

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL

December 18, 2018

Analysis of the Woolsey Fire

The Woolsey Fire began on November 8, 2018 and burned for thirteen days before it was contained. It was an unprecedented, fast-moving brush fire that was 14 miles wide, with a footprint of 150 square miles, and driven by gusts of up to 70 mph — ultimately moving from the 101 freeway corridor to the ocean in just five hours. 70,000 homes, businesses and other structures lay in the fire’s path. A quarter of a million people were evacuated, approximately 2,000 residential and commercial buildings, and other structures were damaged or destroyed. This was the most destructive fire Los Angeles County (“County”) has ever seen.

Habitat and open space were also affected. Approximately 88% of the land in the Santa Monica National Recreation Area, owned by the National Park Service, burned, blackening more acres within that National Recreation Area than any other fire in recorded history.

As first responders fought the blaze, their first priority was to protect life through evacuations. County Departments worked together to constantly assess the trajectory of

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the fire, weather conditions, and topography in order to identify threatened areas in order to effectively fight the fire, ensure the safety of residents, and provide for structure defense where possible. As a result of their strategic deployment of resources, there was minimal loss of life and thousands of homes were saved. Nonetheless, the public has many questions about the procedures used for evacuations, firefighting processes and the decisions made regarding repopulation.

Our success in protecting human life should not disguise the fact that the County has entered a new era of threat from wildfires. Prolonged drought, coupled with other effects of climate change, has created an environment of explosive brush fire development, making firefighting more difficult than ever. We increasingly see residential housing growth at the urban wild land interface which poses greater danger to firefighters and to the residents who live in these extremely high fire severity zones.

Given these new realities and the attendant dangers, the County must prepare for a "new normal." The County needs to review existing prevention regulations and emergency notification systems, and look to lessons learned and what we can do better moving forward. All entities must be involved in this planning process including local law enforcement agencies, fire departments, emergency management agencies, city, state and federal agencies involved in emergency response efforts, residents, city officials and community organizations.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to convene a Working Group to review the response to and recovery from the Woolsey fire and to identify best practices for evacuation and repopulation procedures, including the need for a uniform mass notification system for use throughout the Santa

Monica Mountains and the County of Los Angeles. The task force shall be comprised of all County Departments and other agencies involved in the Woolsey fire and its aftermath, including but not limited to County representatives from emergency response agencies, such as the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Animal Care and Control, Public Health, Public Works, as well as the Los Angeles Police Department, the California Highway Patrol, Ventura County Fire, the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, Cal-OES, Cal-Fire, the National Parks, as well as representatives from the unincorporated Santa Monica Mountains, the City of Los Angeles, the cities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Hidden Hills, Malibu, and Westlake Village and the County of Ventura. The Working Group shall provide a progress report back to the Board in 90 days and every 90 days thereafter until such time as a final report is prepared and presented to the Board of Supervisors.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to engage the Working Group referenced above, and to retain a consultant with subject matter expertise, to review the County, City, State and other involved agencies efforts in responding to the Woolsey fire, and prepare and present a progress report back to the Board in 90 days, and every 90 days thereafter until completed, with an emphasis on the following:

1. The cause and origin of the Woolsey fire;
2. The deployment of firefighting resources as the fire progressed;
3. The distribution and adequacy of firefighting resources, including the availability of mutual aid resources;

4. Evacuation notification and procedures, including the implementation of public alert procedures and the use of mass notification systems;
5. Strategic communications during the fire and its aftermath between first responders, law enforcement, and municipal governments and the communities impacted by the fire; and
6. Community repopulation notification and procedures, including any conflicts in information between and among fire and law enforcement agencies.

The consultant's report shall detail lessons learned and the strengths of the response and recovery efforts and shall also identify areas of improvement to assist the Board in determining whether changes are needed in order for the County to be best prepared to respond to another catastrophic event such as a wildfire of Woolsey's magnitude.

S: LM/Analysis of the Woolsey Fire