

CALIFORNIA

MONDAY, JULY 10, 2017 :: LATIMES.COM/CALIFORNIA

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES



THE WHITTIER FIRE near Lake Cachuma scorched just over 12 square miles and burned 20 structures on both sides of Highway 154.

Photographs by ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

Forced to scramble to safety: 'It was terrifying'

As heat wave continues, thousands are evacuated as flames destroy homes and threaten infrastructure.

By JAVIER PANZAR AND MATT HAMILTON

GOLETA, Calif. — With a heat wave continuing to bake California and the rest of the West, wildfires forced nearly 8,000 people to dash for safety Sunday as flames destroyed homes and threatened thousands of structures across the state.

Along the Central Coast, firefighters battled two major blazes on opposite ends of Santa Barbara County. Efforts Sunday focused on protecting mountain peaks that hold crucial communication and electrical infrastructure, including a high-voltage line that carries power to Santa Barbara and neighboring cities.

The Alamo fire, near Highway 166 in northern Santa Barbara County, was the largest active blaze in California and was 15% contained after burning more than 37 square miles as of Sunday evening, according to the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. At least 200 people were forced to evacuate a remote area east of Santa Maria, and about 1,000 firefighters from Los Angeles and across the state



SMOKE obscures the sun as a U.S. Forest Service official watches the Whittier fire burn just north of Goleta.

rushed to help control the flames, Cal Fire said.

About 35 miles to the south in Santa Barbara County, more than 3,500 people have fled the Whittier fire near Lake Cachuma, which was burning just north of Goleta. The blaze scorched just over 12 square miles and burned 20 structures on both sides of Highway 154, according to officials with Los Padres National Forest.

That fire, which started about 2 p.m. Saturday, initially trapped some 80 campers at the Circle V Ranch Camp. But U.S. Forest Service firefighters reached the group later that day, said Capt. Dave Zaniboni of the Santa Barbara County Fire Department.

On Sunday, firefighters were aided by slightly lower temperatures — nearby Santa Ynez saw a high of 91, compared with 106 on Saturday — and favorable winds blowing in from the Pacific that halted the fire's spread downhill toward Goleta. The blaze was moving east and west along the Santa Ynez Mountains into areas that were badly burned by two wildfires in the last decade, limiting the available fuel.

"It will act as a good buffer," said Jim Harris, deputy fire chief for Los Padres National Forest.

Harris said the firefighting effort in Santa Barbara County is in need of additional "hotshot" fire crews with the kind of rugged engines that can navigate the steep dirt terrain where

[See Wildfires, B6]

Giving new life to the spans

Higher gas taxes will go toward fixing state bridges eroded by rivers' scour power.

By LOUIS SAHAGUN

Searching for evidence of erosion, the primary danger facing California's highway bridges, is a life's work for Kevin Flora.

On a recent weekday morning, the state Department of Transportation engineer gunned the outboard motor of an inflatable skiff and scooted over murky water on a mission to inspect a 53-year-old 405 Freeway bridge that spans a stretch of the San Gabriel River — a spot loaded with trash and teeming with green sea turtles as wide as manhole covers.

Using GPS and sonar equipment, Flora soon found what he was looking for: holes up to 10 feet deep and 30 feet wide in the riverbed and around the foundations of the bridge, which carries an average of 282,000 vehicles a day just north of the Orange County line.

"The problem here," he said, raising his voice to be heard above the din of freeway traffic, "is that this bridge is just downstream from the mouth of a paved flood control channel that funnels turbulent stormwater into an earthen-bottom section of the river."

It's among 230 state high-

[See Bridges, B5]

When no body is no problem

By NICOLE SANTA CRUZ

The recent discovery of 5-year-old Aramazd Andresian Jr.'s remains at a Santa Barbara recreation area was a grim achievement for investigators who had spent more than two months frantically searching for the boy.

It was also a boost for Los Angeles County prosecutors, who had already filed a murder charge against the child's father without having found the body.

Authorities have not released details about the condition of the boy's remains, but the discovery can only help investigators as they try to piece together what exactly led to his death.

Pursuing a murder case without having found a victim's body presents a unique challenge for prosecutors. Lacking a corpse means they can't show jurors the type of powerful evidence that proves someone was

[See Body, B5]

CAPITOL JOURNAL

Telecom bill a bad deal for residents

GEORGE SKELTON IN SACRAMENTO

There's a classic brawl raging in the California Legislature between a bankrolling private interest and several toothless local governments over wireless expansion.

It's a fight being waged essentially under the radar. This subject isn't sexy like a gas-tax increase, universal healthcare or a so-called sanctuary state for immigrants here illegally. So it hasn't gotten much public attention.

That's when special



interests tend to win.

This battle involves the big telecommunications companies — AT&T, Verizon and the like — trying to push aside local governments and start installing the next generation of wireless infrastructure without pesky interference from city hall or the courthouse.

The telecom corporations want to streamline permitting and reduce costs for slapping transmitters — ranging in size from a pizza box to a small refrigerator — on municipal utility poles, street lights and traffic signals wherever they want.

The industry anticipates installing 30,000 to 50,000 "small cells" in the next few years as it rolls out the next generation of wireless net-

works, 5G. It will be faster and have more capacity than what we've got today.

But today, local governments control where the equipment is placed, usually on tall cell towers, which won't be needed for the new stuff.

Under the contested bill, SB 649 by Sen. Ben Hueso (D-San Diego), local governments wouldn't have the power to deny permits if the telecoms followed the minimum guidelines set by Sacramento.

Also, local governments have been tapping telecom outfits for \$3,000 or more annually for each transmitter. Sometimes they've been hitting up the firms for a little extra kickback, such as

[See Skelton, B4]



JEFF ROBERSON Associated Press

INSTEAD of using tall cell towers, telecoms want to hang transmitters on street lights and utility poles.

L.A. drivers, Jakarta has it worse than you

A policy change in the Indonesian capital taught motorists the value of carpooling. **B2**

Campaign ads in Arabic, Urdu

Lieutenant governor candidate courts a niche voter base. **B2**

Lottery **B2**

Cell bill takes away local control

[Skelton, from B1] connecting the local library to wireless. None of that would be allowed under SB 649. And the maximum per year lease on a small cell would be \$250.

Local governments are aghast.

"They'd get to deploy their equipment on their own terms wherever they wanted to deploy it," says Rony Berdugo, lobbyist for the League of California Cities. "It would force counties and cities to lease their public property for wireless equipment. And it would eliminate negotiated leases.

"We now have discretion," Berdugo continues. "We can say, 'We don't want it on this pole; put it on another pole. Make your equipment the same color as the pole.' They could put up something the size of a refrigerator on a street light by your frontyard. We don't want refrigerators on poles outside people's windows."

Local citizens wouldn't have a meaningful say. There'd be no public input. It would be strictly Sacramento's call.

The telecom companies are concerned that the current permitting process would bog down expansion of broadband capacity as demand explodes. Already, they say, there are more wireless devices in California than people.

In many communities, they contend, the regulations and lease fees for wireless infrastructure are ancient, created when 200-foot towers were the norm. Some towns refuse to allow small cells on utility poles and other structures, they argue. The bureaucratic process is too lengthy, they add, and the current fees are "extreme."

The telecom giants already have thrown up the white flag in the face of one group that tends to be wealthy and politically connected: beach dwellers. Coastal zones — narrow strips along the waterfront — are exempt from the bill, as are historic districts.

So someone who lives in Malibu might be able to



ARKASHA STEVENSON Los Angeles Times

TO SET UP 5G networks, telecom corporations want to install 30,000 to 50,000 "small cell" transmitters on public property, such as utility poles and street lights. The maximum lease on each device would be \$250 a year, compared with \$3,000 or more for current equipment.

\$1.6 million

Amount of money AT&T gave to political groups and politicians last election cycle

30,000 to 50,000

Number of "small cells" to be installed on street lights and utility poles

beat back the visual blight of a refrigerator-size contraption. But forget it if you're in Montebello.

In Sacramento, the telecoms have hoards of money to fuel legislators' reelection campaigns, and they routinely spend it.

During the last election cycle, AT&T doled out more than \$1.6 million to political groups and politicians. Virtually everyone got a piece. The California Democratic Party was given \$615,000. The Republican Party got \$625,000.

AT&T also spent \$250,000 on the annual Speaker's Cup golf tournament at the world-class Pebble Beach course. That's the Assembly Democrats' big fundraiser.

By contrast, the League of California Cities and other local government organizations aren't allowed to spend a dime on politicians because their money comes from taxpayers. They do lobby, however.

In matchups like this, the money-doling special interests usually win when only a few people are paying attention. They often lose if the public opens its eyes and gets irritated. Then the

politicians respond to their constituents.

Hueso's bill breezed through three Senate committees and the full Assembly in less than two months. There was only one "no" vote, from Sen. Steve Glazer (D-Orinda).

The measure cleared its first Assembly committee on a 6-2 vote — the two "no" votes were from Democrats — and is scheduled to be considered by the Communications and Conveyance Committee on Wednesday.

This is the kind of bill you'd expect Gov. Jerry Brown to veto, based on his rhetoric advocating local control. He's fond of the word "subsidiarity," meaning governance should be handled locally rather than by central powers, such as Sacramento. But Brown is unpredictable.

You can't blame the telecoms for wanting to kick locals in the rear and ex-

pedite the permit process for expanding broadband. But they shouldn't be allowed to ignore locals. And they should pay a fair price for hanging their machinery on public property.

People should not be forced to stare at ugly refrigerators dangling outside their homes.

george.skelton@latimes.com

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The Trump administration's promised crackdown on illegal immigration has also sparked fear and

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To download the Acceptance of the Notice of Conditional Offer Prior to Sale form, or for additional information on the conditions of eligibility for purchase, how to purchase, or a list of properties to be sold, please visit <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist07/business/710sales/> or call (213) 897-0789.

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