



Seneca: a History Worth Saving

By John C. Nichols, Public Information Officer



On June 29, the Chips Fire started in the rugged mountains of the Feather River, southwest of the small historic mining community of Seneca, California. The extreme dryness of the forest, the rugged topography, and a series of high wind events frustrated efforts to check the spread of the fire.

The Chips Fire northeastern spread was finally checked in flat terrain, successfully protecting the communities along Lake Almanor. However, the mining town Seneca sat at the bottom of the valley along the Feather and Bear Rivers within the fire area and was evacuated.

Seneca's rich history stems back over 160 years to the 1850s when gold was discovered in the streams and mountains of the Feather and Ohio Rivers. Locals today trace their family roots to the original gold miners in Seneca. Many of the original structures from 160 years ago are no longer there but the life of the original Seneca continues through memories passed on through generations.

Chris Boldman, a Boise Smokejumper, was tasked to protect Seneca. "Recognizing the difficulty of what we were tasked to do" Boldman said, "and the simple fact that the outcome of our actions would directly affect lives and property in a historic area, we pooled our experience with the intent to do our best to save Seneca, and it worked".

Hotshot leaders scouted to determine the best place to put in handline. They also planned night time burnout operations when wind and weather conditions would work to the firefighters and to Seneca's advantage. Burnouts were essential to reinforce the handlines dug by both day and nightshift crews. Engine crews strategically placed hose and sprinkler systems for structure protection.

"I was proud of the professionalism shown by all our folks working to save Seneca", said Boldman.

"We put all our experience and training to work in this one effort. The terrain, dry fuels, weather conditions, fuel type, and everything was against our succeeding. But I know that every person involved in the outcome of Seneca's survival has a personal piece of history of their own that only a fellow firefighter can fully understand. We're all just glad that property owners have their homes to go back to, and Seneca can continue to add to its already rich history."



Chris Boldman shares the strategy for Seneca.



*Firefighters protecting the town Seneca.
Photos Courtesy US Forest Service*