

By HEATHER HACKING - Staff Writer
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Friday was a day of power outages, fires and a murky creek for residents in Butte Creek Canyon and beyond.

A downed power line near Centerville shut down power to about 4,700 PG&E customers in Magalia, Butte Meadows, Stirling City and Forest Ranch beginning at about 6 a.m.

PG&E worked to reroute the power to customers, which was completed by about 1:45 p.m., said Paul Moreno, spokesman for the utility.

About 8:30 a.m., a fire was reported in a remote area about a mile from Honey Run Road. Mary Ann Aldrich, spokeswoman for Cal Fire-Butte County, said the acreage is unknown, but it was small.

A while later, at 9:42 a.m., PG&E got a call from Cal Fire asking that transmission lines in the canyon be de-energized to protect firefighters.

DeSabra Powerhouse, upstream from the fire, generates electricity and is where transmission lines are located, Moreno explained.

"During that operation, we turned off the generators to the Desabra Powerhouse." Instead of going through the powerhouse, the water was sent through a spillway channel, he explained.

Before the water was diverted, the creek was very clear, because it hadn't rained in a few days, Moreno said.

But the spillway was dusty and dirty, and the water diversion sent that dirt down Butte Creek.

Two residents of Butte Creek Canyon called this newspaper wondering what was up with the creek.

Chuck Kutz, a board member of the Butte Creek Watershed Conservancy, said the water was clear until about 11 a.m., when he noticed the change. He's accustomed to some short periods of silt during maintenance of flumes in the area, but this lasted several hours, he said.

Moreno said workers were taking turbidity samples Friday afternoon, but he said the water was probably about as murky as during a winter rain storm.

Aldrich said a helicopter used to fight the fire dipped into the creek, and could have churned up the water.

The cause of that fire is still under investigation, Aldrich said.
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