

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

***United States Attorney
Laura E. Duffy***

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Douglas Keehn (619) 546-7573 or Joseph P. Price, 619-546-7642

For Immediate Release

SDG&E Pays United States \$6.4 Million for "Witch Creek Fire" Damages

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – September 17, 2012

United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy announced today that San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) has agreed to pay \$6,429,736 in settlement for damages to federal lands and for federal firefighting costs arising from the 2007 Witch Creek Fire in San Diego County. In addition to the other devastating losses in San Diego County, the Witch Creek Fire burned approximately 44,150 acres of federal land in the Cleveland National Forest in San Diego County. The Cleveland National Forest includes 720 square miles of federally-protected wilderness and recreation area in Southern California and is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. U.S. Forest Service Fire Management, working in close partnership with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management and numerous state and local emergency responders, combated the Witch Creek Fire and other wildfires in San Diego County for nearly three weeks beginning in late October 2007.

The settlement resolves the United States' claims for SDG&E's responsibility for the fire that was caused on the morning of October 21, 2007, when SDG&E's high-voltage power lines malfunctioned during strong, dry Santa Ana wind conditions. The electrical transmission wires, which remained in use despite line faults throughout the morning of October 21, produced electrical arcing and burning particles that ignited one of the largest wildfire events in California history. The \$6.4 million settlement represents the full amount of federal fire suppression costs and natural resource damages incurred as a result of the Witch Creek Fire.

"The United States takes its role as steward of public lands very seriously," said United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy. "The Cleveland National Forest is not only one of San Diego's community treasures, but has been an important part of the American conservation heritage since the Cleveland Forest was established over a century ago. This settlement recovers one-hundred percent of the Forest Service's economic losses sustained as a result of the Witch Creek Fire, enabling our skilled and dedicated Forest Service personnel to continue their rehabilitation efforts in the damaged areas and to speed the Forest's recovery from the disastrous fires of 2007."

"Our focus for the Pacific Southwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service is ecological restoration, making national forests in California more resilient to changes in climate and providing sustainable ecosystems that offer a broad range of products and services to humans and other organisms," said Randy Moore, Regional Forester. "This settlement will help us to accelerate that effort."