

The 2008 siege was the single largest wildfire event (1.2 million acres) in California's recorded history and added significantly to the highest amount of acreage burned in a calendar year (1.6 million) in California's recorded history.



Executive Summary

The spring of 2008 was extremely dry, allowing an early start to the already long summer fire season in northern California.

On June 20th and 21st a series of severe, dry thunderstorms carpeted the state from Big Sur to Yreka with more than 5,000 lightning strikes, and igniting over 2,000 fires. During the following months, thirteen firefighters were killed and many others were injured on fires in this siege. Over 350 structures were destroyed and hundreds of millions of dollars of property and natural resources were damaged. Thousands of people were evacuated and smoke adversely effected air quality over much of the state for weeks. Communications, power delivery, and transportation systems were disrupted. Despite the intensive firefighting effort, some fires in remote areas continued to burn throughout the summer. By fall, over 1,200,000 acres had burned.

The firefighting effort was also large and intensive. The great number of fires combined with weather and fuel conditions, and competition for firefighting resources made fire control efforts difficult. Strong cooperation and coordination among federal, state, and local firefighting agencies was essential. At the peak of fire control operations on July 13, over 20,000 firefighters were engaged. Both the Governor of California and the President of the United States toured fire operations. Governor Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency for 13 counties, and President Bush declared a state of disaster, which made available a wide variety of federal assets, including the military. While the fires had a great impact on people and society, the extraordinary efforts of thousands of dedicated firefighters prevented even greater impacts.

In California's modern fire suppression era, this many fires starting early in the season, and burning simultaneously over such a long a period of time is unprecedented. While there have been larger, more damaging individual wildfires, this siege is the largest fire event on record in California. Fire histories reconstructed from tree rings conclude that there have been rare years when widespread fire occurred throughout the state covering millions of acres. If the fire suppression efforts during this siege had not been waged, many of these fires would have burned unchecked into the late fall, burning much additional area. The suppression efforts resulted in less area burned, reduced threat to communities, public health and safety, and reduced direct fire impacts to ecosystems.

Timeline: 2008 Fire Siege

JUNE 20-21 ▶



Lightning storm ignites over 2,000 fires.
Governor Schwarzenegger orders CANG to mobilize MAFFS NorCal MAC activated

23 ▶



Governor Schwarzenegger declares state of emergency in Monterey, and Trinity Counties

24 ▶



Over 500 of the fires are fully contained

25 ▶



Governor Schwarzenegger briefed at Butte Complex in Chico and Basin Complex in Monterey
CalMAC convenes

JULY 1 ▶



Governor Schwarzenegger briefed at Shasta Complex; CANG deploys 200 ground troops to fires
Gap fire starts in Santa Barbara County and is top priority for resources

3 ▶



Anderson Valley Volunteer Firefighter recruit Bob Roland assigned to Mendocino Complex dies

4 ▶



Additional 200 CANG ground troops deployed

7-10 ▶



Foehn Wind event coincides with record heat and low relative humidity

12 ▶



Piute Fire receives significant rain with flash floods

17 ▶



President Bush tours North Operations Coordination Center and Shasta Complex

24 ▶



Additional lightning strikes in Northern California with 174 fires, including the Panther Fire

25 ▶



Andrew Palmer, Olympic National Park firefighter fatally injured when struck by falling tree on Iron Complex



26 ▶

Governor Schwarzenegger declares state of emergency for Mendocino and Shasta Counties

27 ▶

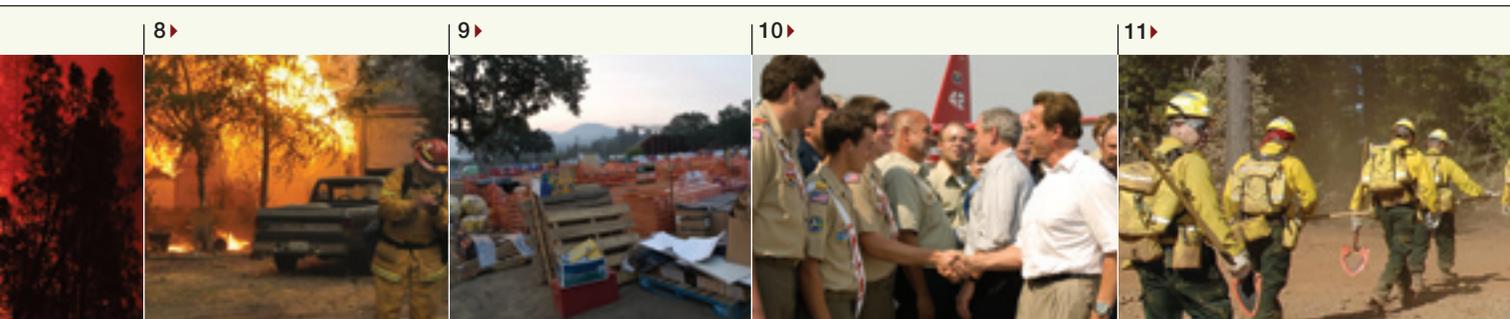
Governor Schwarzenegger briefed at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

28 ▶

President Bush signs federal disaster declaration for Butte, Mendocino, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta and Trinity Counties

30 ▶

Governor Schwarzenegger declares state of emergency in Plumas and Kern Counties



8 ▶

Camp Fire in Butte Complex burns through Concow and destroys 50 homes

9 ▶

Governor Schwarzenegger makes request to President Bush for additional federal resources

10 ▶

Governor Schwarzenegger visits firefighters at Shasta Complex

11 ▶

Civilian fatality reported, Concow area, Butte Complex

Governor Schwarzenegger mobilizes additional 2000 CANG troops to train for firefighting duties



26 ▶

Daniel Packer, Chief East Pierce County Fire, Washington succumbs to fatal injuries while assigned to Panther Fire

30 ▶

4th wave of ground troops deployed to Telegraph Fire

AUGUST 5 ▶

Contract helicopter crashes killing 9 occupants on the Iron/Alps Complex. 4 survivors hospitalized