

Office of the State Fire Marshal

Esperanza Fire – Fire Plan Success Story

In 2000 the BLM and CAL FIRE began working on a community fuel break to protect the communities of Poppet Flat, Rancho Encino, and the Silent Valley RV Club. The strategic placement of this fuels treatment project protected the community from the Esperanza Fire and slowed the fire's progress. On the west side of the communities was a large area of chaparral between the homes and the fuel break. A prescribed burn was planned to reduce the fuel loading in this area. In 2005 the first unit was burned along with the fuel break north and west of town.

The morning of October 26th the Esperanza Fire spread beyond Highway 243 and began to threaten the area. As the fire approached the community its progress was slowed by the fuel breaks and diverted by the prescribed fire. When the fire hit the prescribed burn it was diverted north around the community giving residents the ability to remain in the community or "shelter in place" while the fire burned past. This saved people from needing to evacuate on Highway 243 through the fire in the area of Twin Pines and down hill to Banning.

During the Esperanza Fire morning briefing the incident command team thanked those responsible for the fuels project and acknowledged its strategic importance in helping firefighters save the communities and allowing the citizens to shelter in place. A map of the fire shows a large unburned island in the fire; this is the Poppet Flat area. The gratefulness of the local residents for their safety and their unburned homes makes this a rewarding project. With the growing population and development in Southern California fuels projects such as this are crucial in protecting communities and resources.