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A firefighter holds the line in the forest underbrush, part of what made the Lockheed fire a challenge to contain. *Fire & Fire Protection Dept Post 82809*

Lockheed Fire Claims 7,817 Acres and Costs \$29 million

by Linda Fridy

A still-smoldering fire that started Aug. 12 near the Lockheed Martin facility on Empire Grade north of Santa Cruz charred 7,817 acres before it was contained.

On Aug. 23, about 800 firefighters and 50 engines remained working on

mopping up the fire.

The cost to fight the fire was about \$29 million to control. Fortunately, the cost in terms of people, homes and businesses was much lower.

Firefighters from around the state succeeded in protecting homes in Bonny Doon, Swanton and Davenport.

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The fire destroyed 13 out-buildings, which include four seasonal cabins. Another structure was damaged.

Ten firefighters sustained minor injuries.

Cal Fire announced it had contained the fire on Aug. 22, 10 days after it took off through the heavy brush, quickly spreading over rough terrain. At one point, more than 2,300 firefighters were on scene as helicopters and tankers buzzed overhead.

Paying for those people and the support system they require make up more than 90 percent of the cost to fight the fire, according to Cal Fire Battalion Chief Julie Hutchinson. She reported that as of Aug. 24, air support cost \$2,466,133, with the rest for personnel and base camp necessities such as food, showers, tents, laundry and fuel.

"Basically, the incident must set up a base camp or small 'city' to support all of the incoming resources and personnel 24 hours a day," she explained.

At one point about 2,000 residents were evacuated from

Bonny Doon and other nearby communities. At the height of operations, about 2,300 fire personnel were involved in operations, including a tent camp set up at the county fairgrounds in Watsonville.

Many of those firefighters work for the state, but others are on loan from fire departments and districts, including those within Santa Cruz County. Those districts will be reimbursed for their time and equipment, earning them some of the fire's costs in addition to their revenues from property taxes.

Local Fire Districts Paid for Fighting Lockheed Blaze

The state pays time-and-a-half for the personnel, along with additional fees for engines and administration, explained Scotts Valley Fire Chief Mike McMurry. He is still working on his district's bill for the Lockheed Fire.

Central Fire still had personnel assigned to the Lockheed fire as of Aug. 25 and also had not finalized its expenses.

McMurry recalled a time when smaller departments like those in Santa Cruz County benefited from state payments

based on average salaries in the region. Big departments such as San Jose and San Francisco, with higher salaries, drove the average above local actual costs. Now, however, the state pays based on each person's current salary.

Although the department may come out ahead on the 11 percent administration fee, it also has to wait for payment. McMurry was still waiting for a portion of last year's \$360,000 for Scotts Valley's cost in fighting area wildfires when the state ran out of money and stopped making payments, although Scotts Valley Fire eventually received the money.

Those whose homes were saved cannot put a price on their gratitude and firefighters returned the praise residents have heaped on them.

"On behalf of the Cal Fire Incident Command Team 9, we would like to thank the residents of Bonny Doon, Davenport and the Swanton and Last Chance areas. Your patience and understanding during the evacuation assisted the firefighters in extinguishing the wildfire that threatened the area," Cal Fire officials noted. ■