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## Lafayette portion of North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break completed

By Nick Marnell



Cal Fire working near Wagner Ranch Elementary School. Courtesy MOFD

Work began the week of July 20 on the North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break, a \$4 million state-funded program managed by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to remove hazardous fuels from a 1,500-acre stretch of land extending from Tilden Park to near Acalanes High School. By the second week of August, the seven-mile strip along Lafayette Ridge was completed, according to project manager Jim Call.

"The Lafayette area is a little more affected by the hot weather because there is less of the coastal influence," Call said, explaining why the fuels from the Lafayette segment of the project were removed early in the process. The initial areas of clean up, though, were adjacent to Wagner Ranch and Sleepy Hollow elementary schools in Orinda, which had to be completed before the commencement of the 2019-20 school year.

Call said the crews have faced challenges along the way as they worked 10-hour days, seven days a week. "We've run into a lot of wasps, and a number of workers have been stung. And along the Lafayette Ridge, we've encountered a number of rattlesnakes," Call said. He praised the efforts of the on-site biologists, who tag along with each work crew, ensuring the environment is not harmed. "They found a wild turkey nest, and we gave it a buffer," Call said.

Through mid-August, more than 20% of the fuel break acreage had been cleared. Plans are to work in Wildcat Canyon through the end of August, and then along Bear Creek Road in north Orinda. The final section to be cleared will be the area near Inspiration Point, again, because of its proximity to the coastal influence, Call said. According to terms of the MOFD contract with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the fuel break project must be completed by Dec. 31.

Early on, Call said he heard plenty of skepticism from neighbors, but the complaints have eased as the crews complete their work in the treatment areas. "Now the bystanders comment on how nice it looks," Call said.

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