

Directors Message

JANUARY 2015

I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year! Before we get too far into 2015, I wanted to take a look back at 2014.

I don't think it will come as a surprise that we had 1,000 more fires than in an average year, certainly something we can attribute to three consecutive years of drought. At the peak of fire season, we were responding to over 200 fires per week around the State. Through open and continuous dialogue with the Administration, they were acutely aware of the conditions we faced and supported augmentations to meet our operational needs.



During the year, we were supported with permanent budget increases that allowed us to add seven state fire engines in the mountain communities of Lake Arrowhead, Big Bear, San Jacinto, and in the Lake Tahoe Basin. We assumed full responsibility for helicopter operations at Prado Helitack in the San Bernardino Unit, providing a CAL FIRE helicopter to support the State's mission. Additionally, we began repopulating Ventura Camp with adult inmate firefighters, adding needed inmate fire crews to the central coast.

Under extremely challenging deadlines, we developed and implemented a grant program for the distribution of \$52 million of SRA and Cap and Trade grants. These grants will deliver real, on the ground projects, including fuels treatment, reforestation, urban forestry, and fire prevention.

To meet growing staffing needs and increased training requirements, we redirected staffing away from other priorities to train almost three times the number of Company Officer and Firefighter students. Although this is not a permanent fix to our training requirements, the Department's Training Program rose to the challenge to address this critical need, and the Governor's Budget released today, provides additional limited term funding to continue this effort.

In addition to the operational and fiscal successes of the Department, we had a unique opportunity to be on the ground-floor of the development of Disney's Planes II: Fire and Rescue. During its production over the past several years, CAL FIRE staff worked hand in hand with the Disney Studio crew providing significant technical support. Because of CAL FIRE's credibility as a firefighting agency, many of the characters and images throughout the movie reflected the Department.

Unfortunately, we also experienced tragedy and difficult times in 2014. In particular, the loss of Tanker 81 and pilot Craig Hunt, as well as the untimely passing of Firefighter II Roger Gonzales from the Fresno Kings Unit, hit us hard.

Additionally, the Department was shocked by the events surrounding the arrest of a now-former CAL FIRE employee following the killing of his girlfriend. His actions are contrary to the most basic tenets of our profession, and it was extremely difficult for all of us to watch as the case unfolded.

We, as well as our fire service partners, faced numerous near miss and several burn-over incidents. These served as a wakeup call for all of us that we were experiencing unprecedented fire behavior due to extremely dry fuel conditions. This was clearly demonstrated in September, when the King Fire ran 15 miles in one day.

Although we never know what the new year will bring, CAL FIRE enters 2015 well positioned and stronger fiscally than it has been in decades. The Governor's Budget, released today, reflects that. Below is a link to the complete Governor's Budget, as well as a link to the specific budgeted items for CAL FIRE:

[Governor Brown Proposes 2015-2016 State Budget](#)

[CAL FIRE's 2015-2016 Budget Summary](#)

We will continue to work with the Administration and the Legislature through the budget process for the final inclusion of these items in the Budget Act in July.

Governor Brown has been reelected to an unprecedented fourth term, providing us the opportunity to hit the ground running with the initiatives and work already in progress, such as implementation of the Cap and Trade grant programs, and to address new issues, such as updating the Department's Strategic Plan, working with stakeholders to expand the role of prescribed fire as a critical tool in fuels reduction and ecosystem renewal.

We have a lot to do and the support to get it done. I look forward to a successful 2015.

Chief Ken Pimlott
Director