



# 2015 FIRE SEASON AFTER ACTION REPORT



*Fireman spraying the fiery hillside. Photo Credit: SFGate*

**Gavin Newsom**  
**Governor**

**Nancy Ward**  
**Director**  
**Governor's Office of Emergency Services**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	1
Foreword .....	1
Executive Summary .....	2
Description of Events.....	4
Response Activities – State Agencies .....	8
Response Activities – OPERATIONAL AREAS .....	13
Initial Recovery Activities .....	17
Contributing Agencies .....	A-1
List of Acronyms .....	B-1

## FOREWORD

---

Per the *Emergency Services Act, Article 9.5, Government Code Section 8607(f)*, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in cooperation with involved state and local agencies, shall complete an After Action Report (AAR) after each gubernatorial-proclaimed disaster. This report shall provide a review of public safety response and disaster recovery activities and conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. Cal OES shall make the report available to all interested public safety and emergency management organizations.

An After Action/Corrective Action Report serves the following essential functions:

- Provides a source for documenting response and early recovery activities
- Identifies problems and successes during emergency operations
- Analyzes the effectiveness of the different components of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)
- Describes and defines a plan of corrective action for implementing recommended improvements to existing emergency response efforts

Representatives of public safety or emergency management organizations can obtain a copy of this report by submitting a request to:

[SharedMail.CalAAR@CalOES.ca.gov](mailto:SharedMail.CalAAR@CalOES.ca.gov).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The 2015 fire season at the time had some of the most destructive fires in California history. Severe drought conditions and extreme weather exacerbated the wildfires burning across the state. Thousands of residents were forced to evacuate as the fires burned close to the communities, damaging highways and threatening structures. Two of the most significant fires of the season, the Valley Fire and Butte Fire, burned 146,935 acres and destroyed 2,923 structures combined in Napa, Lake, Sonoma, Amador, and Calaveras counties. There was one reported injury and six reported fatalities. More than 2,400 firefighters battled the blaze, according to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) officials, with hot and dry conditions making the fire unpredictable and highly volatile. Five operational areas (OA) proclaimed a local emergency due to these two fires, including Calaveras, Lake, Napa, Sonoma, and Yolo counties.

Governor Jerry Brown proclaimed a State of Emergency for five fires and authorized California Disaster Assistance Act funding for San Bernardino, Napa, Solano, Yolo, Lake, Sonoma, Amador, and Calaveras counties. The State of



*A Cal FIRE truck drives away from flames during the Rocky Fire near Clearlake. Photo Credit: Josh Edelson – AFP/Getty Images*

Emergency proclamations allowed the state to mobilize additional firefighting and disaster response resources. Numerous hours, personnel, resources, and funds were utilized to respond to and recover from these incidents, including support from local governments, state

government, and various local and national non-profits.

## SUMMARY OF SUCCESSES

- The Cal OES Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) coordinated with the American Red Cross (Red Cross) and a vendor to provide case management services to support survivors in Lake and Calaveras counties.

- Cal OES Logistics team established a base camp in Lake County, which supported over a hundred first responders and emergency workers with meals, laundry, and other support services.
- Cal OES Public Safety Communications and CA-ESF 2 supported restoring essential telecommunication systems.
- Caltrans's public information officer (PIO) leveraged social media to communicate traffic conditions and route closure information.
- The county Office of Emergency Services (OES) used multiple methods of communication to send out evacuation warnings and orders to their residents, including satellite phones, telephones, and door-to-door notifications.
- Counties leveraged the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to support animal care and evacuee shelters.

### ***SUMMARY OF AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT***

- Multiple fire incidents throughout the state led to local and state entities competing for the same resources.
- Counties did not have a plan to address accessibility needs for Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs).
- Counties reported a breakdown in communication within the emergency operations center (EOC), resulting in delays in incident response.
- Counties identified gaps with evacuations and established shelters for evacuees and animal care.
- County Fire, Law, and OES must collaborate on unified messaging.

## DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS

---

### STATISTICAL SUMMARY

#### ACRES BURNED

North Fire	4,250
Wragg Fire	8,051
Rocky Fire	69,438
Butte Fire	70,868
Valley Fire	76,067
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>228,674</b>

#### STRUCTURES DESTROYED

North Fire	68
Wragg Fire	6
Rocky Fire	96
Butte Fire	965
Valley Fire	1,958
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,093</b>

#### STRUCTURES DAMAGED

North Fire	4
Wragg Fire	1
Rocky Fire	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>

#### FATALITIES

Butte Fire	2
Valley Fire	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>

#### INJURIES

Butte Fire	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>

**INCIDENT PERIOD**

North Fire	July 17, 2015 to July 21, 2015
Wragg Fire	July 22, 2015 to August 5, 2015
Rocky Fire	July 29, 2015 to August 14, 2015
Butte Fire	September 9, 2015 to October 15, 2015
Valley Fire	September 12, 2015 to October 15, 2015

**DECLARATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS**

**LOCAL PROCLAMATIONS**

Yolo County	August 10, 2015 (Wragg Fire)
Lake County	August 11, 2015 (Rocky Fire) September 12, 2015 (Valley Fire)
Calaveras County	September 10, 2015 (Butte Fire)
Sonoma County	September 12, 2015 (Valley Fire)
Napa County	September 13, 2015 (Valley Fire)

**STATE OF EMERGENCY**

San Bernardino County	July 7, 2015 (North Fire)
Napa County	July 23, 2015 (Wragg Fire) September 12, 2015 (Valley Fire)
Solano County	July 23, 2015 (Wragg Fire)
Yolo County	July 23, 2015 (Wragg Fire)
Lake County	August 2, 2015 (Rocky Fire)
Amador County	September 10, 2015 (Butte Fire)
Calaveras County	September 10, 2015 (Butte Fire)
Sonoma County	September 12, 2015 (Valley Fire)

## INCIDENT BACKGROUND

### NORTH FIRE

The North Fire began on July 17, 2015, and burned in San Bernardino County, scorching 4,250 acres, and destroying 22 structures. It also halted vehicle traffic north and southbound on Interstate (I) 15, including the railways on the Cajon Pass, a central corridor from the greater Los Angeles area to Las Vegas, for three days. The fire overran I-15 and destroyed 74 vehicles. This closure also created significant delays in commerce.



*Interstate 15 closed in Cajon Pass as fast-moving wildfire torches cars. Photo Credit: Times of San Diego*

On July 19, 2015, aerial suppression of the fire was temporarily halted by personal drones flying in the vicinity. Three of the five drones found in the area left the scene, but the presence of two others interfered with firefighting operations. After the delay, firefighting operations resumed. In response to the drone activity over the active wildfires, Governor Jerry Brown signed laws restricting the use of privately owned drones around emergency response activities. On July 21, 2015, the blaze was contained with the assistance of over a thousand firefighters.

### WRAGG FIRE

The Wragg Fire burned within Napa, Solano, and Yolo counties from July 22, 2015, through August 5, 2015. The fire burned 8,051 acres, destroying six structures, and damaging one. Over 200 homes were evacuated. After the fire was fully contained, investigators determined that the cause of the fire was an idling car's exhaust contacting dry grass, closing Highway 128 and I-505.



*Colusa County Fire watches a water dropping helicopter fill up its bucket in Putah Creek. Photo Credit: Kent Porter/The Press Democrat*



### **ROCKY FIRE**

The Rocky Fire in Lake County was active from July 29, 2015, through August 15, 2015. It burned 69,438 acres, destroying 96 structures and damaging eight structures. The slow-moving fire allowed for organized evacuations and structure protection to minimize damage. Lake County had evacuation orders for more than 13,000 residents, with 7,500 homes threatened.



*Fire burns through a fence line during the Rocky Fire in Lake County. Photo Credit: Reuters*

### **BUTTE FIRE**

The Butte Fire began on September 9, 2015, and was contained on October 15, 2015. It burned 70,868 acres and destroyed 965 Amador and Calaveras County structures. The fire resulted in two fatalities and injured one individual. The fire forced many residents to evacuate, including those from San Andreas, Pine Grove, Ranch House Estates, Pine Acres, Jackson Pine, Pine Drove Ranchettes, and Lake Tabaud communities. Governor Brown proclaimed a State of Emergency for Amador County shortly after the start of the fire and later included Calaveras County. The fire was sparked by a powerline that fell onto a tree and spread due to a lack of vegetation control around power lines.

### **VALLEY FIRE**

On September 12, 2015, the Valley Fire started near the community of Cobb in Lake County. The fire quickly spread and burned more than 10,000 acres. By September 13, 2015, the fire reached 50,000 acres and destroyed much of Cobb and surrounding parts of the south end of Hidden Valley Lake.

At the time, the Valley Fire was the most destructive of the season and the third-most destructive fire in California history. The fire ultimately burned 76,067 acres, destroyed 1,955 structures, and resulted in four fatalities.

## RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – STATE AGENCIES

---

### CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES (CAL OES)

The Cal OES State Operations Center (SOC) was activated for the 2015 Fire Season. The SOC monitored, updated, and supported the mission assignments and tasks to state agencies and supported counties with their resource requests. During this time, Cal OES updated and published the Joint Incident Briefing with CAL FIRE. The Cal OES Geographic Information System Unit (GIS) was assigned to produce multiple maps and products to support the SOC response and reporting needs.

#### SUCCESSSES

- Cal OES OAFN organized the California Wildfires Disability Stakeholders Workgroup, identifying immediate unmet needs and delivering them to individuals with disabilities.
- Cal OES OAFN, in coordination with the Red Cross and a vendor, provided case management services to numerous survivors in both Lake County and Calaveras County. The coordination was a first-of-its-kind initiative that provided survivor assistance for six months.
- The Cal OES Logistics team established the Lakeside Park Base Camp in Lake County, which supported over a hundred first responders and emergency workers with meals, laundry, and other support services.
- Cal OES Public Safety Communications and CA-ESF 2 supported missions to address the burned communication infrastructures and restore essential telecommunication systems.
- Cal OES Logistics coordinated with FEMA to support and develop site search criteria for the Joint Field Office.
- California established a "reasonable accommodation helpline" for survivors with disabilities to get in contact with state and federal partners. A messaging campaign was designed to spread the word about the helpline via the media.
- For the first time, regular coordinated legislative/congressional calls were held.

**AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Cal OES OAFN reported difficulty identifying survivors with access and functional needs during the registration process.
2. Identifying accessible space for the DRC in Lake County and the Area Field Office (AFO) in Calaveras County was challenging as neither county had available space compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
3. Local (county supervisors, mayors, city councils) and tribal government typically were not included in legislative/congressional calls.
4. Multiple fire incidents throughout the state led to local and state entities competing for the same resources.

**CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Cal OES will coordinate with federal, state, and local partners to incorporate the diversity of resources for access and functional needs.
2. The county should create standard operating procedures with clear accessibility guidance, including identifying vendors that provide accessible space or equipment.
3. Local and tribal governments should be included in legislative/congressional calls.
4. Coordinate with the Department of General Services to develop a nationwide vendor list identifying available resources. Establish a logistics team with a cache of commodities for rapid deployment that would address immediate local resource needs.

## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (CDSS)

### VALLEY FIRE

CDSS provided an agency representative to the Lake County EOC from September 17, 2015, to September 19, 2015, and again from September 28, 2015, to October 2, 2015. CDSS supported mass care shelters in Lake County, the Calistoga Fairgrounds, the Middletown and Clearlake Local Assistance Centers (LACs)/DRCs, the Red Cross Client Assistance Center in Middletown, and a Red Cross center in Hidden Valley.



*Evacuees at the Valley Fire evacuation center at the Napa County Fairgrounds in Calistoga. Photo Credit: Alvin Jornada/The Press Democrat.*

### BUTTE FIRE

CDSS worked with the Red Cross to gather information on shelter operations and sent agency representatives to the Calaveras County EOC to support the care and shelter operations. Partnering with FEMA, counties, and local hotels, CDSS provided transitional sheltering operations, coordinated resource requests, and organized mass feeding for Lake County and Calaveras County.

### SUCCESSSES

1. Despite the lack of staff, CDSS identified strong collaboration with partners and their ability to support the county shelter operations during response.

### AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

1. No areas needing improvement were reported.

## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (CALTRANS)

Caltrans coordinated traffic control with the California Highway Patrol (CHP), local transportation agencies, San Bernardino County, and Incident Command. Caltrans provided an agency representative to the Incident Command Post (ICP) and helped communicate traffic conditions and route closure information. Changeable Message Signs and Flashing Arrow Signs were also provided.

## **NORTH FIRE**

Caltrans activated its Environmental and Office of Geotechnical Design in response to the North Fire. They also activated their Flood Area Safety Taskforce and Office of Geotechnical Design to the Burn Area Emergency Response team.

## **SUCCESSSES**

1. Caltrans successfully implemented the department's Emergency Operation Plan, a maintenance callout roster, and the Major Damage Restoration Assessment Team during the 2015 fire season.
2. Caltrans had a maintenance field representative at the ICP, which helped Caltrans make informed decisions.
3. PIO leveraged X (formerly Twitter) and email to inform the public and media outlets of their activities.

## **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Caltrans documented issues with inclusion during operational planning meetings and the ability to share information regarding traffic control work, which impacted emergency closures.
2. There was incorrect contact information listed on duty pages related to traffic operations.
3. Emergency closures were approved without the consent of CHP or Caltrans.

## **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Caltrans agency representatives must be included in all operational planning meetings.
2. Traffic Management Center and maintenance management should create a notification and checklist for staff during incidents.
3. The county must follow the proper approval process from CHP or Caltrans for emergency closures.

## **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH (CDPH)**

CDPH provided an agency representative to the SOC for the 2015 fire season. The Medical and Health Coordination Center was activated to a Level 1 and responded to incidents between September 22, 2015, and October 1, 2015.

**SUCCESSSES**

1. No significant successes were reported.

**AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. No areas needing improvement were reported.

## RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – OPERATIONAL AREAS

---

### AMADOR COUNTY

#### **SUCCESSSES**

1. Amador County identified a successful unified response from all agencies during evacuations.
2. The county's established partnerships before the event benefited response operations during and after the incident, leading to an effective mutual aid response.

#### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Amador County cited a need to improve its notification systems and create a unified message.
2. The county needs to improve traffic control during initial evacuations.

#### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. No corrective action recommendations were reported.

### LAKE COUNTY

#### **SUCCESSSES**

1. Lake County staff demonstrated teamwork that was very flexible and positive, which created a collaborative and unified environment.

#### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. At the time of the Rocky Fire, Lake County did not have a permanent EOC identified.
2. Unit leaders were not qualified for the position, which led to significant frustration.
3. At the time of the Rocky Fire, all county staff were activated to their EOC, whether needed or not, which was the county's standard practice. This action led to too many people in the EOC without an active assignment.
4. Insufficient transition briefings led to the oncoming shift unaware of the priorities, objectives, and work assignments identified in the EOC Action Plan.

#### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Identify and establish a permanent county EOC.

2. Enroll EOC staff in formal position training.
3. The county EOC should follow the practice of activating the EOC at a level 1, 2, or 3 depending on the size and complexity of the incident.
4. No corrective action recommendation was reported.

## **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY**

### **SUCSESSES**

1. San Bernardino County reported areas of strength in staff deployment and the ability to stand up an ICP and the EOC to manage this incident effectively.
2. Due to its fire, law, and public health partners, the county submitted its Fire Management Assistance Grant paperwork timely to expedite the need for resources and respond efficiently.
3. The Community Emergency Response Team volunteers assisted at shelter reception areas when not needed in other duties.



*San Bernardino County Office of Emergency Services Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Photo Credit: San Bernardino County Fire Protection District*

### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. San Bernardino County identified gaps in evacuations, human/animal shelter setup, and did not plan for volunteer coordination.
2. The county did not fully comprehend the disaster proclamation process.

### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The county should facilitate meetings with the sheriff and animal control services to discuss the shelter establishment process and meet with non-profits and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster to discuss volunteer coordination.
2. Create a checklist and review the cost recovery and Cal OES proclamation processes.



## **SOLANO COUNTY**

### **SUCSESSES**

1. Solano County Office of Emergency Services used satellite phones to issue evacuation warnings and orders, facilitating successful communications. The county identified that telephone and door-to-door evacuation efforts also worked to notify impacted residents.
2. Solano County opened a shelter to support the evacuees of the Wragg Fire with minimal usage due to the low-density population in the evacuated area.

### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. The county reported issues with interoperable communications, where different agencies, such as county fire and dispatch, were not using the same frequency.
2. The county identified the need for additional public alert and warning staff to provide 24/7 support.
3. The county identified the need for fire districts to improve services to rural areas.

### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The county should test its radio truck and install a permanent radio tower. The county should also partner with the Solano Law Chiefs Association to improve communication between the two agencies.
2. The new alert system, "AlertSolano," needs more public buy-in to improve effectiveness.
3. Consolidate fire districts to improve services during incidents.

## **SONOMA COUNTY**

### **SUCSESSES**

1. Sonoma County facilitated a mutual aid agreement with Lake County for animal care and livestock evacuations. Animal Services mobilized quickly to support Lake County evacuations.

### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Sonoma County EOC required technological updates to its systems, website, and data-sharing capabilities.

2. The county identified necessary improvements to their EOC's physical security system, phones, and workspace.
3. The county had difficulty obtaining fire situational status reports.

***CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS***

1. The county identified multiple improvement points, including better data exchange support within the county's EOC.
2. Include an alternate entrance, backup phones, and additional workspace for EOC staff.
3. The county should develop a course of action to obtain status information from the various fire agencies and send a liaison to the ICP.

## INITIAL RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

---

### **GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES (CAL OES)**

Cal OES identified and supported local governments with recovery operations, including Initial Damage Estimates and opening LACs.

Individual Assistance activities included:

1. Coordinating with local agencies and FEMA on direct housing missions for Calaveras and Lake counties.
2. Establishing LACs/DRCs to bring needed resources to survivors.
3. Assist eligible survivors by coordinating federal programs, such as the Individuals and Households Program, Crisis Counseling Program, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Transitional Assistance Program, Emergency Critical Needs Assistance, Other Needs Assistance, and the Immediate Disaster Case Management Program.

Public Assistance activities included:

1. Preliminary Damage Assessments were completed promptly for DR-4240 in Calaveras and Lake counties.
2. An AFO was opened in Lakeport for DR-4240.

### **SUCCESSSES**

1. Cal OES successfully collaborated and coordinated with its federal partners, who reached out to national non-profit organizations for assistance, worked with partner agencies on housing issues, and worked with local government on the best solutions for placement of manufactured housing units.
2. Cal OES funded the refurbishment of Konocti Harbor Resort to house vulnerable populations, including older adults, families with small children, and those with other special needs, while waiting for FEMA to provide temporary sheltering assistance.

### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Regarding FEMA's criteria on private property, coordination on direct housing missions needed to be more specific.
2. Public Assistance and Cal Recycle need better coordination related to debris management.

**CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Clarify FEMA requirements to the OAs at the beginning of a direct housing mission to manage expectations for private property cases, including the engagement needed from the county. Those conversations should include county building codes that may hinder the FEMA Manufactured Housing Units for potential sales program, including the Wildland Urban Interface restrictions.
2. Cal OES Public Assistance and Cal Recycle should enhance their tactical operations coordination by mobilizing staff to support local EOC and train staff in debris management.

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (CALTRANS)**

Initial recovery activities included the placement of electronic signage to warn drivers of potential hazards on the roadway. Caltrans included new internal departments to assess damages for future issues of landslides or the potential for flooding of roadways or travel corridors.

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (CDSS)**

CDSS provided a source of funding for recovery efforts through the State Supplemental Grant Program, with \$1,112,816.52 provided to homeowners who suffered a loss due to the 2015 Fire season.

## **CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES**

---

### **STATE AGENCIES**

California Department of Social Services (CDSS)

California Department of Public Health (CDPH)

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

California Highway Patrol (CHP)

### **LOCAL AGENCIES**

Amador County

Lake County

Napa County

San Bernardino County

Solano County

Sonoma County

Yolo County

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

---

AAR	After Action Report
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AFO	Area Field Office
Cal OES	California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF	California Emergency Support Functions
CAL FIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CDPH	California Department of Public Health
CDSS	California Department of Social Services
CHP	California Highway Patrol
DRC	Disaster Recovery Center
EOC	Emergency Operation Center
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
ICP	Incident Command Post
LAC	Local Assistance Center
OA	Operational Area
OAFN	Office of Access and Functional Needs
OES	Office of Emergency Services
PIO	Public Information Officer
SEMS	Standardized Emergency Management System
SOC	State Operations Center