

Moonlight Fire suit settled days before trial date

By Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

The dispute that turned into a legal free-for-all over who started one of the most destructive wildfires in California history was settled Thursday.

The United States' lawsuit against Sierra Pacific Industries, the largest single landholder in North America, and others was scheduled to go to trial last Monday before U.S. District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller. But U.S. Magistrate Judge Gregory G. Hollows agreed to make a last-ditch effort to resolve the case, and the trial was delayed for one week.

The terms of the settlement were not disclosed.

The government has been seeking approximately \$700 million for alleged damage to 46,000 acres of national forest in Plumas and Lassen counties caused by the Moonlight fire in 2007. It is the government's contention that the fire was started by a spark that jumped into dry undergrowth when a bulldozer working a timber project hit a rock.

U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner would not discuss the settlement's terms. He said he will have something to say when the agreement has been signed by all parties. The target date for that is Wednesday, according to minutes of Thursday's negotiations.

Read the whole story