



HUNTINGTON LAKE FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Letter from the Chief

What words work to honor the loss, to capture what has happened during this fire and what words do we use to try to help us envision a bright future that may be in store for us. For some, we might have a better cabin than we had ... actually addressing all those little things that drove us nuts over the years! For others it may be a very long time to re-build and some of our neighbors and friends may not have a cabin at Huntington in the future. For everyone that lost a cabin, camp or business, Huntington will never be the same and the memories that were anchored in wood and mortar are likely to fade.

Knowing that this fire would happen eventually doesn't seem to help that much. Since the Big Creek fire in 1994, we have known that a fire below Big Creek could grow to wipe out the Huntington Lake Community. While many have worked to thin our forest, the bark beetle and recent droughts added unbelievable amounts of dry fuel to the landscape. Over the years, your Fire Department worked hard to put into place the right apparatus, personnel and training. We also developed intricate and complete fire attack plans for every tract. We forged close relationships with Cal Fire and the Forest Service including fire attack planning and joint training and those preparations worked well during this fire. We followed our long established plans. Our first priority has always been a rapid and safe evacuation. Once we evacuated the Lake we joined the larger firefighting effort working under the Incident Commander and alongside hundreds of firefighters and, by the time the flames reached Huntington, over 30 fire engines! Our members were instrumental in planning the dozer lines and burnouts that saved what is now standing at the Lake, and we put out many spot fires.

I am extremely proud of what our firefighters, alongside so many others, were able to accomplish, and yet 74 cabins burned to the ground and several were severely damaged. In addition, our Fire station 262, shop and housing were all lost. With your help, we will build a new firehouse to replace our "first-out" station that was destroyed and will find a way to respond this summer from temporary quarters. But the sad memory of the Creek Fire will linger. My hope is that there is a bright future for us all at Huntington and that soon it will become a wonderful place to have fun with those we love!

My parents Helen and Harry Henry, were both teachers and attended the original Fresno State Summer School at Lakeview. FSU later purchased property by Lakeshore so they became familiar with this area. They chose our lot in 1929 and in 1930 purchased a cabin at Big Creek from the Edison company which was used when they were building the dam. They disassembled it, numbered the boards, and with help rebuilt it. Our family spent whole summers up there only coming down for supplies. The memories of wonderful summers spent at Huntington are never forgotten.

Bill Henry, Lower Deer Creek #37

Our family has been enjoying Huntington Lake since the early 1950s and we were lucky enough to purchase our cabin in 1968. It has been such a great place for family gatherings and to immerse ourselves in God's ever so amazing beauty. We will always love you Huntington and pray you heal quickly.

The Freeman Family

Our family had just completed our 50th summer in our beloved historic 111 year old cabin when we lost her in the Creek Fire. In that time, we spent hours, upon days, upon seasons, upon years and decades of hiking, swimming, sailing, fishing, "prairie tv"(aka, hanging out by the campfire), dog play, cove chilling, Sunday breakfast making, reading, napping and star gazing, and then doing it all again. But most importantly, it was where we gathered and reconnected-our refuge from the chaos of life in the regular world. It was our magic place, woven into the soul of our family, with the hope of extending the magic for the next generation. We miss her terribly.

Unknown

My parents purchased the cabin approximately 50 years ago. The cabin has been a place to help families heal from tragic loss, a place to enjoy family reunions, a place to bring large service groups together sharing the day at the lake, a place to bring the grandchildren. Overall, a place to gather and enjoy food, sailing, new and old friends.

The Padilla Family

My Grandfather built our cabin the year I was born. We were summer only until 1989 when we winterized. For the last 33 summers we have lived there May-October and every holiday and weekend through the winter. When we left our home in the valley to head up the hill we would always say "let's go home". Our one year old grandson was the sixth generation to stay in the cabin. It was our life and will be again!

Bibb Family, Upper Line

BACKFIRES and BURNOUTS

The devastating "Creek Fire" has become the largest single fire in California's history. It is a miracle that so much of Huntington Lake was saved from the flames. It is because of the hard work, planning and excellent execution of backfires and burnouts that stopped the fire.

The Fire began about 6:30 pm on Friday September 4th as a very small blaze about 1,000 ft. in elevation below the town of Big Creek. Twenty-three hours later, it had reached Huntington with enormous flames and smoke towering over 50,000 feet. Those smoke clouds were producing their own weather, including lightning and thunder. Flame lengths were in excess of 100 feet high!

KEOLA and DOWVILLE BACK FIRES

Huntington Fire, in consultation with fire experts from Cal Fire and the Forest Service over the years had written plans for the approach of flames from the Big Creek area, which included setting backfires to deny the approaching flames fuel. Strike teams at Keola and Dowville West, after preparing the buildings for the approaching flames lit backfires at precisely the right time to have the main fire "pull" the backfire towards it. The plan worked for Keola and Dowville, and although five cabins at the top of Dowville were destroyed, the backfire saved most of Dowville and all of Home Creek and Idywilde.

The flames, moved eastward at unbelievable speeds, above Dowville, Home Creek and Idywilde and then descended east of Billy Creek and moved rapidly east and downhill into Huckleberry, destroying everything in it's path.

UPPER BEAR EXTENSION BACK FIRE

While there was intense fire activity around Camp Kennolyn, somehow the fire 'skipped over' many cabins in the upper portion of Lower Line Creek only to intensify as it approached Upper Bear Extension. There, hand crews cleared grass, needles and debris right next to the cabins and set a backfire with drip touches up the hill behind the cabins. Once the fire was established, accelerants were used to quickly burn out all fuel ahead of the advancing main fire.

BULLDOZER LINES AND BURNOUTS

Bulldozer lines were put in place in Dowville, Home Creek, Idywilde and Bear Creek and low intensity fire, set with drip torches, increased the width of the protection line. Officers from Huntington Fire helped to design the a bulldozer line from Bear Creek to Potter Creek (Portal Powerhouse) to serve as the anchor line for burnouts. Even as the line was still being constructed, an entire division of firefighters followed close behind setting low intensity fire above the dozer line to burn up the hill, away from the cabins.

This effort was extremely successful and because of these actions, once the line was in place, Spring Creek, Upper Deer, The Pack Station, Lakeshore and everything to the east, on the north shore was well protected from the fire.

Facility Replacement Plan

Station 262, lost in the Creek Fire, served many functions for the department. It was the “first-out” firehouse, which means that this station was the first to begin an emergency response, *usually within two minutes!* The station was located at Camp Kennolyn, (the former Camp La Salle), near Cedar Crest Road and Huntington Lake Road. The station served as a two-bay firehouse, maintenance shop and storage facility. We had housing for three firefighters and the facility included a “day room” and bathrooms. Food service and dining facilities were provided by the camp. Additionally, the camp location provided storage for our off-road rescue vehicle and our heavy rescue snow cat. Station 262 was staffed 24 hours a day 7 days a week during the summer. We closed the station in the fall and winter when we converted it to winter apparatus storage.

For this summer:

Kennolyn Lake Camp has offered their site as temporary quarters for our mid-lake station (Station 262). Although there is no building to store the engine, housing and bathrooms are available. Kennolyn has restored water and sewer and is working on restoring electrical service. Additionally, we have the condo for our volunteers to respond from the east end station (station 62).

Our long-range plan and capital campaign:

The long range plan for the Fire Department is still in the planning stages. What we do must address the need for rapid response times and provide storage and housing as well as some shop space for apparatus maintenance. The plan needs to specifically address:

1. The need to house all apparatus inside buildings. That calls for an additional two-bay garage at the east end of the lake for Fire Engine 362 and the snowcat.
2. A fire house to serve the central and western portions of the lake. That may be a firehouse with or without housing, near the Billy Creek day use area.
3. Kennolyn Camp has been a gracious host for our Station 262 near Line Creek. At this time it is unknown if that site will be available to the fire department for a station in the future.

I remember going to get boots and jeans for our yearly vacation at Huntington at the age of 5. My family rented so we could be at the lake every summer and in 1963 purchased our cabin in Bear Creek. Sailing, hiking, exploring, dances and movies at Lakeshore with Charley Hull are a major part of my wonderful memories here.

Linda McKeever

"I have raised my children coming to this lake, to enjoy its peace and beauty. Now, the blessing of continuing this with my grandchildren is something I will never take for granted!"

Tari Johnston

*Seven years ago our 9 year old grandson was given a class project to write about his summer; this is an excerpt ---
"Every summer my family goes to the cabin [at Huntington Lake] and we have lots of fun swimming, fishing and boating. My grandpa and I make bird houses. Someday I hope to make bird houses with my grandson too."*

The Richert Family

We have been coming to Huntington Lake since 1967 and bought our cabin in 1991. Since then it has become the family retreat center for many holidays as well as the favorite of all. We have seen lots of changes yet in many ways the wonders of God here stay the same.

Ned Gould, Bear Creek

The first week of the fire

We have put together a detailed time line of actions/assignments that your firefighters conducted during the first 7 days of the Creek Fire. Due to its length, we chose not to print the entire document in this newsletter. The full, detailed report is available on our website: www.hlvfd.org/CreekFireTimeline.

Huntington Fire was there 24/7. From the initial reports of a fire below Big Creek on Friday the 4th of September, your fire department maintained constant staffing at Huntington on the fire line as well as serving on the command staff. Contrary to some comments posted on the internet, a combination of The Chief, Brother Chris our two Assistant Chiefs, Driscoll and Price and our three Captains Coleman, Wienholz and Day *were constantly on the fire line at Huntington during the first two weeks of the fire.* In addition, our firefighters worked shifts on both the Huntington fire divisions, and other divisions in Prather, Bald Mountain and Shaver, as assigned on the Incident Action Plan.

On Friday evening September 4th just after 6 pm we began monitoring fire operations and began preparations for the worst-case scenario. The Chief contacted the Cal Fire command Center to commit our resources if needed. The Chief also briefed all personnel on our evacuation plans and initial attack plans for Dowville and Keola should the fire reach Huntington. Firefighter Castro moved our apparatus for quick response; Captains Coleman and Day organized and briefed firefighters Allbright and Tamberi on our evacuation plan. Br. Jack and Captain Wienholz were assigned to monitor emergency radio traffic.

On Saturday the 5th at 05:30 am, the Chief responded to Big Creek to assist with the evacuation and to “get eyes on the fire”. He recommended a mandatory evacuation of Huntington, which began about 08:00. Captains Coleman and Day, the Chief and firefighters Allbright, Castro and Tamberi evacuated the lake. They were followed by the Fresno Sheriff’s Department, who did house-by-house checks and closed neighborhoods.

Assistant Chiefs Driscoll and Price arrived at Huntington and were placed in charge of our apparatus, which was then under the Division Commander, to be used as reserve units to handle flare-ups and new starts. (Unfortunately, when those apparatus were needed to fight the fire at China Peak, they had been moved without our knowledge, and were not available to fight the fire when it arrived there the following days and nights.)

The Chief, along with the two Assistant Chiefs and Captain Coleman briefed incoming commanders on strategies, logistics and water sources as strike teams arrived and we transferred command to them. The two Assistant Chiefs took over department operations at Huntington and the Chief and Captain Coleman assisted the command staff for the fire. Cal Fire, local government and USFS crews did amazing work protecting homes and businesses the first few days of a very dynamic fire.

From Sunday the 6th and for the next two weeks, our officers worked shifts assuring that we had at least two company officers and one firefighter on-scene at Huntington throughout the fire. Additionally all our firefighters, including Gary Castro, Peter Allbright, Steve Monke, and Grayson Tamberi worked shifts at Huntington during those two weeks. Our officers and firefighters continually put out spot fires, assisted cabin owners, rescued stranded hikers and worked directly with strike teams and Division Commanders on the coordinated firefight.

A section of our cabin was built in 1926. My parents bought it in 1938. I grew up there, our children, grandchildren and now great grandchildren. It was our home base.

Jan Regan , Upper Line

My Grandfather bought our cabin as a one room shack in 1933. My first trip up there was with my mother in September 1945. I was born the following January.

J. Steve Bennett, Home Creek #15

Starting in 1960, it took 3 summers for my brother and I to build our cabin. We have a great love for Huntington Lake since then and consider the cabin owners in Home Creek Tract as part of our extended family..

Howard & Rosie Atamian, Home Creek