



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Heppner
Ranger
District

P.O. Box 7
Heppner, OR 97836

File Code: 5100/6700

Date: July 30, 2003

Route To:

Subject: Near Miss During Fire Fighting Operations

To: Forest Supervisor, FLT

Rough Canyon Fire

On July 16th, 2003, Brian Spivey (IC) plus a crew of seven were dispatched to incident 113. Brian walked the perimeter of the fire, checking for hazards. A green pine tree approximately 24-26" DBH had been struck by lightning. There was fire burning up about 8 feet in the tree. He checked the base and felt there was enough holding wood left to support the tree. Safety Officer Kenneth Meyers also looked at the tree and said he would have made the same call. Dan Michael went ahead and fell the rest of the snags on the top of the fire while the crew watched from a safe distance. After the snags had been felled, the crew started digging fire line up the North side of the fire. Dan Michael was watching the pine that had been struck by lightning and saw it starting to fall up the hill into the fire. He shouted to everyone on the crew to get away from the fire and the falling pine. While fleeing from the tree one Pomeroy crewmember caught his leg between two small trees and twisted his knee. Another crewmember fell and was able to get up and away from the falling tree. Ken Meyers also hit his shins while moving away from the tree. All injuries were minimal and the crew was able to get away from the tree to safety.

This was truly a "close call" and if were not for the steps that Brian took to ensure crew safety; the result could have been tragic. I share this information with you so that you can remind your folks to be ever vigilant when it comes to lightning struck trees. I have directed my folks that if there is even a hint of doubt in their minds regarding the soundness of any tree/snag, within or adjacent to a fires perimeter, it comes down. I would rather err on the side of caution than take the risk of serious injury. Attached are a few photos that Kenneth Meyer took while visiting this incident.

If you have any questions, please feel free to give me, Kenneth, or Brian a call. Thanks and I hope the rest of our fire season is a safe one.

ANDREI RYKOFF
District Ranger





Here's the Pine just as the crew was beginning to construct hand line.



Here it is flaring up, just after it fell.



Here's a view of the stump.



Side view, with Dan Michaels bucking it up.