

The "Old Fire"

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Smoke billows from the "Old Fire," a wildfire that raged in the San Bernardino Mountains of California in the fall of 2003. In this view from a distant peak, gray-white smoke rises in great clouds from green mountains, partly obscuring a sky with only wisps of cirrus clouds. A single evergreen (possibly a cedar) is visible nearer the photographer in the lower right corner of the photograph, and provides some sense of scale and distance.

Fanned by the Santa Ana Winds, the fire burned 91,281 acres (369.4 km²), destroyed 993 homes and caused 6 deaths. The final cost of the fire was \$42 million dollars. It should be noted that a USFS report on the "true" combined costs of the 2003 Old Fire, Padua, and the Grand Prix wildfires which burned at the same time was nearly \$1.3 billion. When cleanup, watershed damages and other costs are considered beyond the mere "bill" for firefighting, wildfire impacts are much higher than many realize. The fire threatened San Bernardino and Highland, as well as the mountain resort communities of Crestline, Running Springs and Lake Arrowhead and forcing upwards of 80,000 residents to evacuate their homes. The suspected cause of this fire was arson.



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