



## Three Days of the Creek Fire - September 4th - 6th 2020

The purpose of this brochure is to inform travelers on the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway of how this landscape was forever changed by the Creek Fire during the first three days of the incident. Driving the byway is an excellent way to grasp the effects of the largest single wildfire in California history. Please note that this information is from eyewitness observations, fire maps, documentaries from Outside the Lens, Jeff Aiello, and Channel 30 news. None of this information was obtained from officials of the USFS.

Starting your journey in the small town of North Fork travel on Road 225 which turns into Minarets Road, Mammoth Pool Road, and the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway 81. To help gain some perspective of the area, we recommend your first stop be Redinger Overlook. Here you can witness the first sight of the San Joaquin River and the Big Creek Hydroelectric project. This area is the entry to the dramatic landscape that the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway has to offer and the first of many scenic overlooks. Next stop, the turnout at Mammoth Pool Powerhouse/Powerhouse 8. From this location you can see the approximate area where the Creek Fire started around 4 pm on Friday September 4th 2020. The fire ignited somewhere up the canyon towards Big Creek, across the San Joaquin River above the penstocks but below Camp Sierra, cause unknown as of June 2021. The fire began in that area and traveled up the canyon towards Big Creek, from there it began to spread at a rapid rate and behave unpredictably. The following timeline may help you to understand how fast and furious the Creek Fire became along the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway.



## Three Days of the Creek Fire - September 4th - 6th 2020

### September 4th 2020 - Friday Evening

Use the turnout at Mammoth Pool Powerhouse/Powerhouse 8. From this location you can see the approximate area where the Creek Fire started around 4 pm on Friday September 4th 2020. The fire ignited somewhere up the canyon towards Big Creek, across the San Joaquin River above the penstocks but below Camp Sierra, cause unknown as of June 2021. Friday evening it was around 10 acres and crews were fairly confident they could extinguish it quickly. By 10 pm that didn't seem likely as the Creek Fire grew to 100 acres and Big Creek and Huntington Lake communities were threatened. The glow from the flames could be seen by byway travelers and local residents. This glow was all too familiar to locals and many were not too concerned with the threat of the fire jumping the San Joaquin River, however by noon on Saturday that threat became reality. You may have noticed several homes and structures along the route that were saved by the heroic efforts of local residents and fire personnel. Our hearts go out to those who suffered any loss due to the Creek Fire incident. Along the route you will see both the devastation and beauty caused by fire. Many of the vistas and unique rock formations could not be seen before the fire.

### September 5th 2020 - Saturday

By Saturday morning the fire had progressed down the Big Creek canyon and up the mountainside across from you and had developed unexpected behavior. Fire induced winds up to 60 mph+ blew embers and flames at a rate of 15 miles in 4 hours (which may be a record) across the San Joaquin River canyon towards this area and around it. Next travel along 81 through the burn scar to Mile High Overlook where you'll get a glimpse of Mammoth Pool Reservoir. From this point to our next recommended stop Mile High Vista, note the views of the burn scar and how the area has been drastically changed. Mile High Vista gives you a view of our beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains with Mammoth Pool Reservoir at the bottom of the river canyon.

The campers of Wagners Mammoth Pool Resort and many other campers and travelers in the area began to evacuate mid day but by 2pm anyone within the Chiquito Creek basin area found themselves taking shelter at Mammoth Pool Reservoir. Those who evacuated before this time were met by fire personnel at 81 and led to safety. The fire had moved so rapidly, engulfing Chiquito Ridge and devastating the Chiquito Creek basin, many were caught off guard by the intensity of the Creek Fire. The fire engulfed everything below Mile High Vista and in less than 24 hrs had grown from 10 acres to 45,000 acres. Unfortunately, there were several other fires in California at the time so resources were not abundant (personnel, aircraft, heavy equipment, etc.). However the California National Guard rescued 242 people by helicopter from the Mammoth Pool Boat Launch throughout the night. Most of what you see from this vista point was engulfed in flames as the campers and residents were helicoptered to safety. There was a small group of campers and residents with several animals that were not helicoptered but drove to safety while escorted by fire personnel.

### September 6th 2020 - Sunday

By Sunday afternoon the fire continued its incredible rate of growth and had grown to 81,000 acres, up both sides of the San Joaquin River to Huntington Lake, Shaver Lake and surrounding communities and also towards North Fork. Over the next few days the Creek Fire continued on its path destroying structures and forest lands and grew to 181,000 acres or 282 square miles. By the final days of the incident the fire had consumed 380,000 acres and devastated forest land and communities from Cascadel Woods above North Fork to Shaver Lake, to Pine Ridge to Fuller Buttes and Brown Cone in the distance. Be sure to visit the metal signs at Mile High Vista to view the geography of the area to better understand names and locations within the burn scar.

# Burn Area Safety



## Sierra Vista Scenic Byway Association SierraVistaScenicByway.org

While you continue your journey on the beautiful and breathtaking Sierra Vista Scenic Byway, we hope you enjoy the amazing Sierra National Forest and surrounding areas.

The Sierra Vista Scenic Byway Association is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose purpose is to stimulate interest in educational, interpretive and related activities along the Sierra Vista Scenic Byway.

Join us! Visit our website for more information.

Please be safe traveling along the Byway and be sure to check with USFS Sierra National Forest Bass Lake Ranger District for information regarding closures of recreation sites, roads and trails at [fs.usda.gov/sierra](http://fs.usda.gov/sierra) 559.297.0706 559.877.2218

### HAZARDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

#### Snags and Falling Trees

Roots have been damaged

Tree structural strength damaged by fire

Increased chance of trees falling over

#### Loosened Soil

Vegetation burned off surface = less stable soil

Rocks, boulders, logs can become dislodged easily and roll downhill

#### Burned out Holes in the Ground

Stumps, roots, and duff subsurface create hollow cavities that are hidden above ground

Dangerous if you step in also hot ash can continue to smolder in these holes

### WEATHER TO WATCH OUT FOR

#### Wind Events

Leave area immediately if wind is substantial

'Increased chance of limbs or trees falling

#### 'Precipitation

'Chance of landslides and flash floods

Water runs easily off of burned hydrophobic soil

Drainages can be blocked with debris and form dams, when these break a flash flood can occur

Things to consider - signs may have burned bring navigation tools, also animals have lost their homes and food resources, they may be stressed - give them space

Recreate Responsibly and Enjoy our Beautiful Sierras!