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PRESS RELEASE

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Camp Fire Fraudster Finally Sentenced

A former Butte County resident who was convicted last year of construction fraud, embezzlement, contracting without a license in a disaster zone, failing to appear in court, and filing false documents with the court was sentenced today in Butte County Superior Court to the upper term of seven years and eight months in state prison.

Kipp Ford, 41, formerly of Gridley and Chico, had previously been found guilty after a six-day trial in October of 2022 of all charges against him.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the case began in 2019 when a local construction company reported to the Paradise Police Department they had been scammed by Ford, who claimed to be a licensed contractor and had signed several subcontracts for houses that were being rebuilt in the town of Paradise. Within days the construction firm became suspicious of Ford due to his shoddy workmanship and evasive answers when it was discovered by their bookkeeper that the license number Ford had provided belonged to another contractor out of Southern California.

Ford was fired by the company and promised to return the \$17,000 he had been paid. However, he vanished and never paid back the company that had hired him.

Eventually, Ford was arrested and charged in July of 2021. After several failures to appear and continuances, Ford came into court on his own recognizance on March 30, 2022, and was facing being put into custody when the court took a break in his proceedings. During the break, Ford left the courthouse and failed to return. He had previously filed a false declaration with the court in an attempt to excuse a previous non-appearance. He was found and arrested hiding in a cabinet in a garage in Utah in May 2022 and returned in custody to Butte County Jail.

Ramsey said at Ford's trial in mid-October of last year, the jury deliberated for less than two hours before returning with a verdict of guilty on all counts. The jury also found the special allegations that Ford had committed new crimes while out on bail to be true, which increased Ford's potential prison sentence.

Ramsey said Ford's case had been on for sentencing multiple times but was delayed when Ford had fired his original trial attorney after being convicted. Once Ford retained a new attorney

from out of the area, that attorney requested numerous continuances, citing the need to work on a variety of new trial motions.

Finally, after no less than six continuances, Judge Corie Caraway ruled today there would be no more continuances and sentenced Ford to the upper term of seven years and eight months in state prison. The judge cited as reasons for selecting the upper term that Ford had previously been convicted of six other felony crimes over the past decade (ranging from DUI, stalking, auto theft, forgery, bad checks and failure to appear), and also that his crimes in this case were especially aggravated because he was taking advantage of Camp Fire victims. Ford remains in jail without bail pending transport to state prison.



Kipp Ford