



Mount Wilson Observatory with Bobcat Fire earlier in the week.

Dear Friends,

As many of you may know, the Bobcat Fire is now threatening the Observatory. It started on Sunday, September 6 near the Cogswell Reservoir deep in the San Gabriel Mountains, and has burned for a week, mostly north, east, and south. But for the last few days, it has moved westward down into the Santa Anita Canyon. As of Sunday night, it has crossed the river at the bottom of the canyon, passed Chantry Flats, and is headed rapidly upslope towards Mount Wilson. The fire will probably be upon us today.

We find ourselves in an extra tough place this year, with fires raging across the western United States, all competing for limited firefighting resources. The weather conditions have created the perfect storm, with exceptionally dry vegetation. And the pandemic has undoubtedly added another level of difficulty to these efforts.

Nevertheless, we have been preparing all year for a fire, as we do every year. Trees have been cut. New high-flow hydrants have just been installed a few months ago to help replenish the fire departments tanker trucks with water. (A special thanks to the Ludwick Family Foundation who just a year ago awarded us funds for these and other essential infrastructure upgrades). Our giant 530,000 gallon reservoir has just been topped off and is ready to supply 33 hydrants across the Observatory. Thanks to generous funds from Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, the renovation of this critical water supply was finished last year. Another 270,000-gallon tank, belonging to the U.S. Forest Service and maintained by the Observatory, lies just outside our main gate to help defend the Observatory and the broadcast towers which provide radio, television, and communications to most of the LA Basin.

As we go to battle, a skeleton crew of four of our maintenance staff will be on hand to assist the firefighters until such time as they are ordered to leave. They have been working all week in extremely smoky conditions readying hoses on all the hydrants, lowering metal shutters on building windows, and countless other critical fire-safety preparations. Saturday, Todd Smith, who runs the LA County road operations on the mountaintop and always does heroic work to maintain access on Red Box Road from Angeles Crest Highway, cleared a small landslide that has been blocking the Old Mount Wilson Toll Road. This will provide additional access for fire crews and a second escape route in case Red Box is obstructed.

While we hope the Observatory makes it through relatively unscathed, the battle could go either way. The sun will be heating the forest tomorrow and winds will pick up in the afternoon. Our thoughts are with the firefighters who will defend the Observatory against the approaching blaze. We know they will give it their best. We cherish the historic telescopes on the mountain that revolutionized humanity's understanding of the Cosmos and hope they will be safe. That is the most important thing.

With so much going on around us throughout the state, little attention has been paid by the media to what is at stake on this unique mountaintop above Los Angeles. But we will know the outcome soon enough. For those who wish to follow the events, as best we can convey them, please go to our website at mtwilson.edu where there are links to our Facebook and Twitter feeds, to our live tower cams, and to the U.S. Forest Service twitter page on the Bobcat Fire.

The Observatory thanks all of our many supporters, and now more than ever, we hope to see all of you looking through our telescopes and enjoying our special events someday soon!

Best Wishes,

Sam Hale
Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mount Wilson Institute