

Officials identify suspect in Courtney fire at Bass Lake

By Rory
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The remains of a home smolders near Road 426 and Cedar Drive in Oakhurst, Monday, September 15, 2014, where a wildfire stormed through the area on Sunday, destroying more than 20 homes.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

Cal Fire officials have identified a suspect they say was responsible for starting the Courtney fire, which continues to burn in and around Bass Lake, as well as a youth suspected of intentionally starting 13 arson fires in the Oakhurst area over the past several months.

Officials say the juvenile is not connected to the Courtney fire, and neither suspect is associated with the Junction fire, which swept through Oakhurst in mid-August.

Cal Fire spokesman Bernie Quinn said Thursday that the Courtney fire case was handed over to the Madera County District Attorney's Office for investigation.

The cause of the Junction fire, which burned for a week and consumed 612 acres, remains under investigation. In August, Cal Fire officials said they were not discussing the case out of concern it could jeopardize the ongoing investigation.

The Courtney fire was 90% contained by Thursday evening, Cal Fire reported. It consumed 320 acres and damaged 56 structures, including 30 homes destroyed, Cal Fire reported. All evacuation orders have been lifted.

The state Department of Insurance reminded fire victims Thursday that they may have insurance benefits to help with additional expenses associated with evacuation and recovery.

The state office also said it's available to help people who suspect they have been approached or targeted by a scam artist or need assistance with their insurance claims. The department's consumer services team can be reached at (800) 927-4357.

The Madera County Sheriff's Office is asking those affected by the Courtney fire to fill out surveys for the purpose of assessing the total damage and level of aid needed, spokeswoman Erica Stuart said. Sheriff's officials will hand out these surveys at three locations: the Grocery Outlet at 40301 Junction Drive from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. today, the Miller's Landing barbecue fundraiser in Bass Lake from 5-9 p.m. today and the Raley's Shopping Center at 40041 Highway 49 from 9-11 a.m. Saturday.

Stuart said representatives from the True Value Home Center in Oakhurst will be at the corner of Road 426 and Pine Street starting at 9 a.m. Saturday to help those affected by the Courtney fire.

Meanwhile, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. said Thursday morning that its crews had restored power to all affected customers in the area.

PG&E crews are expected to remain in the area doing cleanup through the weekend as well as some preparation work to help homeowners rebuild when they are ready, spokesman Denny Boyles said.

He added that the Courtney fire is the eighth wildfire that crews in PG&E's Yosemite Division (Merced and Madera counties) have responded to this fire season.

A group of public agencies have come together to encourage wildfire prevention at www.preventwildfireca.org/OneLessSpark.

Fire information is available online at www.fire.ca.gov or by calling the Courtney fire information line at (209) 966-4784. Residents can register for emergency alerts within Madera County at www.mcalert.org or by calling (559) 675-7770. Three events will be held in Oakhurst this week to help residents sign up for the alert system.

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