

MULE FIRE

Bridger – Teton NF July 12, 2002

Mini-FAST review on Type 3 organization
By Greg Vergari
Regional Wildfire Safety Officer for the Intermountain Region.

Received word from Wade Burleson FMO on the Bridger – Teton N.F. that he had just broke a fire that was going Type 3. The time was approximately 1430, July 12th. Wanting to assess IA/Type 3 operations first hand has been my desire all season. The most significant loss of life is taking place on this size incident and I wanted to start to review these incidents, specifically operations, Change of Command associated, briefings, strategies and tactics at this level to ascertain how the Intermountain Region /Great Basin resources were doing.

I got to the Mule Fire on the evening of 7/12 at 2300 and tied in with Greg Clark the District Ranger. At that time he said he had the whole Type 3 organization was filled including PSC – LSC – OSC a dedicated IC, everything except for a SOF. I told him I could fill the SOF position and served as the Type 3 SOF from 7/13 through 7/15. I was also judging the Type 3 operations and all the management associated with the fire during this time. I soon determined this was a good time to call in a full FAST and placed an order. This would be a good time to witness the Change of Command from a Type 3 to a Type 2. however the FAST was too slow and I was the only one to witness the Type 2 in briefing however the FAST came soon after and witnessed a very smooth transition. My main topic here however is how well this Type 3 organization performed.

The fire was 160 + - acres on the morning of 7/13 and by the end of the day it was approaching 1200 acres. The Type 3 organization on this incident was what I consider the epitome of what a Type 3 organization should be. Dedicated IC - Paul Hutta, Plans – Ken Baily, Logistics – Mark Randall, and Ops – Chris Vero with the appropriate support from the district and forest. The fire ended up being 3500 + acres and was a typical sub-alpine rager. The IC managed the incident and I could tell positive impacts of having a stand-a-lone IC. Issues were addressed and taken care of from strong valid objectives to how folks were going to get fed.

The IC and the OPS set the strategy to anchor and flank, maintain the anchor mopping as they went. LCES were in place constantly. When crews were just about to turn a corner in front of this "bad boy" it became apparent that they were not going to make it. The Ops backed off and kept mopping and maintaining what they had. They also had a State of WY. County Chief acting as a dedicated lookout and he was on the shift plan every day. He took weather every hour or half depending on the severity and time of day and relayed this to the crews. When the fire became larger they put up a second dedicated lookout and placed the position in the 204 portion of the IAP for the DIVS he/she covered. I mention this because I see many Type 1 and 2 Teams time and time again not placing dedicated LO's, not striving to address the L in LCES but simply putting down "establish LCES" on their 215a's and that's it, let the crews figure it out. SOF's are covered on the paper but do nothing to ensure or help crews establish a LO. Granted this is not always something that can be done due to terrain or visibility but too often I see it missed.

Things that worked well:

- Dedicated IC and Team members.
- IAP's every day.
- Good logistical support – the troops were happy and commented to me how well things were going.
- Objectives were set from the get go with Ranger and Forest support – Firefighter and Public Safety #1

- Strategies followed a basic anchor and flank tactic and stuck to it even when it was tempting to try to get in front of the fire.
- Tactics were elementary and this was to mop as the crews went – good basic sub-alpine fire fighting. The use of water and the water shows the crews laid were large, monumental and just plain good old fashion firefighting.
- It went well not because of people preaching SAFETY but because people were doing their job's correctly.
- Dedicated Lookouts – identified – vocal