



Yosemite West Property & Homeowners, Inc.

YWPHI Annual Meeting Speakers

September 2, 2018

Kelly Martin, Chief of Fire and Aviation Management at Yosemite National Park, made her (at least) annual visit to Yosemite West to meet with residents as part of our Labor Day weekend BBQ. Here's some notes about the conversation with Chief Martin.

Chief Martin arrived in Yosemite in 2006, and one of her first observations was that it was a matter of when, not if, a fire would come up the Merced River canyon into the Yosemite West community. Kim O'Neil and John Mock have done an amazing job over those years in improving the defensibility of the community via grants that protect our entire neighborhood. We've had nine grants totalling \$840,000! But even having come through the Ferguson Fire, it's critical that each of the home and property owners in Yosemite West improve their work to protect their property and the community. Now is not the time to get complacent. It's the time to double down.

On the Ferguson Fire, Chief Martin pointed out that the fire could not have started in a worse place – at the mouth of the South Fork, leading into an area with few roads and difficult access issues. Past fires, like the Avalanche Fire (2011) and the Grouse Fire (2009) ultimately acted as critical shock absorbers and demonstrated the critical role of previous burns in limiting the damage from future fires. We believe the Ferguson Fire has a human cause, but it is still under investigation. There's a lot of suppression repair being done now, and we should expect to see quite a bit of pile burning into winter.

Looking forward, we should expect more prescribed burning. This daily work is so important to the health and safety of our forests and property. We can't cut our way out. We can't graze our way out. We have to manage the land. Our patience and support of these prescribed burns is critical to managing the risk of large fires. There's backpressure on these burns from air quality administrators and sometimes even local community members, but it's really important that we support these controlled burn efforts because they're the most effective tool we have to mitigating the risk to the community from unplanned fires.

Two things really helped us on the public communication front this year. It feels like the first year that we've gotten really solid social media engagement, and the video content seems to have really resonated with people. Additionally, we now have better smoke forecasting, which has been helpful in planning operations and also setting expectations with community members.

Parker Bevington, Yosemite National Park Wawona Station Captain also shared about his experience with the Ferguson Fire. Chief Bevington grew up in El Portal, and this was his 16th fire season here. In addition to the amazing work of all of the fire crews, Chief Bevington attributed the protection of the community to three factors: seasonality, resources, contingency planning, all of which were critical to the community surviving the fire. The Ferguson fire started relatively early in the season, which meant there were additional resources available that had not yet been committed to other incidents. This gave the team time and people to build contingency plans and lines in addition to the initial containment lines. It's these early contingency plans and lines that were ultimately used to protect the neighborhood. They were moderately confident the final back burn would work, but it was a real concern and a concern that highlighted a previously heard concern about the community: there's only way out, and that's via Henness Ridge Rd to Wawona Rd.

Fun fact: they laid 85,000 feet of hose just around the community of Yosemite West.

Questions and answers with the community:

- What is Camp 1? This is the former Sugarpine logging camp at the top of the abandoned incline railway down to El Portal – the top of an 84% grade.
- What can homeowners do? Sign up for Nixie alerts. Have a plan for evacuation, and when an evacuation is recommended or ordered, evacuate in a safe and timely fashion. It's critical that residents have a plan to leave so firefighters can operate freely. Finally, ensure defensible space around your property: keep wood away from your house, clear brush, pine needles, etc. See <http://www.readyforwildfire.org/> for more.
- Should owners invest in phoscheck or foil wrap for their homes? No. It's more important to be prepared ahead of time with defensible space and evacuate when the time comes. Phoscheck is already carried by the crews, and must be applied shortly before fire reaches, so it's unlikely you could apply it meaningfully before evacuating.
- Where's our greatest risk of fire from now? It's still from the downslope sides of Yosemite West. There are still unburned fuels, and while this fire did clear out a lot of ground fuels, those will grow back sooner than you expect, so it's important to continue to be prepared.
- What else should we expect? There's a lot of cleanup happening still in the community, and we'll be trying to get in and burn piles between now and winter.

Pamela Schultz then introduced her son-in-law, Dustin Clevenger. He grew up in Hilo, Hawaii as an acquaintance of Brian Hughes, who lost his life defending Yosemite West during the Ferguson Fire. Dustin shared heartfelt words of remembrance about their community and about Brian. He was always known as a selfless, caring, joyful, humble, and down-to-earth man, and that is how he'll be remembered both back in Hilo and within the California fire and mountain communities.

Finally, Ted Williams noted that Brian Hughes will be honored by a memorial boulder at the Henness Ridge Road guard rail area near the junction with Yosemite Park Way. YWPHI then presented plaques for each of the teams that defended the community. Representing those teams were YNP Fire chief Kelly Martin, battalion captain Parker Bevington, and battalion captain Russell Mitchell. An additional plaque was presented for Dustin Clevenger to give to Paige Miller, fiancé of fallen firefighter Brian Hughes.

Respectfully submitted by Scott Renfro.

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Page 2 of 2

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