



USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Briefing Paper



Date: March 3, 2003 1300

Topic: Columbia Support

Issue: USFS support to Columbia Recovery effort.

Background: Saturday morning February 1, 2003 the shuttle Columbia was lost in flight over Texas and Louisiana.

Key Points:

The debris field from the space shuttle is in part on the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas and the Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana.

All activities are being conducted under a Unified Command of FEMA, NASA, EPA, and the State of Texas. A FEMA Interagency EOC at Lufkin is serving in a capacity of a Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (MAC) directing operations. Texas Forest Service is providing operations planning and logistical support to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Austin.

Field operations are located in Palestine, Nacogdoches, Corsicana and Sabine with Texas Forest Service managing local collection sites in these communities plus San Augustine and Rusk for receipt and cataloging of shuttle material.

Goals continue to be the safety of personnel and the public in the affected areas, collection of shuttle material, location and containment of hazardous material, and supporting the completion of the incident investigation. The retrieval of shuttle materials has become the primary focus. All items are handled according to the established protocol of NASA.

The following interagency resources are committed to the incident through FS mission assignments from FEMA:

- Approximately 5,272 people are assigned to the incident. Human resources committed include: (3) Type I teams, (2) Type II teams, LEI, miscellaneous overhead and 159 crews.
- 36 Helicopters and 10 fixed wing aircraft are on site providing aerial reconnaissance of open areas.
- Miscellaneous equipment including: global positioning systems (GPS), all terrain vehicles (ATVs), weather stations, satellite phones, etc.
- Mobile Caterer and Showers

It is estimated that about 158,102 person hours have been spent to cover about 57,892 acres. Search production rates average about 2 acres/person/day. Crews continue to find shuttle pieces of significant importance.

The efforts in covering the ground have been so successful that FEMA has extended the mission assignment through March 30. Astronauts are visiting crews, which has been a big help in maintaining crew morale. There is a high level of camaraderie among the various agency personnel and local communities in the search area. All have banded together to accomplish the mission of recovering the remains of the shuttle.

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