

Published August 16th, 2023

## MOFD holds massive Wildland Fire Training Burn at Painted Rock

By Vera Kochan



Firefighters' are briefed prior to Moraga's Aug. 11 Painted Rock Prescribed Burn exercise. Photo courtesy Moraga Police Chief Jon King

Moraga's residents are accustomed to what's become the annual Painted Rock Prescribed Burn conducted by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, but the Aug. 11 event was decidedly a much larger production.

MOFD hosted a Wildland Fire Training Burn that involved 15 additional fire districts. Contra Costa County Fire, Alameda County Fire, Oakland Fire, Hayward Fire, East Bay Regional Park District, San Mateo County, Cal Fire, Central Santa Cruz Fire District, Santa Clara County Fire, Watsonville Fire, Scotts Valley Fire, Ben Lomond Fire, Livermore-Pleasanton Fire, Rodeo Hercules Fire and CAL OES were on hand to take advantage of the training session, which this year covered 150 acres of the John Muir Land Trust's Painted Rock and the Moraga Geologic Hazard Abatement District (GAHD). Also on hand were members of the Lafayette Police Department, Chief Ben Alldritt, Administrative Analyst Cathy Surges-Moscato and Police Services Assistant John Cornell, who provided drone coverage from the top of Moraga's La Salle Drive,

and Moraga Police Chief Jon King. Total involvement included 130 personnel, 29 fire engines, one dozer, and three wildland fire hand crews. Ambulances were also in attendance as a precaution.

The day began at 9 a.m. with a firefighters' operational briefing in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center parking lot before crews headed out. A media briefing was held at 11 a.m. in MOFD Fire Station 42 (555 Moraga Rd.) where MOFD's Chief Dave Winnacker, Public Information Officer for Painted Rock Trust and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein, and King answered any questions. The entire operation was not expected to last beyond 6 p.m.

According to an MOFD notice, the training was organized using the incident command system (ICS), and included management staffing for fire operations, logistics, planning, public information, and safety. Firefighters practiced wildland fire suppression skills including firing operations, progressive hose lays, mobile attack, and the use of fire suppression hand tools. The burn also served to remove hazardous fuels prior to the onset of critical wildfire conditions for the coming fall season.

MPD stressed that safety was the number one priority and that the project was set up to "take advantage of existing weather and fire control lines." It was executed according to a strict "go, no go" checklist and was coordinated with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Fire Weather Forecasters at the National Weather Service "to ensure the size and timing of the burning would minimize smoke impacts to homes and other smoke-sensitive sites in the area."

The burn area was divided up into 10 units with directions facing west, north and south around the peak. Fires were started on the north side near Buckingham Drive; progressed to the south forming what is called "a catcher's mitt" strategy, which burns a massive line around an area that lets the fire come to the crews; and finished off facing west above Moraga Road. The reasoning behind setting fire to the west last is that it would ensure safety to the Rheem Valley Shopping Center in the event of stray embers since crews from the already burned areas would be available as backup if necessary.

? "This is part of a longer-term project to promote grazing from cows and for future mitigation," stated Winnacker. It is hoped that eventually cattle can be brought into the region to keep the vegetation in check and reduce the risk of wildfire threat. He also stressed the importance of cooperation from homeowners with respect to vegetation mitigation.

According to Rein, for several firefighters, this was their first time getting experience with this type of terrain; and while there is an East Bay Municipal Utility District water tank on the property, the crews would only use it during an emergency. The fires were started and burned in such a way as to virtually extinguish themselves back into the blackline of an area that has already burned, but crews continually checked for any spot fires that reignite themselves.

"Every burn has a general game plan, but it's never defined until they [the crews] are actually out there," Rein said.



Photo courtesy Lafayette Police Department

Reach the reporter at: [vera@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:vera@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA