

"It's such a big problem," he added, noting that the distribution lines at both the Dixie Fire point of origin and his site "were built back in the 1950s with technology and materials that were available back at that time—and they've never been upgraded or modernized; they've just been fixed on an as-needed basis, when something gets really bad or breaks."

PG&E has pledged to make its grid safer—publicly and to Judge William Alsup, who's overseeing the company's probation stemming from its role in the 2016 San Bruno gas line explosion. Since then, along with the Camp and Dixie fires, PG&E has taken responsibility for last year's Kincade and Zogg fires and the small Bader Fire in Magalia July 14. The Bader Fire, which burned a quarter acre, started when a tree leaned on a wire and snapped it—similar to the cause of the Zogg Fire. Cal Fire determined the Kincade Fire started when a transmission tower cable broke during high winds and arced. The Camp Fire, which claimed 85 lives, stemmed from a high-voltage line breaking free from faulty C-hook that had been in use for nearly a century.

A week after the start of the Dixie Fire, PG&E committed to bury 10,000 miles of power lines underground in "high fire threat districts," as it has promised for Paradise. Spokesman Paul Moreno told the CN&R by phone that this is the most recent development in PG&E's Community Wildfire Safety Program (pge.com/cwsp), a "multifaceted approach" that includes hardening its distribution network as well as public safety power shutoffs (PSPS).

"It's not a destination but a journey,"

he said. "And I know that's a little bit trite and overused in some cases, but it really best describes how we're approaching a safer grid.... We're always looking at new and better ways to operate our power grid for safety against wildfires."

Trees for the forest

PG&E's most conspicuous efforts have centered on "enhanced vegetation management"—a broad program of trimming, pruning, cutting and removing trees. Its site lists a goal of completing 1,800 miles by the end of the year, out of 2,400 miles total, to ensure a minimum of 4-foot clearances around power lines.

McCollum, an arborist, has long taken issue with the selection process of trees targeted for removal—PG&E's notably, though also Butte County's after the Camp Fire. Courtney told the CN&R that he challenged, successfully, PG&E tree removals on his mountain property in the wake of the Rim Fire.

The task force's overriding concern is proportion: clearance versus equipment upgrades. At a point two years ago when Southern California Edison had committed to replace 5,000 miles of bare wire with insulated and completed 1,200 miles' worth, McCollum said, PG&E was "creeping up on" 300 miles.

"We want the focus to stop being on trees as the solution when that's really only 25 percent of the solution," Nancy Macy, task force chair, said

PG&E CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



PG&E was found responsible for igniting the 2018 Camp Fire and is suspected of causing the current Dixie Fire, both of which originated in the Feather River Canyon, just a few miles apart.
GOOGLE EARTH IMAGE



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