found in the mountain community, according to Ben Lomond Fire spokesman Earl Robertson.

Eight homes were buried in the massive mudslide one mile up Love Creek Road from Ben Lomond early Tuesday morning after Monday's historic storm saturated the area with rain.

Saturday, Earl Hart, a state division of Mines and Geology official, said geologists have estimated the slide is 1,000 to 1,500 feet wide and 1,500 feet long.

Noren said geologists planned to survey the area again today and determine how severe the problem is.

At the devastated site, it appears that an entire section of the mountain behind the homes released a vast inverted funnel-shaped mass of land and trees that slid downward toward the canyon.

Its mass buried most of the homes and splintered others. They appear as match boxes dumped upon a table, broken and intertwined with massive redwoods, downed and broken in the slide.

Large earth-moving machines donated by local lumber firms and weary Ben Lomond volunteer firemen are digging to the homes and carefully sifting through them. Trained dogs are used to find the bodies.

A reflection of the grimness of the Love Creek site can be found in Brookdale where volunteers and residents continued Saturday to bring Clear Creek under control and prevent its undermining Highway 9 in front of Brookdale Lodge.

The lodge was severely damaged by the creek at the height of the storm, only one day after its formal opening following years of closure.

At the lodge now is the Red Cross rescue center, and volunteer Maria McClain there said Saturday that more and more people are arriving for help.

"It's surprising, but there are more people now. It seems that many of them waited at homes that can't be lived in, expecting help to come. It never did and they are coming in," she said.

The rescue center needs child care equipment, portable cribs and chairs and toys, and the "chef" of the rescue center said he wishes someone would donate a few 10-pound roasts and some fresh produce so the menu can be varied.

Along with Brookdale, St. John's Church in Felton is serving as a rescue center and among its dispossessed are refugees from Gold Gulch and Felton Grove, two areas near downtown Felton that were flooded by waters that reached more than 10 feet.

Volunteers were working in both areas to clean the mud and silt, trying to make liveable homes that may be total losses.

The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District is providing free shuttle buses from Zayante Fire Station to the rescue centers. The buses are marked with a red cross.

While the valley is muddied from the worst storm in history and battered in many areas and bloodied, there is an awakening spirit in the past few days that the damage is done and rebuilding must begin.

It's a bustling valley and strangely

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more alive than usual in the work that has to be done to restore services to everyone — to get water to Brookdale and dozens of other places, to clean up the Grove and Alba Road and Zayante and Lompico and other hard-hit areas.

The intensity of the volunteers' work was expressed Friday morning by Felton Fire Chief Mac McDonnell who awakened from his first deep sleep and seriously asked his wife, "Is this Wednesday?" He lost two days in the busiest week the county's ever known.

Adding to the energy of the valley are the hundreds of outside volunteers, the

conservation corps, the youth authority, the seemingly hundreds of utility trucks restoring services and the Army trucks along Highway 9 in Ben Lomond and Brookdale dispensing tanks of needed water.

All of the upper valley from Ben Lomond north is on "health use only" with water (drinking and flushing) and adjoining areas are asked to voluntarily restrict use of water.

Electrical and gas services have been mostly restored and downed wires are being lifted into place.

At one point in the valley where some power poles fell in the storm, the heavy

strands of wires are held in their elevated positions with bright yellow rope tied to the nearest tree.

The roads are under continuous repair by county and Caltrans crews, and officials repeatedly state that people who don't belong in the valley should stay out.

While there are pockets of real trouble left, the valley is beginning to have the appearance of returning to normalcy. The stores are opening and some business is being done.

In Saturday's bright sunlight, one man commented, "Civilization has returned. Cable television is back and we can watch the game Sunday."