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In addition, over 200 BIA firefighters were dispatched to battle the Poomacha fire alone, which, at only 70 percent contained, remains a serious threat to the La Jolla Reservation (the Witch and Harris fires are 99 percent and 100 percent contained, respectively).

“I want to commend the employees of the BIA’s Southern California Agency and Pacific Regional Office and other BIA regions who responded so quickly and effectively to this emergency,” Artman said. “Their diligence in the performance of their duties during so difficult a time best exemplifies the BIA’s mission of service to the tribes.”

In addition to BIA personnel, fire crews and trucks were sent from tribes both in and out of the state. The Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation in California and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon each sent a hotshot fire crew. Fire trucks sent from the Warm Springs Tribes, the Chippewa-Cree Tribe in Montana and the Colorado River Indian Tribes in Arizona joined equipment provided by 11 of Southern California’s 18 tribes.

The La Jolla Band of Luiseno Mission Indians and the Rincon Band of Luiseno Mission Indians have suffered the most severe damage from the Poomacha fire. The La Jolla reservation has lost 59 of its residential homes while the Rincon reservation has lost 65 homes and its historic chapel. In and around the Rincon reservation alone, both Indian and non-Indian residents have been coping with lost homes, clogged or closed roads, power outages, lack of potable water, downed telephone lines, as well as health concerns from dead or dying animals and the fires’ impact on air and water quality.

Other tribes that have experienced fire damage and the displacement of tribal members include the Pauma-Yuima Band of Luiseno Mission Indians, the Mesa Grande Band of Diegueno Mission Indians, the Santa Ysabel Band of Diegueno Mission Indians and the San Pasqual Band of Diegueno Mission Indians.

The Poomacha fire has burned approximately 19,748 acres on the La Jolla (8,679 acres), Pauma-Yuima (5,360 acres), Rincon (3,585 acres), Pala (2,118 acres) and San Pasqual (6 acres) reservations. The Witch fire has burned approximately 10,481 acres on the Barona, Capitán Grande, Inaja-Cosmit, Mesa Grande and Santa Ysabel reservations. The Harris fire burned one acre on the Jamul Reservation.

In the face of catastrophe, Indian communities in Southern California came together to support the many fire victims. Local casino hotels became evacuation centers for those seeking shelter. Tribal evacuation centers were established on the Pechanga, Soboba and Campo reservations. The Noli School, a BIA-funded 6-12 grant day school on the Soboba reservation, became a temporary shelter. And some tribes and tribal members not dependent upon federal relief chose to forgo their BIA assistance so that others in greater need could receive it.

Note to Editors: A photo of Assistant Secretary Artman’s visit to the Rincon reservation that accompanies this release may be viewed via the DOI website at www.doi.gov.