

WHITTIER FIRE - 2017



The Whittier Fire was a fast-moving 2017 wildfire in the Santa Ynez Mountains of Santa Barbara County that burned about 18,430 acres, destroyed 16 homes, and forced large evacuations around Highway 154 and Lake Cachuma. It began in dry grass and chaparral near Camp Whittier along Hy 154 and across from Lake Cachuma, then spread rapidly through steep terrain and windy conditions to the top of the Santa Ynez Mountains near Broadcast and Santa Ynez Peaks.

These images represent some of the impacts the Camino Cielo area received during the fire.



Near the crest, the fire likely removed mature shrubs, opened the canopy, and exposed soils on steep, erosion-prone slopes. That kind of burn can trigger strong postfire erosion and runoff, especially in chaparral watersheds, while also creating opportunities for native species that depend on fire cues to regenerate. The long-term effect depends on recovery time: if another fire comes too soon, chaparral can be pushed toward degraded grassland or weed-dominated cover.



Its impact on the chaparral near the mountain crest was severe but also ecologically typical for this vegetation type. Chaparral is adapted to infrequent, high-intensity crown fires, so a fire of this kind generally burns the shrub layer thoroughly rather than patchily. In the Whittier Fire area, officials noted that the chaparral had not burned in roughly 70 years, which meant a heavy fuel load had built up on the slopes.

Today the chaparral has made a remarkable recovery in just 9 years.









Whittier Fire Gallery - 7











Whittier Fire Gallery - 12



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Whittier Fire Gallery - 21











