

Rain brings end to Camp Fire, impedes search for human remains

By Kathleen Ronayne
The Associated Press

PARADISE, California — The catastrophic wildfire in Northern California is nearly out after several days of rain, but searchers are still completing the meticulous task of combing through now-muddy ash and debris for signs of human remains.

Crews resumed the grim work Saturday as rain cleared out of the devastated town of Paradise. Some were looking through destroyed neighborhoods for a second time as hundreds of people remain unaccounted for. They were searching for telltale fragments or bone or anything that looks like a pile of cremated ashes.

The nation's deadliest wild-

fire in a century has killed at least 84 people, and 475 are on a list of those reported missing. The flames ignited Nov. 8 in the parched Sierra Nevada foothills and quickly spread across 240 square miles, destroying most of Paradise in a day.

The fire burned down nearly 19,000 buildings, most of them homes, and displaced thousands of people, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said.

The two-week firefight got a boost Wednesday from the first significant storm to hit California. It dropped an estimated 7 inches (18 centimeters) of rain over the burn area over a three-day period without causing significant mudslides, said Hannah

Chandler-Cooley of the National Weather Service.

The rain helped extinguish hotspots in smoldering areas, and containment increased to 95 percent. Despite the inclement weather, more than 800 volunteers kept searching for remains.

Crews worked on-and-off amid a downpour Friday. While the rain made everybody colder and wetter, they kept the mission in mind, said Chris Stevens, a search volunteer who wore five layers of clothing to keep warm.

"It doesn't change the spirits of the guys working," he said. "Everyone here is super committed to helping the folks here."

His search crew went home to Orange County on Saturday after completing its assignment.

Authorities also lifted evacuation orders for certain sections of Paradise.

In Southern California, more residents have returned to areas evacuated in a destructive fire as crews repaired power, telephone and gas utilities.

Los Angeles County sheriff's officials said they were in the last phase of repopulating Malibu and unincorporated areas of the county. At the height of the fire, 250,000 fled their homes.

Flames erupted Nov. 8 just west of Los Angeles and burned through suburban communities and wilderness parklands to the ocean. Three people died, and 1,643 buildings, most of them homes, were destroyed, officials said.

— OREGON IN BRIEF —

From wire reports

Man pleads not guilty to stealing Ohio man's identity

PORTLAND — A Portland man accused of stealing an Ohio man's identity and trying to use it to take over the lease of a luxury car has pleaded not guilty to identity theft.

KATU-TV reports 40-year-old Kenneth Colvin entered the not guilty pleas Friday to 14 counts of the crime.

Police arrested Colvin Nov. 13 after they say he responded to a post on swapalease.com seeking someone to take over the lease of a 2016 BMW 340.

Police say Colvin, while pretending to be Shaun Milleson, paid for a background check, paid for the lease transfer and a credit check on the credit history of Milleson.

Probable cause documents say Colvin agreed to meet the man to finalize the transaction Nov. 13.

Ohio investigators also were investigating identity theft against the actual Shaun Milleson.

SEX ABUSE

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"It creates the possibility of helping other victims, because sometimes they don't know who assaulted them," Jenkins said. "Or little kids who can't vocalize yet — which unfortunately we have."

Susan Stephens, a sexual assault nurse examiner at Good Shepherd Medical Center, said the hospital completed 17 sexual assault examinations in 2017, and the same number in 2018 so far. Of those, she said, they collected SAFE kits on 15 and gave three to law enforcement, keeping the victim anonymous.

She said nurses will sometimes be subpoenaed to testify on a sexual assault case, and some of Good Shepherd's sexual assault nurse examiners have done so. But she said all those cases have been settled out of court.

Jenkins said there is no typical method by which victims report sex crimes. Often it will be reported by someone else, like a family member or teacher. Studebaker estimated the number of sex crimes reported is likely between 10 and 30 percent of the number that actually take place.

Many resources for sexual assault survivors both locally and statewide are focusing more on encouraging victims to report. A group of Good Shepherd nurses, including Stephens, recently brought the Start By Believing campaign to the hospital, which encourages people to respond to reports of sexual assault with acceptance instead of skepticism, to encourage people to report more. Studebaker said the "You Have Options" program, started by a detective in Ashland, works with law enforcement to help them focus their investiga-

tions on the actions of offenders, while promoting a safe environment for victims to come forward. The program, he said, gives the victim as much control as possible with the case — including if and when they want to pursue it.

Jenkins said while many victims do want to pursue a case, there's a lot of preparation for all involved — gearing up the victim and family for what's about to happen.

"I have to ask parents who've already had their trust betrayed to trust me. They have to let me walk into the room with their little kid."

It takes time to develop a relationship with the victim. She recalled the times where she's had young victims who don't want to talk.

"I won't force them," she said. "If they just want someone to sit and color with them for an hour, then that's what we do."

She said she's been amazed by the strength of some victims — as well as understanding of those who may not be strong enough to go through a trial.

She remembered one teenage victim who shocked her: "She came in and said, 'I Googled you,'" Jenkins said, laughing. The teen mentioned an article she had found, where Jenkins had relayed an embarrassing story, and asked her about it. "She said, 'I want to know who I'm working with!'"

Resources

The impact of a sex crime case is uniquely damaging to all involved, Jenkins said.

"There's a lot of blame, guilt," she said. "Nine times out of 10, the mom will say, 'I should have seen this coming.'"

Even when choosing a jury, Jenkins said, she has noticed that many people will be disqualified for their proximity to

a similar crime — many have a friend or relative who've gone through some sort of abuse, but she said almost always, someone in the room has been a victim themselves.

There are resources locally for victims, including the Sexual Assault Response Teams in Umatilla and Morrow counties. Those teams are composed of nurses, victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors and judges, and assist victims of sexual assault.

The DA's office provides victim advocates, and gives victims information to seek counseling if they choose to.

Edmiston said he feels the field doesn't provide enough resources for professionals who deal with sex crimes.

"I think we're remiss in making sure our own people, across the country and across the profession, are physically and mentally healthy," he said.

Jenkins said developing a balance between work and life is important — when she first started the job, she said she worked seven days a week. Now, she's better about making time to think about and do other things.

She enjoys running, hiking and spending time with loved ones. She teaches and takes Zumba classes.

"I try to give every case all that I can, and try to be there for my victims in whatever capacity I can be," she said. "My victims deserve that, and because I don't think I could sleep otherwise."

Still, she said, she's had to acknowledge that cases will not always get the outcome she wants for victims.

"I've come to realize there are some things I cannot fix, some issues (legal or factual) that are insurmountable, and some hurts that can only be healed by time."



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