



Blair, Church & Flynn's Creek Fire Response Team spent over four weeks navigating active fires and charred debris, assisting SCE with post-fire assessment of critical facilities & infrastructure.

# The Creek Fire

## Post-Fire Assessment, Restoration Assistance & Prevention Plan Development



***“It looks like Mars out there,”*** said a Shaver resident. After 24 hours, smoke had blocked the sun and fire threatened both the Big Creek and Shaver Lake communities. The true extent of the damage to SCE's critical assets was unknown.

It started on September 4th, 2020. During a hot and festive Labor Day weekend, one that was battling record-high temperatures and random lightning strikes, the Creek Fire took hold. It burned almost 380,000 acres in total and left the communities of Shaver Lake and Big Creek in devastation.

It would be Christmas Eve, December 24th, before fire managers declared full containment on the biggest single wildfire in California's history. The spark of the wildfire, was in the

Big Creek drainage area, a dense forest wedged between both Shaver and Huntington Lakes. It quickly raced through both lakes, Mammoth Pool and the San Joaquin River Canyon before first responders were able to bring it under any kind of control.

Adding to the devastation, the wildfire's path was directly within Southern California Edison's (SCE) Big Creek Hydroelectric project and its critical power generation infrastructure.



# Unforgettable Scenes in the Field

The Creek Fire Response Team was tested with extreme challenges - including active burn areas, access issues, compromised air quality - and snakes.

Our team of engineers and land surveyors were among some of the first non-fire crew allowed to survey the damage of the Creek Fire in the Sierra Nevada Forest. Because there were still active fire areas, smoldering debris and unknown damage to structures and roadways, our team's safety was of the utmost importance.

Blair, Church & Flynn's response team navigated highly difficult field conditions, treacherous access roads and steep terrain all within an ongoing emergency situation. Our team encountered falling logs, live fires, steep cliffs and even had several rattle snake sightings.

Air quality was also highly compromised in these areas. and the long days in close proximity reinforced the need for N95 respirator masks and vigilant adherence to established Covid-19 protocols. To be as responsive as possible, our firm acquired off-road vehicles equipped with air-purification equipment to gain access to compromised sites where typical field trucks couldn't go, either due to air quality or active burns.

When the Blair, Church & Flynn response team reflects on their time in the field and their work for SCE during the Creek Fire, one thing is certain: They're very glad they were there to help. The team produced desktop reviews, site reconnaissance visits and provided construction oversight for the majority of SCE's critical assets "on the mountain" including more than 470 transmission towers and four substations.

Members are immensely proud of the successful completion of erosion mitigation plans for more than 100 critical electrical transmission and distribution assets, where they worked hand in hand with contractors in the field to install improvements that will save vital resources and sensitive environments. Not only for the first rain event, but for those many rains that follow.

Our team kept ahead of schedule, amidst harsh working conditions, remote locations and sub-par access to facilities. It wasn't uncommon for one wheel of the field vehicle to be almost in a ditch, while the other got uncomfortably close to a cliff.

Regardless of the uncommon site conditions however, the team's inspection efforts were expedited by continuous office support resources, who were engaged to work parallel with the field response team.

And the big achievement? All of the field inspection and preparation of erosion mitigation plans were completed within 42 days, allowing for the complete installation of all improvements prior to the first precipitation event of the season.



## Creek Fire Restoration Efforts at a Glance:



Site visits & construction oversight for **4 substations & 470+ transmission towers**



Erosion mitigation plans completed for **100+ SCE critical assets**



Safely logged **1300+ man-hours** amidst harsh conditions & remote locations



All field inspection & erosion plans completed in **42 days**, ahead of the season's first rain event



**Photos: The Blair, Church & Flynn Creek Fire Response Team performed site reconnaissance and assessments for four SCE substations, over 470 transmission towers and more than 100 other critical assets.**