



SAN GORGONIO PASS
WATER AGENCY
A California State Water Project Contractor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Aerial Firefighting System Stops Fire in Cabazon at 14 Acres

BEAUMONT, CA (May 26, 2026) – San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency’s (SGPWA) Heli-Hydrant system played a critical role in helping firefighters quickly contain the recent Lemon Fire in Cabazon, preventing an emergency that had the potential to expand to as much as 700 acres.

“Partnerships and investments like these make real threats to life, property, and the environment far more manageable,” said SGPWA Board Secretary Sarah Wargo, who represents Cabazon. “It was amazing to see this project work exactly as intended and help stop the fire from spreading. Having these Heli-Hydrants available locally gave firefighters another important tool to protect our community.”

The fire was initially reported as a 2-acre vegetation fire in Cabazon. Air resources responded rapidly, including airtankers that conducted multiple retardant drops and a firefighting helicopter assigned to spot fires, flare-ups, and mop-up operations.

Both of Cabazon’s Heli-Hydrant sites were used during the firefighting response, allowing aircraft to refill within seconds. Heavy smoke near the southern Cabazon Heli-Hydrant forced the helicopter pilot to shift to the northern site to continue suppression efforts safely.

Thanks to the rapid and coordinated response, the Lemon Fire was contained at approximately 14 acres of vegetation, with damage limited to one outbuilding and four vehicles. This effort protected approximately 2,630 residents in Cabazon and demonstrated, once again, the life-and-property-saving value of investing in local wildfire response infrastructure and regional collaboration.

The Heli-Hydrant project was developed by SGPWA in partnership with local water agencies, Riverside County Fire, and Cal Fire to strengthen wildfire response capabilities across the Pass area. Funded through \$1.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding secured by Riverside County Fifth District Supervisor Dr. Yxstian Gutierrez, the network is designed to place strategically located refill stations on both sides of Interstate 10, allowing firefighting helicopters to refill water in as little as 10 seconds without requiring ground crews.

Originally developed by retired firefighter Mark Whaling, the system helps aircraft remain closer to active fires, improving response times during critical early stages of wildfire suppression and enhancing protection for high fire-risk communities throughout the region.

Learn more about SGPWA’s Heli-Hydrant network at sgpwa.com.

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About San Geronio Pass Water Agency

Formed in 1961, SGPWA is a State Water Contractor that serves a 225-square-mile area of western Riverside County. The service area includes the cities of Calimesa, Beaumont, and Banning, and the communities of Cherry Valley, Cabazon, and the Banning Bench. In addition to importing State Water Project (SWP) water from Northern California to augment local groundwater sources, the Agency builds local system infrastructure, participates in water transfers, partners in statewide water projects and collaborates on regional water reliability and conservation efforts.