

CASE STUDY

Butte County Rebuild

DRMcNatty resources were brought in to jump start the construction efforts and bolster the project management capability at the inception Butte County/Paradise Rebuild in the summer of 2019. It was late in the construction season and the goals for the initial year were substantial and ambitious.

INDUSTRY



Utilities

PROJECT

Paradise - Main Line
Underground Project
(MLUG)

LOCATION

Northern California

SERVICES PROVIDED

Project Preparation
Project Construction
Project Closeout



OVERVIEW

The Butte County Rebuild Program was launched to rebuild the electric, gas, cable, and telecom infrastructure following the California wildfires in 2018. DRMcNatty was hired to support the project management efforts of the program including project preparation, construction, and closeout.

CHALLENGES

The project management team was faced with immediate challenges since much of the work was still being focused on securing the safety throughout the devastated community, structures and vegetation needed remediation and removal to allow for a safe transition to rebuilding the infrastructure. To get the remaining customers back in service overhead facilities were installed while operating in event mode, and had isolated many services where structures were destroyed.

Once the decision was made to complete 20 miles of MLUG done in 2019, cost controls took a back seat to construction progress to be achieved by year-end. It became obvious that internal crews did not have the capacity to achieve the goal, and outside construction contractors would be needed asap, both at the outset and for the duration of the program.

Given the need to work quickly and install multiple utilities in a joint trench, a new Program Management Organization was created to streamline the process, DRM played a role in helping shape the PMO.

Part of the plan was to shorten the project preparation and construction phases dramatically. This worked well in 2019, goals were met, and as 2020 settled in so did the traditional approach with much more silo-based management and review. The program and individual projects continue to adjust and respond as many stakeholders influenced the ongoing work.

SOLUTION

Any projects that were about ready to go into construction before the summer of 2018 took off first, there were only a few of these. The balance of the work was scoped by dividing it up into approximately 100 lots and about a mile of mainline to be installed as an underground joint trench. The fire evacuation



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zones were used as a geographical reference and numbering convention. Collaborative discussions were undertaken with telecom and cable entities about the options for participation in joint trench efforts and how best to approach this work.

Once final scope was agreed upon with partner entities, design and estimates could be completed, which led to permit applications and bid documents. All of this was compressed into 6 to 8 weeks in 2019, with much of the actual construction work starting in September and October.

The project had about a dozen contractors working on 20 projects as the end of 2019 approached, in addition to the hundreds of trucks hauling trees and debris from the cleanup efforts.

In addition to the MLUG projects, several other overlapping efforts need coordination. These include running new temporary overhead power, and service requests that continue to come in. Our focus is always to get the customer connected asap.

RESULTS

Goals have been met in 2019 and 2020, in terms of mileage installed underground and removal of the overhead power lines.

Project approval processes continue to evolve as more influence is coming from electrical distribution, and governance in general. Project Managers adapt and continue to be flexible while keeping the focus on timely construction completion, along with budget considerations, with safety and quality always guiding the way. This work continues to evolve, and we improve, with better base maps, more complete designs and estimates, a focus on easement acquisition, streamlined approvals, more inclusive and complete statements of work, and a better understanding of available resources.

The efforts to connect customers have evolved with fewer temporary overhead lines are being run, more mini-MLUG projects that get done on customer schedules, and effectively remove streets or portions of streets from MLUG projects. Individual services remain a priority, sometimes requiring adjustments to the work plan/flow of a MLUG project to get one street done sooner to meet customer requests.

This program continues to progress as options continue to be explored for means to safely and effectively accelerate schedule goals.



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