



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING STAFF REPORT COVER PAGE

JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa
Palm Desert, CA March 26, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: Los Angeles Area Fires Recovery Program Update

STAFF: Alex Luscutoff, Chief, Law Enforcement and Emergency
Services Division

SUBJECT: Overview of LA Area Fires and Impact on California State
Parks

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

No action needed, informational only.

II. BACKGROUND

Alex Luscutoff, Chief of Law Enforcement and Emergency Services
Division, will provide an overview of the Los Angeles area fires,
including information on damage sustained, response efforts, impacts to
California State Parks and next steps.

III. ATTACHMENTS

- Staff Report



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa

Palm Desert, CA 92260

March 26, 2025

STAFF REPORT: Palisades Fire

STAFF: Alex Luscutoff, Chief
Law Enforcement and Emergency Services Division

SUBJECT: 2025 Palisades Fire Impact on California State Parks

OBJECTIVE

The Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks or Department) provides this report to the State Park and Recreation Commission (SPRC) for an overview on the Palisades Fire and the Impact on California State Parks.

INTRODUCTION

On January 7, 2025, at 10:30 am, the Palisades Fire ignited on the southeast side of Palisades Drive. The State Park System sustained considerable damage from this event and two state park units remain closed. This report will detail the damage sustained, response efforts, impacts to employees, and the next steps for the Department.

DESCRIPTION (REPORT / UPDATE)

Damage Sustained:

The Palisades Fire remained active for 24 days, over 23,000 acres burned and 6800 homes and businesses were destroyed. Of the 23,000 acres burned, approximately 8,300 acres were on state park land. Will Rogers State Historic Park and Topanga State Park are two units of the State Park System that were most significantly impacted. 19 structures at Will Rogers State Historic Park were lost and there was extensive damage to fences, gates, pay stations and EV charging stations. 28 structures at Topanga State Park were lost including the Topanga Ranch Motel. Approximately 270 trees burned, 10 fleet vehicles and heavy equipment was destroyed, over 40 miles of road and more than 80 miles of trail was damaged and there was considerable damage to culverts, pedestrian bridges, and retaining walls.

Response Efforts:

The Department responded by activating the Department Operations Center (DOC). The DOC is coordinated by the Law Enforcement and Emergency Services Division and is comprised of division chiefs from all core program areas to include, Natural and Cultural Resources, Facilities, Administration, Interpretation, and Public Safety. The coordinated efforts from the DOC resulted in over 418 shifts filled by State Park Peace Officers, over 60 Natural and Cultural resource advisors assigned to the event, over 400 hours from facilities and maintenance crews, 376 hours from Interpretive Staff and many hours of work from administrative staff supporting field staff. These efforts resulted in all park visitors and employees being safely evacuated and over 150 artifacts successfully removed from Will Rogers State Historic Park ahead of the fire.

OES managed the greater fire response from a Joint Field Office (JFO) located in Pasadena. FEMA, CAL-OES, US Army Corps of Engineers, California National Guard, U.S. EPA, CalEPA and many other agencies were headquartered at this location. 19 different state park superintendents were embedded in the JFO and worked side-by-side to meet the needs of the community.

One of the more significant issues immediately preceding the fire related to the removal of household hazardous waste. OES, U.S. EPA, and CalEPA urgently needed a flat area directly adjacent to the burn zone. OES and the EPA identified the Topanga Ranch Motel and the parking lot at Santa Monica State Beach as acceptable locations. Superintendents, along with Natural and Cultural Resources Staff, worked side-by-side with US and CalEPA to identify sensitive areas, protect the most valued natural and cultural resources while also supporting the needs of the community and OES. The EPA assured the Department that best practices will be in place at sorting facilities and that park land will be cleaner than when they arrived.

Impacts to Employees:

The Palisades Fire caused 12 employees in the Angeles District to evacuate their homes. 4 of those employees had their homes damaged and 2 state residences were completely destroyed.

Many employees in the Angeles District did not want to disconnect from the emergency because of their concern for the park and their dedication to State Parks' mission. This resulted in many consecutive days of work with early start times and late departure times. With support from executive staff, leadership teams from other districts were deployed to the Angeles District. This included District Superintendents and Chief Rangers from Inland Empire, Gold Fields, Law Enforcement and Emergency Services Division and other locations to offer a much-needed break from the stress and pressure of the event. The Department's peer support program was fully activated. Peer Supporters from San Diego Coast, Santa Cruz, Orange Coast and Channel Coast responded and were available for their colleagues.

While it is difficult to convey the full impact of the Palisades Fire, there is one characteristic that is always reaffirmed during emergencies – Park professionals are among the most dedicated civil servants in government.

NEXT STEPS

Will Rogers State Historic Park and Topanga State Park will remain closed for several months. The Department is working closely with OES and FEMA on Phase II Debris Removal which includes removing hundreds of Hazardous Trees. Once all hazardous are identified and mitigated, both parks will re-open for use.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

COMMISSION ACTION(S)

N/A