As California fires rage, Realtors fear the worst

***Update**: Since the original story ran yesterday, the Camp Fire has spread to more than 20,000 acres as of this morning and the* New York Times confirmed *there are at least five fatalities of individuals that were trapped in cars as they tried to flee.*

A fast-moving wildfire is raging through Butte County in Northern California in the Sierra Nevada foothills, north of Sacramento and just east of Chico. One Realtor on the ground told Inman the blaze is “worse than you can imagine.”

“It’s horrible,” Stephanie Neumann, a Realtor with Blue Team Realty told Inman. “We’re going to lose the entire town, there are fires everywhere.”

At press time, the Camp Fire had spread to 8,000 acres, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which classified it as “dynamic and moving very quickly.” The department’s website does not say it has been contained at all.

Neumann explained that the area is heavily treed with ponderosa pine trees and a lot of them are standing dead. Coupled with high winds blowing hot ash around, the fires are spreading rapidly she explained.

“As horrible as you can imagine, it’s worse,” Neumann said. “The entire town is evacuated, not just a neighborhood, not just a zone.”

Solving the largest crisis for agents: healthcare

It’s time for all real estate professionals to have peace of mind READ MORE

Photo of sky darkened by the Camp Fire in Paradise, California. (Credit: Stephanie Neumann)

Neumann, who spoke to Inman from nearby Chico, said when her husband went to get his parents to help them evacuate, the sky was pitch black and you could hear the sound of transformers exploding. The evacuation process from Paradise, California has been arduous as well, she explained.

“If you can imagine a town with just a couple roads going in and a couple roads going out – single lane or double lane – so it’s bumper to bumper to bumper traffic,” she said. “People running

people over to get out of the way. There's ashes falling. You hear the wind from the fires. There's spot fires."

Evacuation orders are in effect for Paradise, Magalia, Concow, Butte Creek Canyon and Butte Valley. The Butte County Sheriff's office's Twitter feed is constantly updating with evacuation areas and advice.

> Reminder: If you are in Magalia, the best way to evacuate is to go north on Skyway to Butte Meadows. #ButteSheriff #CampFire
>
> — Butte County Sheriff (@ButteSheriff) November 8, 2018

She added that now that the fire has reached the town, she and others are speculating that Paradise is going to lose a lot of structures.

Ryan Patterson, an agent with North State Real Estate, spoke to Inman Thursday as friends evacuated from Paradise, California, and a massive plume of smoke spread across the sky.

"It's awful," he said. "The whole western sky is just a big smoke plume. The smoke plume itself looks like its spreading pretty rapidly."

Patterson is based in nearby Oroville. He said that Paradise is filled mostly with single family homes on small lots, adding that the city is "built into the forest." Fires make real estate difficult in the region because they not only affect demand, but also result in insurance moratoriums, preventing new would-be property owners from getting insurance until the fire is contained plus time.

"It makes it hard to close properties," he explained.

Making matters even worse, the fires in the region only appear to be getting more ferocious.

"Fire has always been a part of life up here," Patterson said, "but the past couple years it's gotten worse. It's really bad."

The immediate and long-term concern, according to Neumann, "is where are people going to stay?"

The hotels in Chico are already booked and it's an area starved for housing in the first place.

"We're such a rural area, I don't think we have the ability to house people," Neumann said. "There's not enough housing as it is."

"Even people before the storm, we have so many people looking for rental housing and we have such a limited supply of rental housing people couch surf because there's not enough homes to rent," Neumann added. "Now with homeowners being displaced, I have no idea what it's going to look like but there's going to be a lot of people hurting."

Neumann said the area is a poor community on a per-capita basis, so when the fire is contained, they will be looking for donations of food, water, blankets and school supplies.

"Anything to get people feeling a sense of normalcy," she said.

Email Patrick Kearns

Additional reporting by Jim Dalrymple II.

Source: click here