

## ***TWARS (This Week at Reef Seekers)***

### ***January 12-19, 2025***

What a week it has been . . .

**FIRST OF ALL** - To any of you who have lost your homes or simply had to evacuate your domicile, our hearts go out to you. We realize in times like these, scuba diving may not be prominent on your mind, but if there's anything we can do to help - replace c-cards, help you clean gear, replace gear, or whatever - please let us know.

**DAY BY DAY** - I am not in any immediate danger. I'm in Westwood south of Wilshire/Sepulveda and the fire is not moving in this direction. At least, not yet (nor do I really think it will). But I certainly know plenty of people who have had to evacuate as well as a number of people who have lost their homes. And there are many who aren't sure yet if their home is still standing or not. And as I've said numerous times, anyone who lives in the L.A. knows someone who has been displaced or lost their home or maybe they can just see the fire from afar. And the point is that even if this hasn't hit you directly, you know someone who has been directly affected. Writing is always good therapy for me (plus I've got a journalism background) so I've been posting notes and thoughts on FaceBook. Some of my musings:

#### **TUESDAY NIGHT**

##### **I CAN SEE FLAMES FROM THE 405 FREEWAY**

I just dropped Laurie Powers off at LAX for her flight home (where there's massive snow). On the drive back to Westwood on the 405, right around National heading north, I can see a line of fire and flames on the hillsides to the NW. No idea how far away. I'm guessing it's in the area of Will Rogers State Park and Riviera Country Club. A bit unnerving to see the actual fire and - knowing it's far away - getting a concept of how big it really must be. And it's not just a single line of fire. I must have seen a dozen of separate burning areas. When I got home, I went up to our roof and can see smoke over the buildings across the street from me - again, no clue as to how far away the smoke really is but it's a number of miles - and there's a flickering orange glow reflecting off the bottom of the smoke cloud. That's the actual fire burning. I don't feel that I'm in any danger in Westwood. (And the Palisades evacuation center is the Westwood Rec Center two blocks away from me so they're thinking that this is a safe area.) But they just expanded the evacuation area to include part of Santa Monica between Montana and San Vicente Blvds., from 26th Street to the ocean. Yikes!!!

#### **FRIDAY AFTERNOON**

##### **THE LATEST FROM THE WESTWOOD PERSPECTIVE**

For those unfamiliar with the geography, Westwood (where I live) is about 4 miles east of the eastern edge of the Palisades fire. I talked with a good friend of mine this morning who lost his house in Altadena. I know another person who lost their Altadena home plus someone who lost two homes in the Malibu and Pacific Palisades areas. I had to go up to the UCLA campus today and the smoke wasn't as bad as yesterday. You can still see plumes of white-ish smoke to the west but not as bad as yesterday or the day before. Can't see any flames, but that doesn't mean they're not there or still smoldering. I have not personally visited any of the fire-struck areas - we have a weekly softball game at the Palisades Rec Center, which I'm told is still standing but is in the middle of areas that were wiped out - but my impression is that the photos are similar to what Hiroshima looked like after the nuclear bomb was dropped. Pure obliteration with an occasional structural survivor here and there. CalFire says that just for the Palisades fire, it's consumed 20,438 acres and is 8% contained. Don't let the 8% fool you. It's not so much that we're taming the fire as it is that everything that's combustible has burned and there's nothing left for the fire to feast on. Total of 10 deaths so far (from all of the fires) and that number will surely climb. Eaton fire is listed as 13,690 acres, 3% contained. It's estimated that each fire has destroyed 5,000 homes or businesses for a total of 10,000. How do you replace and rebuild that? And it's one thing to replace/rebuild/repair the structural losses? But what about the massive mental anguish this has caused? As I've said before, there's no one who lives in L.A. who doesn't know someone directly affected by these fires, either because of evacuations or loss of their homes. "Devastating" is an understatement. This hits all 10 million of us who call L.A. home.

#### **FRIDAY NIGHT**

##### **I CAN SEE FIRE GLOW AGAIN**

I've been hearing for the last few hours that the fire edge is on the move, basically heading north or NE towards Encino and the SF Valley. There are new evac areas. I went up on the roof of my building and looked NW and saw nothing. But then I looked sort of N/NW, straight up Kelton (the street where I live), and I can see a red glow under the clouds at the top of the visible ridge. Using Google Earth, it looks like it is up around Mulholland

Drive and west of the 405 (about six miles away from me), perhaps north and west of Mountaingate, but this means (if I'm correct) that it may be heading up and over the hill and down to Encino. This is a long way from over and the wind forecasts are predicting a return of milder Santa Anas over the weekend. Not good.

### **SUNDAY MORNING**

#### **SUNDAY REPORT FROM WESTWOOD - A GLIMMER OF HOPE???**

I just took a look towards the Palisades fire area from my rooftop. This is the first day that I have not been able to see any smoke at all. Hopefully that's a good sign. (It's certainly a blue-sky day here in Westwood.) That certainly doesn't mean the danger has passed and may also not mean the danger's even abated much.

Part of this apparent success likely goes to the relentless air attack that's been mounted in the last few days by helicopters and fixed-wing airplanes who have been dropping retardant and water every chance they get. Much of this has been on TV and it's really impressive to see.

As of 6:33AM this morning, CalFire lists the Palisades fire as 11% contained. (Eaton is listed as 27% contained.) But don't let those number give you too much comfort. "Contained" means the fire has been stopped from advancing but it doesn't mean it's not still burning. In theory, you could have 100% containment and still have a raging inferno going on, but just within a confined area.

And there's concern today about winds picking back up out of the N/NE. That's what got this all started. The good news is that, blowing from that direction, it theoretically might slow down recent movement of the fire since the first was moving towards the direction the wind might be coming from. But it could also push the fire backwards but into areas that were spared the first time through. In Westwood, we've got no wind today and no forecast of any increase. But in Encino, over the hill and NW of where Westwood is, they're talking 15-20mph winds this afternoon and maybe tomorrow.

I got my oil changed yesterday afternoon. Before you go, "What on earth does that have to do with the fire" I have to tell you that I was sitting next to a guy in the waiting room and we were watching fire coverage on the TV there. As we got to talking he said, "I live in the Palisades on the street where the fire was first spotted." Turns out his house and two or three others were somehow spared - at least for the moment - but everything else around him was burned to the ground. He showed me a video he'd taken the previous day when allowed back in for a little bit. He and a friend drove down Sunset Blvd. and it was utter devastation. He passed by the area where I play softball and the large church that's at the top of the street was only a charred steel skeleton. The nearby Ralphs was leveled. Homes were burned beyond recognition. (Ironically, the local fire station seemed to survive.) We both came to the same conclusion: Even if your home was spared, how can anyone live here with no infrastructure in terms of shops, roads, utilities, etc.? How long will this take to return to "normal," and what the new "normal" will be?

And that's the second crisis L.A. will face shortly: How do we recover and move forward? How do you rebuild on this scale? Where do all the displaced people go to live in the interim? How do you recover and move on mentally, let alone with buildings?

So it may be a blue sky day here in Westwood, but there are still figurative clouds on the horizon and a long way to go even after the last of the flames have been extinguished.

### **SUNDAY LATE MORNING**

#### **ANOTHER INDICATION THAT THINGS MAY BE CALMING DOWN . . .**

All the local TV stations this morning are running regular programming, not non-stop fire coverage.

So there you have it. We're not out of the woods yet. And we can share with you that we've been in touch with Carter Cray who owns Malibu Divers on PCH in Malibu, and it seems their building (and entire strip mall) has survived the destruction that swept through the part of PCH that touches the ocean. So there's a glimmer good news in all of this.

**THE PERFECT DISTRACTION FROM THE FIRES** - If you're a photographer, you MUST see this. And even if you don't photo, I think you'll find it interesting. The link is to a FB video and I'm not sure if you need to be signed in to FB to see it or not. but the photog featured creates amazing time-lapse images where he can distill an entire event into a single picture that's created from multiple multiple exposures. In this case, he did an NFL game. I found the entire video to be fascinating and interesting (and it's less than 10 minutes long). I hope you'll take time to view it: [TIME-LAPSE PHOTOGRAPHER CREATES AMAZING IMAGE](#).

**AND IF THAT DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU** - How about a young manatee being rehabilitated and released in Crystal River, Florida? How can a manatee NOT cheer you up? Click here for the cuteness: [MANATEE RELEASE \(WITH AUDIO\)](#).

That'll do it for now. In the meantime, let's go diving together somewhere in 2025!!!

- Ken