



## *SouthWest InterFace Team* *SWIFT*

*A collaborative partnership since 1999*

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### *SouthWest Interface Project*

### *Accomplishment Report and Program of Work 2019/20*



*The Detwiler Fire started 7/16/2017 and burned through 8/24/17. Burning 81,826 acres. It destroyed 131 structures, of which 61 residences, an additional 21 structures were damaged. Just one of the latest major incidents to impact the Southwest Interface Project area.*

***Southwest Interface Project  
Accomplishment report & Program of Work  
CY-2019/20***

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## ***Executive Summary***

### ***October 2018***

*In 1999, the SWIFT project was developed to try and reduce the impacts of catastrophic wildland fires that threatened communities and natural resources in Southern Tuolumne and Northern Mariposa counties. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Tom James, former District Fire Management on the Groveland Ranger District in developing the concepts behind SWIFT and providing leadership for the first 15 years.*

*As we close in on 20 years of the SWIFT project, much has changed from the beginning. Initially project implementation activities were the primary focus. Once these implementation projects were completed, the focus has switched to long term maintenance operations. In the past few years with the impacts of several major fires, the primary focus continues to be on the protection of communities at risk. We continue to look for opportunities to increase the protection of those communities at risk within the project area and find the appropriate funding for these projects. However, resource protection continues to be of concern for the land management agencies.*

*Although most remember the large damaging fires that have occurred over the years, small fire can be as easily destructive when they occur in the right location. It is worthy of noting, that in the 20 years of the existence of SWIFT in all the fires that have occurred within or threatened the project area, not a single structure has been lost due to a wildland fire. This includes some pretty notable fires: Pilot fire – 1999, Hunter fire – 2000, Creek Fire – 2001, Tuolumne Fire – 2004, Don Pedro fire, 2007, Telegraph Fire 2008, Rim Fire – 2013, Big Creek fire – 2015, Marshes Fire – 2016, Detwiler fire- 2017 and most recently the Ferguson Fire – 2018. These incidents have burned almost 500,000 acres. Although no structures have burned within the SWIFT area, approximately 80 residential structures have burned along with approximately 100 out buildings (sheds, barns, etc.) as a result of these fires. Although not all of the acreage from these fires was within the SWIFT project area, they all had significant impacts on the lives, property and natural resources within the area.*

*The participation in our group has changed over the years, but the commitment and support has not. Both Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties continue to provide strong support along with the Forest Service, CALFIRE, Bureau of Land Management, the City and County of San Francisco- Hetch Hetchy Water and Power, Tuolumne and Mariposa County fire departments, the Fire Safe Councils and Resource conservation districts.*

*It is quite apparent that we will not completely eliminate the threat of wildland fires on the communities and resources within the SWIFT project area, but it is apparent that with the collaboration of all involved, we can and will make a difference by reducing the impacts of wildland fires.*



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### **Mission Statement:**

*It is the mission of the SouthWest InterFace Team (SWIFT) to cooperatively plan, implement and maintain a strategic fire defense system designed to reduce the threat of loss to life, property and natural resources from wildfires within or adjacent to the wildland-urban interface areas located in Southern Tuolumne and Northern Mariposa counties.*

### **Vision Statement:**

*As public agencies we have a responsibility within the respective jurisdictions to provide the best possible protection from wildfire for the citizens, property and natural resources located within or adjacent to the SWIFT project area boundaries. By working collaboratively as agencies, along with our partners, volunteer organizations such as Fire Safe councils, home owner groups and associations, we have the potential to provide additional protection, at reduced costs, along with increased opportunities for additional funding, and to gain respect and cooperation from the citizens and communities that we protect.*

## ***Acknowledgements:***

*As we move into our third decade of existence, it is clear that the mission of SWIFT and its strategic fire and resource protection plan is still as important today as was when it was proposed by Tom James 20 years ago, if not more so! Though there are continued changes in representatives for the various partners on the Southwest Interface Team due to retirements, position changes, etc. the field and other work continues.*

*John Gray District IV Supervisor of Tuolumne County and Merlin Jones District II Supervisor of Mariposa County continue to be regular attendees at the monthly SWIFT meetings and continue to provide full support for the efforts of the group. Hetch Hetchy Water & Power agency has hosted the SWIFT for more years than most can remember at their Moccasin Facility and are to be commended.*

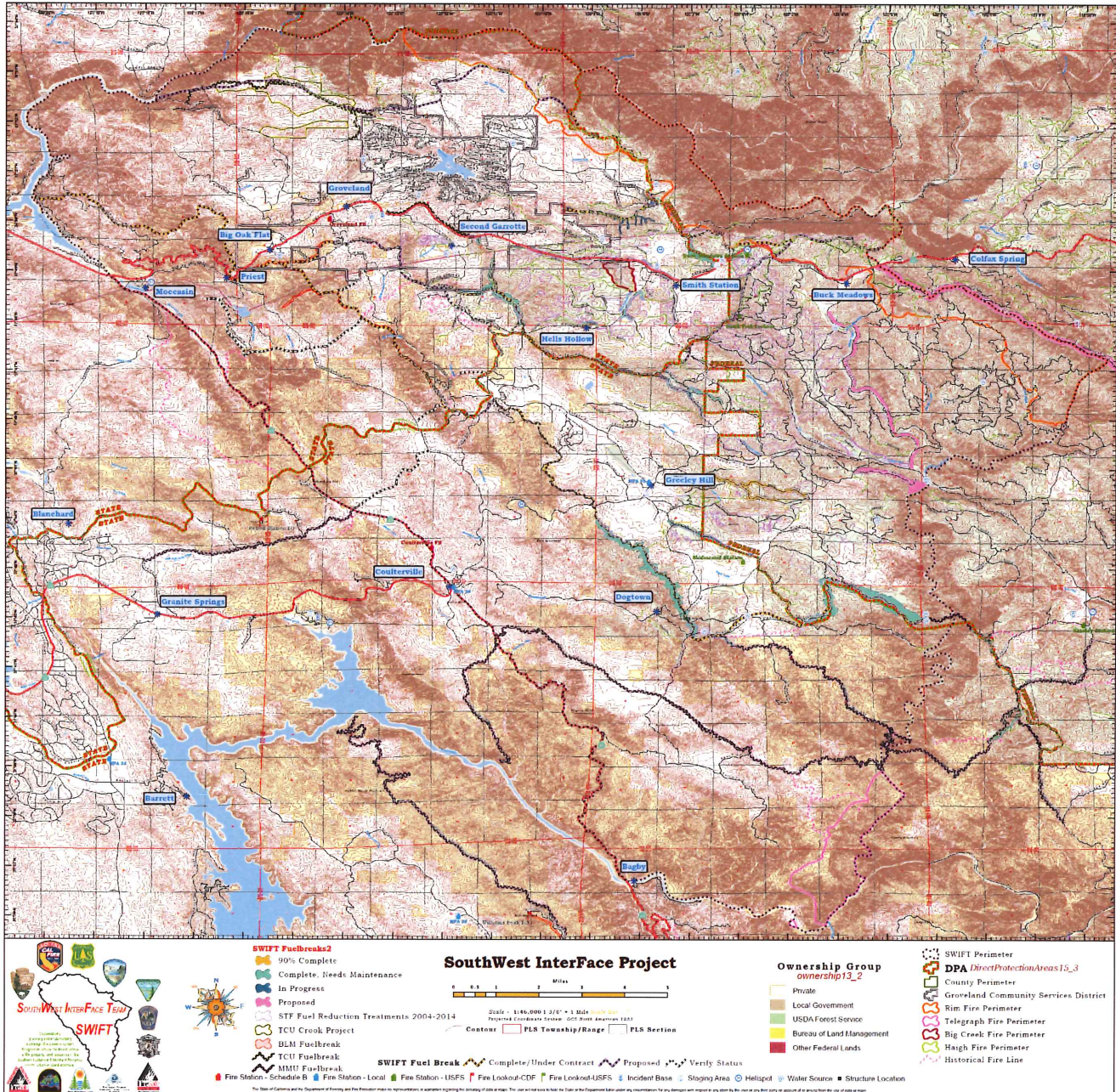
*The Yosemite Foothills and Mariposa County Fire Safe Councils are key team members in SWIFT. They provide the public side of fire prevention and preparedness effort. Their ability to garner grant funding for projects on private lands, fill a gap that the government agencies cannot fill. This creates a critical tie between the Councils and other members of the team in providing strategic fire protection to the communities at risk.*

*Pine Mountain Lake Association continues to expand the fire protection and prevention measures that it initiated many years ago. There most recent steps have been to include the neighbors on the perimeter of the subdivision to work with them on the fire protection and prevention measures.*

*The Agency cooperation with regard to some of the larger projects that cover extensive areas continues, this is evident in projects such as those being funded by the NDRC where the Forest Service and CALFIRE are working together for the greater good of the communities and resources. The same can be said for CALFIRE and BLM on their prescribed burn projects.*

## SWIFT Project area Accomplishments:

Over the past five years, the partners involved in the SWIFT project have accomplished many projects. One of the most notable was the updating of the SWIFT pre-attack map. The original map was a hard copy map that showed the location of fuel breaks, structures, water sources, helispots, staging areas and other important information for the initial attack and extended attack resources. Although this hard copy map served its purpose well, it became apparent after the Rim Fire that a more technically up to date map was necessary. CALFIRE's Madera/Mariposa/Merced Unit volunteered to take on this project. The result is a PDF map format that can be used on a computer or a smart phone or tablet by using the Avenza app. By using the Avenza app, a user can track their location real time while in the field.



*Another advantage of this new map format is that it can be sent electronically to incoming resources to provide them an up to date detailed map of the location of strategic fuel breaks, roads, structures, etc. This map format was invaluable during the Detwiler fire as we were able to provide out of area resources a map with valuable information to make decisions on where to safely attack the fire or where to place contingency lines. The next update of the map will be to provide a QR code so that the map can be easily transferred from one person to another.*

*After the 2013 Rim Fire and the subsequent disaster declaration, SWIFT members were asked to provide information on possible locations for fuel breaks that would create a more resilient environment for the communities affected by the fire in Tuolumne County. Three proposals were presented within the SWIFT project area as part of the National Disaster Resiliency Competition (NDRC). Rim Truck West, Rim Truck East and Wagner Ridge. All three proposals were accepted and SWIFT members continue to provide information and support as these projects move toward implementation.*

*As a group, SWIFT often provides letters of support to Fire Safe Councils and Agencies seeking funding for projects that are in line with the mission and goals of SWIFT. These letters of support from a collaborative group such as SWIFT greatly increase the chances of projects being funded. Several examples of these successes are the Gentry Creek headwater proposal. This particular proposal had significant impact during the Detwiler Fire, as the reduction of fuels as a result of this project helped protect numerous structures in the Greeley Hill area.*

*Another letter of support was provided for the Mariposa Fire Safe Council's proposal for Wagner Ridge Fuel break. The Wagner Ridge Fuel break runs along the Mariposa/Tuolumne County line. Since Mariposa County was not included in the Rim Fire disaster declaration, the Mariposa County portion of the fuel break was not eligible for the NDRC funding. The Fire Safe Council submitted a grant request to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for funding of the necessary environmental documentation. Their proposal was accepted and the funding provided.*

*The Gentry Creek watershed restoration project. This project was initiated by the private land owners that reside in the headwaters of Gentry creek. They received a grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to treat approximately 300 acres of private land. The grant funding allowed for the removal of approximately 2770 dead or dying trees, most of which went to the local mill, and an additional 27 truckloads were transported to co-generation facilities. Currently most of the land owners are applying and receiving grant funding for reforestation. This project was supported by the SWIFT, Stanislaus National Forest & the Mariposa Fire Safe Council. The reduced fuels associated with this project played a significant role in the containment of the Detwiler fire.*

*Most recently, SWIFT was asked to provide a letter of support for another Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant proposal by the Forest Service. The grant proposal is seeking funding to do thinning, fuels reduction and prescribed burning in the plantations south of Highway 120. Since many of these plantations are adjacent to several communities within the SWIFT project area, we provided that letter of support.*

*The recent tree mortality epidemic has greatly affected all members of the SWIFT group. As the coordinator for the group, I attended the monthly Tree Mortality meetings in both Tuolumne and Mariposa counties. This issue was a constant topic at our monthly meetings, ideas and strategies on how to deal with the excessive amount of dead and dying trees and associated fire hazard were shared among members.*

***Tuolumne County felled and removed 1630 dead or dying trees in the following areas in the SWIFT project area since 2016:***

|                      |           |         |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Old Highway 120      | 150 trees | 11/2016 |
| Groveland Facilities | 239 trees | 11/2016 |
| Merrell Road         | 295 trees | 6/2017  |
| Ferretti Road        | 522 trees | 7/2017  |
| Smith Station Road   | 108 trees | 9/2017  |
| Ferretti Road North  | 153 trees | 11/2017 |
| Smith Station Road   | 10 trees  | 1/2018  |
| Big Creek Shaft      | 153 trees | 3/2018  |

*An additional 762 trees have been or are currently scheduled to be removed in Pine Mt. Lake, Groveland area/Second Garrotte Ridge, Yosemite Acres & Old Hwy 120.*

***Mariposa County felled and removed 774 dead or dying trees in the following areas in the SWIFT project area:***

|                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Red Cloud Library              | 2 trees   |
| Greeley Hill Community Center  | 102 trees |
| Greeley Hill Rd./Red Cloud Rd. | 198 trees |
| Dexter Road                    | 202 trees |
| Fiske Road                     | 68 trees  |
| Ernst Road                     | 32 trees  |
| Cuneo Road                     | 113 trees |
| Holtzel Road                   | 57 trees  |

*This only represents the trees felled by the respective counties with the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) and State Responsibility Area (SRA) grant funding that they received. The Mariposa County Resource Conservation District also received SRA grant funding and removed 47 trees in the vicinity of Coulterville. Many more trees were felled, piled and burned within the SWIFT project area by agency personnel of the Forest Service, BLM and CALFIRE in the course of project work. Many trees were removed from existing fuel breaks so as not to compromise the integrity of the fuel breaks, and along non county maintained roads. The Forest Service also implemented the Red Tsunami which cleared dead and dying trees throughout the SWIFT area in both Tuolumne and Mariposa counties, primarily along road and adjacent to private property. Pine Mountain Lake has also been actively removing dead and dying trees along roadways and in green belts to reduce the fuel loading.*

*In 2017 we implemented field trips to the various projects within the SWIFT area. These were quite successful and greatly appreciated by the members of our group. At our monthly meeting group members gave updates on projects that their respective organizations were involved in. Hearing about a project versus being able to physically being able to be out on the ground and discuss the strengths, weakness and/or challenges of particular project was very helpful.*



*Hetch Hetchy Water & Power continues to actively treat the fuels beneath and adjacent to their transmission lines although not technically designed as a fuel break for fire suppression, the open space provides opportunities for fire suppression resources to take action to stop the progression of fires that approach these transmission lines. Additionally, many of these lines have road access to the towers or between towers, which provides access for fire suppression personnel.*

*Pine Mt. Lake received an SRA grant to treat 346 acre fuel reduction project between Hwy 120 and Pine Mt. Lake. The project was completed in 2017.*

*The Fire Safe councils have also been busy with projects. A few worthy of note are:*

*The Yosemite Foothills fire Safe council (YFFSC) has completed the following project in the past 5 years:*

*Assisted Tree Mortality Aid Program (TMAP) in the raising of funds and coordinating the removal of trees for Seniors & Disabled Adults. 2017*

*Smith Station Rd. Shaded fuel break, 50 ac., Stevens Grant Funding, - 2017*

*Buck Meadows fuels reduction, 33 ac., PG&E funding, - 2016*

*Temp. Road repair, emergency vehicle ingress/egress, Alice lane – 2015*

*Emergency vehicle access, Mountain springs Ct. between Yosemite acres and Pine Mt. Lake – 2015*

*Big Long fuel break, opened emergency vehicle access between Big Creek Shaft & Clinton Rd. and also connected to Forest Service fuel break on the ridgetop. – 2014*

*Mariposa County Fire Safe Council has continued to provide defensible space clearance for seniors and disadvantaged citizens of Greeley Hill and Coulterville.*

*During active fires, i.e. the Rim Fire, Detwiler Fire and Ferguson Fire SWIFT members are often sought out to provide input on long term strategies and tactics because of their knowledge and experience in fire behavior and suppression within the project area. This was particularly true during the Detwiler fire, when SWIFT members were asked to provide input for long range contingency line planning and implementation.*

*The Bureau of Land Management has continued to actively maintain the Tip Top, Jackass, Cuneo and their portion of the Wagner ridge fuel breaks most recently in 2018. These fuel breaks are key to the protection of the communities on the west and southwest portions of the project area (i.e. Big Oak Flat, Groveland & Greeley Hill).*

*Prescribed burn Projects completed:*

*China Flat – Forest Service      150 Acres completed, 5/18*

*Gookin VMP- CALFIRE              92 Acres completed, 6/18*

*Hetchy Anker VMP - CALFIRE      6 Acres completed, 10/18*

*This does not include pile burning projects associated with the tree mortality or fuel break maintenance.*

## *Program of work for 2019/20:*

*Update the SWIFT map PDF data base to include new information such as: constructed firelines and contingency firelines from recent fires, i.e. Detwiler, Marshes, Ferguson, shape files for fuel breaks, prescribed burn perimeters, etc. Establish a QR code for easier transfer of map file during incidents.*

***Prescribed Burning:*** *Starting in the fall of 2018 and continuing into 2019/20 there are several prescribed burn projects planned.*

***Forest Service – China Flat 5,000 acres***

*Pile burning on Wagner Ridge (Tree Mortality/Detwiler contingency line)*

***CALFIRE – TCU - Gookin VMP – 69 acres***

*Crook Ranch VMP – 2500 acres*

*Hetchy Anker VMP - 516 acres*

***CALFIRE – MMU- Greeley Hill VMP – 1,200 acres in cooperation with BLM***

### ***Fuel Break Maintenance & Implementation projects:***

*Wagner Ridge, Rim Truck East & West, Corcoran fuel breaks and Long Shanahan fuel reduction project are all part of the NDRC funding and scheduled to be completed prior to April 2022. This is a combination project being managed by both CALFIRE and the Forest Service.*

*Wagner Ridge, Mariposa Co.- The Mariposa Fire Safe council has a planning grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to do the NEPA/CEQA environmental documentation for the portion of the fuel break not covered under the NDRC funding.*

*Smith Station Road, Tuolumne Co. line to Greeley Hill - Road side fuel break – Mariposa Fire Safe Council.*