

After-Action Review
Cow Camp Fire
7-9-02 0900-1115

Heather McDonald
Wade Burleson
Bob Reese
Dave Provencio RO4
Craig Trulock
Greg Vergari
Lance Francis

Cindy Stein
Chris Vero
Bill Neckels
John Haugh
Randy M. Johnson JTCFD
Ken Bailey

History:

A local Cattleman's Association reported the fire at approximately 1300 on Saturday, June 29, 2002. The Cattleman's Association had 14 head of stock at their cow camp located 1/3-1/2 mile from the fire. The Cattleman's Association stayed the first night to remove their horses from the premises but were asked to evacuate the next morning. The Association was given radios to remain in contact with fire personnel. A private landowner allowed the helibase to be set up on his private land, with his only request being that the road up to the cow camp be rehabilitated and repaired.

Initial Response:

Paul Hutta was the first to report to the fire call, with Engine 21 from Big Piney, Teton Helitack, and 4 Sublette County engines responding for initial attack. Hutta instructed most of the crews to stay at the bottom of the hill because of erratic fire behavior. E-21 spiked out at the cow camp after initiating structural protection.

A Type 3 team, led by IC Bill Neckels was requested to handle the Cow Camp Fire. After the fire was flown over, the number of black acres was determined to be approximately 170 acres. The final perimeter of the fire and spots was 346 acres.

On Day 2 of the fire, heavy spotting was reported in the NE. The fire had a good anchor point and excellent safety zones in the meadows.

Action Plan:

Wade indicated the basic Action Plan for this fire was to put it out because it was still outside the wilderness area.

Primary Objectives:

The primary objective of the Cow Camp fire was to minimize the fire spread to the SE. and W. A big fear was that with a strong NW wind the fire would run down Jim Creek to

the Big Sandy area. Southeast of the fire was the Big Sandy lodge and parking area. To the west were private ranches. The goal was to herd the fire into the wet, green meadows. The second objective was to protect the cow camp structures, provide for the safety of the public and the Cattleman Association, and keep the fire to the NE.

Action Taken:

Bill said that the specific tactics and guidelines were well outlined and that the delegation and directions were clear-cut and straightforward. Bill and Craig discussed the Executive Summary for Line Officers that evolved from the 30 Mile Incident. A complexity analysis was conducted and reviewed by Paul Hutta to determine that a Type 3 Team was needed for the fire.

There were problems getting crews up to the fire and partial crews had to be put together. The incident started with one full hand crew, Teton 1. One-half of a hand crew, combined with Engine 21 made up Teton 2, the second hand crew. Bill said that Dennis Barron was able to take over as crew boss of Teton 2, so that there were two complete local crews before additional crews began “drooling in”. The new crews were briefed coming onto the fire. Daily briefings were documented, and the IC team conducted debriefings with the crew bosses. At the end of the fire there were 7 crews total. The first few crews were very effective in halting the fire, and towards the end of the incident there were plenty of crews at the camp. The Overhead Team on the incident consisted of the IC Bill Neckels, Operations John Haugh, Safety Officer Randy Johnson, and IC-3 trainee Chris Vero. By the end of the fire there was also a Division Supervisor, a Division Supervisor trainee/Task Force Leader, and a Strike Team Leader. The latter personnel did not arrive until Day 3 – Day 4, so for the first few days Operations consisted only of John Haugh.

At the time of the incident, there were limited resources at the Eastern Great Basin dispatch, so finding personnel was described as “scraping the bottom of the barrel”. Bill pointed out that this fire was a low-priority incident so the team took whatever they could get. Even though not all of the requests were filled, things were put together so that they worked.

The strategy of the fire was tied into the objectives, so that all the resources were put on the priority side. The line started on the SE side with the first crews, and when the other crews came in, they took the north side. When the last 2 crews arrived, they tied the lines together. A huge benefit to the fire was that there was a lot of water and a lot of hose, which was utilized well by the crews to take care of spot fires and to establish wet line.

Major Problems:

Fire personnel reported logistics and transportation as the main problems. The problems experienced were mostly based on the topography and lack of resources. A blaster and bulldozer were brought up on Day 2 to clear out the road up to the spike camp. Even

though a lot of work was done on the road, the drive from the helibase to spike camp still took almost two hours.

One major logistical concern was that there was no helicopter assigned to the fire. For the first several days, the IA helicopter was used to shuttle crews and supplies. When a helicopter was assigned to the fire and ATV's were brought in to help with supplies, some of the logistical problems were smoothed out.

Craig Trulock, Pinedale District Ranger, said that the initial decision to spike crews near the fire was due to the lack of transportation and the bad road. There was quite a bit of trouble finding a camp crew and managers for the spike camp.

Another glitch was trying to find pumps and equipment, which was difficult because the Pinedale cache had no cache manager. It would have been a good idea to ask Wade Burluson for experienced fire people to work in the cache. The personnel working in the cache had trouble identifying the equipment that was ordered. Cindy Stein, who was in charge of the ordering unit, said that the supplying and distributing needed more organization. Someone was needed to monitor the priority of the supplies that were delivered to Helibase. Wade noted that the IA crew should not have been used to work the cache, and that there is a need to find and train other employees for cache and supply duties. Cindy pointed out that it would be helpful to identify people from around the forest who are experienced with ground support and ordering operations.

Barriers:

Again, logistics was the main concern as a barrier to the suppression operation. There was a significant problem reported in the communications between Helibase and spike camp. A lot of the problems were smoothed out once Don Shrivvers and his two camp helpers were up at the spike camp. Don was the spike camp manager, but was not at camp until Day 3. Dessa Dale, who was originally the lookout for the Teton crews, was a terrific help at camp after having trouble with a minor ankle injury. Having someone at the spike camp to communicate problems and needs to the cache and Helibase was very valuable.

Sanitation was reported to be a major problem at the spike camp. Because it was so remote and access to the camp was difficult, there was no sanitation available to the fire personnel at the spike camp. Bill was very concerned about the disregard to sanitation, especially from the Teton crews. It was noted that the Teton 1 and 2 crews neglected to wash their hands and feet, but that the other crews that were brought in took care of themselves. Many of the crewmembers did not take proper care of their feet, which became problems for the EMTs to deal with.

On the evening of Day 2, it was decided not to depend on the helicopter, so 4x4 vehicles and ATVs were used instead. The first two days, while the road was still rough and dangerous, drivers were sent up to spike camp as little as possible. Most of the support was done by ATVs, but there were 7 ATVs and only 2 drivers. Trailers were ordered for

the ATVs, but it was reported that they did not hold up very well on the rough road. The possibility of sending up packhorses and even National Guard trucks was considered, but decided against. Five vehicles were dedicated to the fire; most of the vehicles now need maintenance. There is a need for more experienced 4x4 and ATV drivers. The #1 safety concern reported by the IC was the drive between Helibase and the spike camp.

The drivers for the fire were limited, but it was suggested that supervisors could/should release their workers to be drivers for the duration of the fire. Drivers should be assigned to the fire until they are released, but if they are told that they cannot only stay for a few hours, the district may be hard-pressed to find drivers at all. There are only 2 places that the forest can contract drivers out of, and it's not very plausible to use the county personnel as drivers.

John brought up that because the fire access was so limited, the crews became "pack mules" to get hose and pumps up to the fire.

A concern about the Mark III pumps was discussed among the group. Tactically, these pumps were great, but there was a big need for uniformity in the pumps and gas mix. The crews were operating both old and new Mark III pumps. The old pumps require a 16:1 gas mixture, while the new pumps run on 24/25:1. There were not very many people who checked to see what mixture was needed and not many working who knew how to properly mix the gas to the correct ratio. There were also a couple of Mark III pumps that were boxed and sent up, but not operable.

Some of the problems in the supply and ordering section of this operation were alleviated by the satellite phones that Wade so generously donated to the District ☺. Communication problems were also corrected by a portable repeater that was brought to the fire. The local repeater was not working very well, so the SOA repeaters helped tremendously. It was noted that Teton Dispatch couldn't copy traffic off of these repeaters. There was also a problem contacting Dispatch for the first 2 days of the fire because someone turned off the main switch in Big Piney (oops ☹). Cindy said the cell phone communication between Helibase and the District office worked well.

Wade expressed his concern about fire personnel, especially overhead, going over the 2:1 work: rest hour limit. He stressed that it was very important for the IC and line officers to pay attention to fatigue factors. Wade said it was critical to recognize when the resources were too overextended, and then scale things back.

"The Camp Crew Incident"

In order to solve some of the sanitation problems at the spike camp, a camp crew was brought in to dig latrines and help around camp. The crew from Fort Hall neglected to inform anyone that they had hit their 14-Day work limit until after they were given their latrine assignment. The number of days that the crew actually worked needs to be checked on. Even though they spent the night at the Helibase, they did not say anything about their 14 days. It is suspected that their memories were triggered by the latrine

assignment (☺). The crew boss informed overhead personnel that his crew “did not have enough rest to function safely”. Because the crew expressed their concern, they were offered a full day off to rest, which they agreed to. The Fort Hall crew then refused to work on the incident and requested to be sent home. Some of the crew hiked out from camp instead of waiting for their assigned ride. The crew elected to leave the fire on their own accord.

Suggestions for Next Time:

Many people suggested that a 100-man cache van would have helped a great deal. The van was en route to the fire but broke down and is currently having its bearings fixed and other parts repaired. It was agreed that a 50-100-man cache van would be very valuable for backcountry fires. Facilities and ground support teams are also essential for future fires. Ground support was ordered for the Cow Camp fire but never arrived. Mark III pumps should all be the new models from now on so that no gas conversions are needed, and no more pumps are ruined by the wrong gas mix at high elevations. It was also suggested that there should be a time limit placed on when supplies are ordered and shipped on Type 3, 4 and 5 incidents. This would help consolidate shipments and prevent unnecessarily long hours collecting and distributing supplies. There was also a big need expressed for people to work in the planning unit. More trainees are needed in order to increase the depth of resources available in this area. Another topic of discussion was to no longer provide hot breakfasts to spike camp, but instead ship in cereals, bagels, and fruit with the dinners so that breakfast is available early in the morning. The non-perishable breakfast items can be stockpiled in case the helicopter cannot make it in with the food. The cost of a fully outfitted food trailer for the East Zone needs to be looked at and considered. A small, start-up supply trailer for initial needs on the fire would also be a great asset on the district. John and Cindy both mentioned the need for more ¾” hose and fittings. Along the lines of communication, the satellite phones and SOA repeater could be very useful on future fires.

Medical Information:

171 contacts with the EMT services were recorded during the incident. A medical tent of some sort is needed for future fires in order to provide privacy, confidentiality, and a more sanitary environment. There were only a few serious injuries or illnesses that occurred on the incident. The following were cases that had to be taken down from the camp:

knee injury
pneumonia
a deep muscle pull affecting kidney function ☺
foot injury

Additional Comments:

Wade said that he was surprised and impressed with how quickly the fire was put out and the incident wrapped up. He also commended the IC for sticking to his duties and not trying to take up a different role. A few people commented on the “impressive pump show” at the fire. The final count on the hose lay was 19,950 feet. The pump trailer was a huge asset with plenty of water available at the fire. Personnel were reminded to monitor and manage the time they spend working. Also emphasized was the importance of following the Incident Response Guide and creating good habits and safety standards for everyone working on any type of fire.

Many people were given kudos for their efforts on the incident:

- Paul Hutta for stepping in and helping out so much as the Resource Unit Leader
- Bob Reese for the excellent plans and maps
- The Pinedale District for all of their help
- The Type 3 team for working so well together
- Cindy for taking care of so many logistical jobs
- Jennifer Hayward for the great GIS and photo quad work
- The line and camp EMTs for their help with prevention and early intervention of injuries and illnesses on the fire (the local medical clinics were very impressed!)
- The makers of OFF for sustaining the blood supply of the fire personnel

HAVE A NICE DAY! ☺