

Small Water District Responds to Mosquito Fire Emergency

The Board of Directors of the Georgetown Divide Public Utility District (GDPUD) convened a special meeting on Sept. 6 to discuss the need to maintain irrigation services for fire mitigation due to unprecedented extreme temperatures.

“We had no idea that within hours of adjourning, the Mosquito fire would start in Placer County and quickly expand into El Dorado County. In fact, I could see the smoke during my drive home from the meeting,” stated Board President Michael Saunders in a GDPUD news release.

“The timing of the fire shows the relevance for not only our district but the region’s focus on critical water infrastructure for fire mitigation and fire suppression. These policies and infrastructure are not just about water delivery, it is about protecting our communities,” said Saunders, who also serves on ACWA’s Region 3 Board.

During the deliberation, board members recounted the recent devastating wildfires in the area, including the Caldor Fire that seriously impacted the neighboring districts of El Dorado Irrigation District and Grizzly Flats Community Services District. They discussed the importance of keeping ponds filled for firefighting and maintaining green irrigated landscaping during the fire-prone time of the year.

The district has limited firefighting capacity through treated water sources and storage tanks, requiring a combination of treated and raw water to effectively fight fires. Having communicated with the State Water Resources Control Board and receiving advice from legal counsel, the Board modified the district’s Level

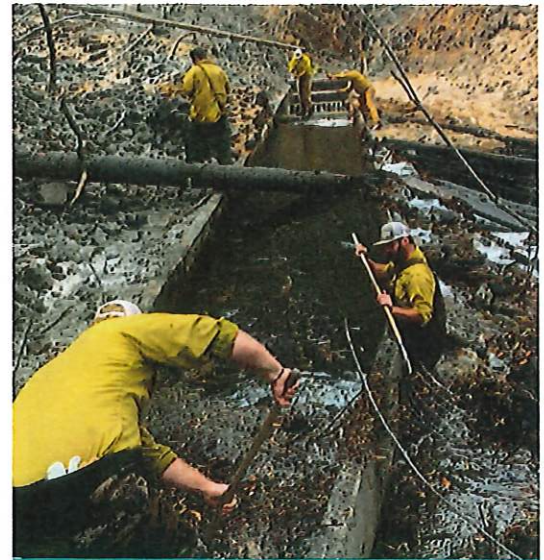
2 Water Shortage Contingency Plan to allow irrigation service to continue to the original end date of Sept. 30.

By the morning of Sept. 9, Georgetown was under an evacuation order and the GDPUD office closed. In coordination with the CalFire Command Center and the U.S. Forest Service, district crews were being escorted through checkpoints to access distribution infrastructure that required work to restore water flow.

The Board held an emergency meeting on Sept. 13, to receive an update on the impact of the Mosquito Fire and consider emergency response action. A State of Emergency Order was proclaimed by Gov. Gavin Newsom allowing the district to access funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Operations Manager Adam Brown reported to the Board that “the fire had impacted the tunnel area almost up to our diversion, but a full assessment had yet to be done at that point.” Brown added, “the emergency for the district will continue during the aftermath dealing with erosion, landslides, blocked ditches, clearing debris, and making repairs to the system.”

GDPUD’s distribution crew jumped into action, and despite having to evacuate their own families, they knew the importance of their work to keep the water flowing. District water was being used to fight the fire through hydrants and from the district’s water supply ditches at 100 gallons per minute. Brown also stated, “it has been beneficial for the district to be able to work with the Cal-Fire Incident



A GDPUD crew at work clearing a ditch during the Mosquito Fire. District workers jumped into action despite having to evacuate their own families.

Photo courtesy of GDPUD

Command, U.S. Forest Service, Sierra Pacific, the El Dorado Irrigation District, and state water agencies in scoping out the next steps to deal with this emergency.”

Efforts are underway to access funding through FEMA and the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services to help ensure the district’s infrastructure and water supply won’t be interrupted.

Director Gerry Stewart stated in the news release that he has received several calls from customers grateful for the hard work the district was able to provide to keep the water flowing and for keeping them informed through the WaterSmart notification system. He commended Brown and the crew for their excellent work and dedication. ♦

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the last decade, and the reason we take protection of our watershed so seriously,” Fecko said. “Experience has shown that the impacts to our rivers, hydroelectric facilities, and ecosystem will take years to remediate and cost tens of millions of

dollars. The action taken by the PCWA Board today will allow the agency to expedite emergency repairs on the project once conditions allow. Safety of staff and customers remains our highest priority.”

The Mosquito Fire is the largest California wildfire in 2022, so far, burning through nearly 77,000 acres with 95% containment as of Oct. 6, according to InciWeb, an interagency all-risk incident information management system. ♦