



Calli-Jane DeAnda, executive director of the Butte County Fire Safe Council, says creating a forest management plan is critical to avoiding future disasters like the Camp Fire.
PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER

Plan for the future

Local group gets \$100,000 for forest management

PG&E's rollout has been less reassuring.

Two days before the most destructive wildfire in California history ignited, 62,000 PG&E customers in eight counties, including Butte, were warned that their power could be turned off as a precautionary measure.

"This is an important safety alert from Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Extreme weather conditions and high fire-danger are forecasted in Butte County. These conditions may cause power outages in the area of your address. To protect public safety, PG&E may also temporarily turn off power in your neighborhood or community. If there is an outage, we will work to restore service as soon as it is safe to do so."

—6:30 p.m. Nov. 6, 2018

Cal Fire reports the Camp Fire ignited around 6:30 a.m. on Nov. 8.

PG&E never shut off power. In fact, the utility went on to issue cancellation notifications hours after the deadly blaze started.

"This is an important safety update from Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Weather conditions have improved in your area, and we are not planning to turn off electricity for safety in the area of your address."

—2 p.m. Nov. 8, 2018

PG&E wouldn't comment on its decision. The CPUC would say only that it is investigating when asked if the state was looking at why the utility didn't initiate a blackout. □

When it comes to preventing future wildfires in Butte County, forest management is at the top of the list. And, aside from a plan funded last year specifically for Magalia, the region has none. At least not yet.

"Right now there is a lack of forest management, especially in the wild-urban interface," said Calli-Jane DeAnda, executive director of the Butte County Fire Safe Council. "We've lost about a quarter of our forest to fire."

The council last month was awarded \$100,000 by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for its Big Chico Creek Forest Health Management Plan, which covers 7,939 acres north of Chico and adjacent to Forest Ranch, including the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve, which is owned and run by Chico State. According to the project description, it will "protect water quality and improve water quantity in Big Chico Creek and for downstream users; prevent catastrophic wildfire; restore forest ecosystems from overstocked conditions with forest thinning and prescribed fire; improve air quality and carbon storage; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

The plan is in line with the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program, whose focus is on restoring and improving ecosystem and community resilience in the Sierra Nevada. It was among 35 projects to be funded—to the tune of \$26 million.

The aforementioned Magalia plan, which received funding from the conservancy last year, includes several projects, one of which was slated to get started in December. That project area "burned to a crisp" in the Camp Fire, DeAnda said. For Big Chico Creek, she hopes a variety of projects—from forest thinning to prescribed burns—will enhance the overall health of the forest and creek while helping to prevent future disasters.

The funding doesn't come because of November's blaze, however.

"This was written months and months before the Camp Fire," she said. "We're trying to get ahead of the curve."

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