

Illegal pot grow may have started Rim Fire

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Investigators searching for answers into what caused the massive wildfire burning in and around Yosemite National Park have made some headway, fire officials said Friday.

Most authorities are mum about the details, but one fire official in Tuolumne County offered a tantalizing clue when he recently told a community meeting that the fire was likely caused by marijuana growers.

“We don’t know the exact cause,” said Todd McNeal, fire chief in Twain Harte, a town that has been in the path of the flames. But he told a community meeting that it was “highly suspect that there might have been some sort of illicit grove, a marijuana-grow-type thing.”

“We know it’s human caused. There was no lightning in the area,” said McNeal, a former captain with the Sonora Fire Department who has fought fires for 23 years for the Forest Service, the National Park Service and other agencies in the Sierra Nevada.

His remarks, made on Aug. 23, were recorded and posted on YouTube in a video that has gotten surprisingly little attention.

Officially, authorities were saying little.

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