

Ranchers take stock of rangeland, forage damage from fires

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

OROVILLE, Calif. — Rancher Kurt Albrecht was away at a meeting when a neighbor called to tell him of the wildfire that was rapidly approaching his property.

He and his son drove home from nearby Orland, Calif., and by the time they got to Oroville, they could see the Cherokee Fire on the top of Table Mountain overlooking the city.

“It was a huge, wide expanse,” Albrecht said of the blaze that started Oct. 8 and charred 8,417 acres, mostly rangeland. “It was many miles wide and headed in our direction, so we raced home.”

The two ran three trailer loads of goats and sheep off their ranch and let their cows stay in a section of irrigated pasture behind a fire break. The fire swept through their property, taking out a hay barn and three employee houses and devastating the pasture they were using as winter feed for the livestock.

“When we came back for our third load, the fire had come off the top of the table and gotten into a canyon behind our place that hasn’t burned since the ‘20s,” Albrecht said. “We pulled out for the last time, and it had already gotten into the barns and was headed between our two larger houses.”



Colleen Cecil, manager of the Butte County, Calif., Farm Bureau, checks photos of damage to farmland from recent fires in the area. She said mostly rangeland was burned by the fires, although a few structures were lost.

Albrecht is one of numerous ranchers who are still taking stock of their feed and other losses af-

ter wind-driven wildfires swept through parts of Northern California in October, killing at least 43

people and destroying 8,900 houses and other buildings. State officials estimate the overall insured losses at \$3.3 billion so far, among the highest of any U.S. wildfire in recent decades, according to The Associated Press. While the fires spared most cattle, they’ve forced ranchers to supplement feed to their livestock while their burned pastures recover, which could take a couple of years.

While the world was focused on fires in the iconic wine country, four blazes were scorching the rolling hills and mountains of Butte, Yuba and Nevada counties, burning 17,037 acres and destroying or damaging 414 buildings, according to the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Much of that ground is winter range, and the fires also caused hay loss, said Colleen Cecil, manager of the Butte County Farm Bureau.

“The biggest loss will be any feed that was there,” Cecil said. “The silver lining from a fire burning property is that you can get rid of weeds. But those are decisions you’d like to make.”

A few ranches, including Table Mountain Ranch in Oroville, did suffer “significant devastation,” she said.

The fires were the latest event to rattle the Oroville area after the Oroville Dam’s near failure in February led to the evacuation of about 188,000 area residents and threat-

ened a large portion of the Eastern Sacramento Valley’s \$1.5 billion agriculture industry.

“I don’t know what (else) God has in store for us,” Cecil said.

Albrecht’s Chaffin Orchards just north of Oroville produces olives and citrus and stone fruit as well as livestock. The fire stayed out of the orchards and spared the two family residences, but Albrecht will have to replace housing for four of his seven permanent employees.

Two of the employee houses were built of concrete blocks with metal roofs, but the fire outside was so hot that it caused things inside to catch fire, and the homes “burned from the inside out,” Albrecht said.

“These guys have been in these homes for 30 years,” he said. “They’re long-term employees with families. We’re going to have to figure out other accommodations for them. ... It’s not a cheap operation.”

Several federal programs are available to help ranchers impacted by wildfires. They include the Livestock Indemnity Program for animal losses, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program for forage and the Emergency Conservation Program for fence and other infrastructure repairs.

For information on the programs, contact a local Farm Service Agency office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Tim Hearden/Capital Press



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4-H PROVIDES ATV SAFETY TRAINING



Isabel and Boden Sayer, Brownsville, have taken the Oregon ATV Safety Youth Rider Endorsement Program.



Youth have to pass equipment evaluation, mental riding exercises, pre-riding exercises and physical riding exercises.

By *Mary Stewart*
OSU Extension Service

All-Terrain Vehicles, ATVs, are fun to ride and useful for work, but they can also be dangerous if the operator doesn’t operate the ATV safely. Youth are learning the right way to ride safely through the Oregon ATV Safety Youth Rider Endorsement Program (OASYREP).

According to Dr. David White, Oregon 4-H Youth Development Specialist who oversees the state’s outdoor education and recreation program, OASYREP provides youth ages 6-15 with the hands-on training, evaluation, and endorsement they need to ride safely and legally on public lands.

Youth under the age of 16 who want to ride ATVs on Oregon’s public lands, must pass an Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) on-line ATV Safety course.

Once completed, youth are then required to pass a hands-on training and evaluation to receive an endorsement. The 4-H program is one of a few organizations that provides both training and evaluation. For a complete list of locations and dates, visit <http://oregonatvsafety.com/>. A fee is charged for the course.

Once both the course and evaluation are completed, the youth will receive a card they should keep with them when they ride on public lands.

“The training and evaluation sharpens and measures the physical and mental readiness of the youth,” said Robin Galloway, a 4-H Youth Development Faculty and certified ATV instructor. “Looking ahead, quick thinking and action prevents a rider from running into an oncoming bicycle or horse, or keeps them from landing in the ditch,” added Galloway.

During the evaluation, an instructor will check the fit of the rider to the vehicle, and ask riders to turn the vehicle on and off before sending them through a course of cones that tests their ability to make quick stops, turn, weave and handle obstacles.

Tenille Sayer, Sayer Farms – Brownsville, is a 4-H volunteer who has seen positive results from the ATV safety program through experiences with her two children – Isabel, 13 and Boden, 10. Sayer endorses the program because it “eliminates those kids who are just put on a quad and taken out to public lands to ride.”

The training teaches youth to be self-sufficient. They learn the parts of the vehicle and simple maintenance such as changing the oil and spark plugs. “They learn to carry a tool kit so they don’t get stuck somewhere,” said Sayer. “We have hills on our farm and they need to go up and down the hills and know how their quad will react to the hill and how to position their bodies.”

ATVs include 4-wheelers and side-by-sides. Three-wheelers are not considered safe to use.

For more information on ATV Safety and other outdoor programs, visit: <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/projects/outdoor>



The physical riding exercises require youth to successfully pass numerous tasks like starting and stopping, quick stops, turning, weaving, evasive moves and obstacles.



ATV instruction at Sand Lake. OASYREP Instructors like Cathy Chrenka are located throughout the state. They are 4-H volunteers and deputy sheriffs.



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