THE SILVER FIRE STORY: AN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

by

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THE SILVER FIRE STORY: AN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE SILVER COMPLEX FOREST FIRE

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OVERVIEW

On August 30, 1987 a severe dry lightning storm struck the forests of southern Oregon and northern California leaving as its mark in history, a trail of blackened forests and wildfire devastation. One national forest that was dealt a severe blow from this storm, with a total of 110,247 acres burned within its boundaries and an estimated 272 million board feet of timber destroyed or charred was the Siskiyou National Forest located in the southwest corner of Oregon.

The Siskiyou National Forest has long been noted for its atypical forestland features: fragile soils, steep terrain, unique botanical areas and huge stands of immense old-growth Douglas Fir trees. It was difficult to envision the magnitude that the residual effects of the wildfires would have on the forest and its surrounding communities. Even now, repercussions from long standing efforts to come up with a modern and timely forest plan have become complicated due to the alteration of the forest land base because of the fires.

The Silver Fire presents a new focus on land management concerns within sensitive areas of the Siskiyou National Forest. It is also an event that will long stand in the history books as one of the regions most challenging forest fires both in the interests of suppression efforts and land rehabilitation concerns. This incident continues to pose intriguing and challenging management questions even today. What makes this fire especially unique is that it occurred in two highly diverse management areas.

The North Zone of the fire, including its origin, occurred in an area rich in lush stands of old growth timber which for many years has been the center of controversy between timber interests and concerned environmental groups.

The Southern Zone of the fire lay entirely within the remote and challenging Kalmiopsis Wilderness. This fact alone dictated a complex set of management constraints that had to be considered in the suppression efforts of this natural caused wildfire burning in a wilderness area.

With the severely dry weather, forest fuels and erratic fire behavior the Silver Fire situation presented itself as a nightmare to many Forest Managers.

This fire, one of the largest on record as being caused by a natural event, eventually grew to a size of 96,540 acres. What started on a ridgetop between two remote and steep canyons at first received designation as a low priority fire. Because the violent nature of the storm unleashed the fury of more than seventeen hundred downstrikes it ignited many fires. Highest priority was given to those fires posing immediate threats to human life and private property. All fires that appeared to be non-threatening to life and property were assigned lower priorities. Even though the Silver Fire was first assessed as a low priority fire, veteran forest managers knew that this fire would present special
problems. With this knowledge in mind, immediate suppression strategy for the Silver Fire was enacted.

FIRST LIGHT STORY: THE STORM

From the early afternoon hours of August 30th and throughout the following evening, dark skies, ominous clouds, crackling thunder and crisp downstrikes dominated over the southern Oregon forestlands. As soon as the storm appeared to be forming, impending feelings of deep concern gripped the lonely lookout sentinels posted high on their strategic mountain points as they prepared to monitor the storm, record the strikes and sweep the horizons for the inevitable smokes.

When the first lightning strikes flashed their brilliancy across the darkened skies, and the fury of the thunder echoed itself against the canyon walls reverberating along the river corridors and climbing the steeply sloped mountainsides, this activity began a communication and observation campaign never heard of before by the many lookout stations experiencing the phenomenal event.

Three lookout stations that were to play key roles in the unfolding of the Silver Fire story were Onion Mountain Lookout staffed by veteran lookout Elaine Clark, Lake of the Woods' Lookout manned by another veteran, Melissa McDowell (and her soon to be born baby) and Quail Prairie Lookout monitored by Jan Mille a first time fire-lookout. Between these three lookout stations this account of the storm and their initial efforts in reporting information was gathered.

Lake of the Woods Lookout on the morning of August 30th had no idea what fate the imposing storm would render onto the forest. Melissa's day had begun with her daily ritual of recording her weather observations, tending to chores, and scanning the skies for smokes.

Her recorded weather observations for the day were - skies: clear, temperature: 90°, relative humidity: 16%, and winds variable out of the east-northeast ranging in speed from 5 to 7 mph. Melissa's fuel stick reading was also a 6 indicating rather dry fuel conditions in her area. What her measurements did not indicate were the extremely low fuel moisture contents of the larger 1000 hour fuel types. Because the Siskiyou Mountains were experiencing their third successive summer of drought like conditions, this subtle factor was a critical element contributing to the rampant spread of the Silver Fire throughout the tinder-dry forest.

On this same morning, Quail Prairie Lookout Jan Miller reported that she began feeling an impending sense of "something brewing in the skies" when Siskiyou Headquarters in Grant's Pass relayed lightning activity warning levels of "6" for the eastside areas of the forest. Jan states that this was her "First ominous warning," and, "that this high of of a lightning activity level was rarely heard of." But seeing was believing and what happened then was an experience that opened many eyes to the fury of Mother Nature.

August 30th started out as usual. The summer had been hot and dry. There had been little rain in over three months. It was widely felt that if somethi
was going to happen that this would be the season. Many would be proven right, for on this day it would all begin.

Throughout the day all three Forest lookouts, as well as the many other stations surrounding the Siskiyou Forest, began reporting the active build-up and movement of the storm systems into the area from the south. Cautious feelings about the approaching storm were shared by Bolan, Ship Mountain, Manzanita and Little Grayback Lookouts to the south and east, and also by Peavine lookout to the north and Bosely Butte lookout to the west.

At one forty-five p.m. that afternoon, Bolan lookout reported that she was observing buildups to her south and to the east over the Cascades. As the afternoon progressed the formations grew to threatening heights and it appeared for sure that the south was going to get hit. When Bolan Lookout called in to give her report she noted that there was only a few, small, puffy and white clouds over the Siskiyou Mountains. Although it appeared that the majority of the Siskiyou skies were unclouded and safe, the southern skies were ready to unfurl.

One of the critical observations made by Onion Mountain Lookout that day was the rapid rise of the temperature over the course of a few hours. This factor, as well as her extremely low fuel stick reading, set the menu and added the necessary ingredients needed for wildfire. At 1600 the winds began to shift, temperatures suddenly dropped a few degrees and the sky began to take on dark shades of gray. The buildups were forming rapidly and the radios began to chatter. A concerned heaviness was shared by all as the first electrifying energies were discharged out of the skies.

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One of the most frightening things that can happen to a person in the natural environment is when the stark realization of vulnerability besets oneself when left alone to deal with the elements and their furies. Lightning is no exception. When it strikes it is indiscriminate; when it hits, damage occurs. The presence of the first strikes left no time for fear, for what had begun was one of the worst storms to ever hit the Pacific Northwest. Once started, it did not relent and a record of over seventeen hundred downstrikes left little time for fear for the lookouts watching in their towers. The process had begun; the skies were lit and the forests were hit.

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The first smoke report in the area was issued by Glenda Butts stationed atop Bolan Lookout on the Illinois Valley Ranger District at 1615 that afternoon. Within nine minutes after Glenda's sighting, Ship Mountain was calling in its first smoke. Five minutes later, Onion Mountain reported towering buildups encroaching upon the Siskiyou in her territory. At six o'clock, two more smokes were called in on the Klamath National Forest to the south, and by 1819 hours, confirmation of the first wildfires was established.

Heavy downdrafts dictated the forward motion of the storm to the north and in its wake, it was leaving the familiar and dreaded scent of woodsmoke. At 1828 Onion Mtn. called Grant's Pass with her first sighting on the Siskiyou. The smoke she observed was in the North Fork of Galice Creek. She was unsure at that time if the smoke was on BLM or Forest Service land, but for now it didn't
matter. This strike was then recorded and later confirmed as the origin of another devastating Siskiyou Fire; one that would later present gripping fears of joining with the big Silver Fire that was yet to be born.

Over on the west side of the Forest, those lookouts that were not directly in the path of the storm found themselves in an excellent situation to observe the critical movement of the stormcells and the rise and fall of the buildup. Shortly before six-thirty, Lake of the Woods noticed her first strike on her territory over Squirrel Peak. The rumbles were getting louder as more and more downstrikes bolted out towards the Kalmiopsis. Throughout the hour it became apparent that the long dreaded storm had furiously arrived.

At the Supervisor's and District offices suppression plans were in the makings, and at approximately 7:30 p.m., the first twenty person crew was requested. The timely process of filling resource orders and other crew requests was enacted and manifests were quickly filled.

All of the lookouts were now active. First one lookout would identify a smoke, fix in on the legal, and then call it in. This was then backed up by another lookout scanning the same area and confirming the reported smoke. This cross checking process then enabled these scouts to pour over the horizon and carry on with the locating. This went on for many hours. With the skies darkening and nightfall imminent, the tedious, exciting and demanding pace continued.

Then, at 2018, something bluish-gray and wispy began rising between Chrome Ridge and Indigo Prairie on the Gold Beach Ranger District. Driftsmoke! Melissa spotted it but she wasn't sure. Melissa describes the sky as very dark and extremely hard to read.

"I wasn't sure," she said, "but I was real concerned. I began thinking 'was it smoke, where was it?'. The driftsmoke was coming from a wide gap and I knew there was a lot of remote territory out there."

Melissa described her feelings then as being in wonder and awe. She knew that in the morning she would awaken to a new forest scene, one filled with smoke, fire and haze; but her inner most thoughts were not of fear but excitement. Melissa had been in this situation before; although this storm was severe, her confidence in the firefighters was overwhelming.

Then it happened! At 2035 her deepest thoughts were confirmed, for slowly rising out of the vicinity of Silver Creek, high on the ridge between the North fork of Silver Creek and the tributary Little Silver Creek, the vague appearing driftsmoke was now clearly rising. A small column became evident and the Silver Fire was born. Melissa called it in. This time she was sure. "It definitely was smoke," she said, "it didn't go away."

Nor would it for many days.

The radio chatter did not stop until the wee hours of the next morning. That night, many of the lookouts had to be told to get some rest and even though sleep was hard to come by, they knew that the next day would be a demanding one. So with the glows of the distant wildfires illuminating the western nightsky, they turned their radios down a notch and restful quiet returned to
the lonely hilltop sentinels. Anticipation of the suppression efforts that were yet to come were on everyone’s minds as sleep beset the ever-watchful lookouts.

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AERIAL ENDEAVORS AND SMOKEJUMPER TALES

Meanwhile, within the inner workings of Forest Headquarters, the involved process of coordinating troops and equipment had begun. Some of the first resources used on the Silver Fire were the smokejumper crews and Siskiyou Air Attack. The following is an account of the activities begun on the 31st of August:

At 0100 hours a fire request for smokejumpers was put into the Missoula Smokejumper Base in Montana. The initial request was for a crew of eight jumpers to be sent to the Siskiyou National Forest to initial attack the Silver Fire. At 0300 hours a Twin Otter smokejumper aircraft departed Montana with its load of jumpers and their equipment. They arrived in the early morning hours at the old and abandoned Siskiyou Smokejumper Base in Cave Junction, Oregon. For many years this now abandoned base was the initial attack center for the Siskiyou National Forest. For many years, this base effectively furnished a quick and efficient, highly specialized contingent of airborne firefighters specifically trained for the challenging duty of suppressing remote and wilderness wildfires.

The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, well known to veteran firefighters as the old "Caves" Base had always been regarded highly among the aerial firefighting forces. It had been shut down in 1981 for several reasons: lack of recent lightning busts and cost-effectiveness were among the primary concerns. Nevertheless, the old Siskiyou Smokejumper Base was going to relive some of its old glory days, as its forever-young ghosts would rise in spirit to ride along on the Silver mission with the Missoula smokejumper crew.

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One of the concerns that the Missoula smokejumpers had during their flight to Oregon was for the nature of the jump. The Siskiyou jump territory has always been regarded as some of the most terrifying and electrifying country to parachute into. Hazards presented themselves in many ways. Tall trees, steep bluffs and hard, rocky landings were major considerations. To many, this is the ground that firefighting legends are made from. To land jumpers safely into this country takes skill and daring along with high motivation and an intense knowledge of aerial logistics.
All of these factors were racing through spotter Jim Cyr’s mind as he slapped the first jumper on the back, yelled "GO" loudly in his ear, and released him out the door of the Twin Otter and into the grips of the prevailing winds and the beckoning jaws of the Silver Fire.

At precisely noon that day, a small contingent of highly trained firefighters was down on the ground attempting to deal with the Silver Fire.

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Prior to the arrival of the smokejumpers in Oregon another highly qualified aerial firefighting force was already in the air. At seven-thirty that morning, Gold Beach Ranger District Fire Management Officer Terry Mewhinney was directing aerial reconnaissance from Siskiyou Air-Attack, a small fixed-wing aircraft whose mission was to fly over the Silver Fire and report on its status.

Terry Mewhinney was no stranger to wildfire in the Siskiyou’s. As a veteran Siskiyou smokejumper he had known the nature of wildfire in the area. He was familiar with the terrain and had a clear understanding of the perilous nature that was presenting itself.

From Terry’s vantage point in Siskiyou Air-Attack, a clear view could be seen of the entire fire area. Terry reported that when he first saw the Silver Fire it was approximately 15 acres in size and burning on the sharp, hog-backed ridge between the North Fork of Silver Creek and Little Silver Creek - but the thing that amazed Terry most was the amount of large smoke palls that were rising all throughout the forest.

The following excerpts were furnished by Terry as he recounted his flight of the morning of August 31, 1987:

This is the first time that I have ever seen that many fires burning in such a small area. You could draw a straight line to tell exactly where the storm went. You could see smokes everywhere, and if you looked west of that line - there was nothing. It was phenomenal the way that storm went through, you could look both north and south and see exactly where it went. Everything to the east of that line was just column after column, and they were BIG!

That was the only time that I’ve ever been in awe about what to do in a situation like this. I had no conception. Any other time I could look at a fire and in two seconds tell you: where I'm going to start, what I'm going to do and my chances of success at beating it. But this event was so large you didn't have any idea, absolutely nothing. In this case it appeared that if decisions were made to backfire, that you would have to back off four miles instead of 1000' feet. All of a sudden, looking at strategy from this perspective you had to readjust your thinking. You didn't know if people were going to believe this and they didn't in many, many cases. When you radioed back and said, "This thing is going to get big," I don't think people understood what "big" was. When you thought about how you were going to deal with this situation,
I don't think anybody was psychologically ready to accept it. We were looking at writing off tremendous amounts of real estate - but I also feel that if it happened again, the same thing would occur.

The flight progressed and Siskiyou Air-Attack continued its reconnaissance. It flew the entire Forest to view the total situation. It was pretty grim. Northeast of the Silver Fire there were several large fires burning west of Grant's Pass. All lightning caused, these would later grow together and become the Galice Complex. To the south, more fires were burning and several of these grew together to become the Longwood Complex. The Forest Service now had major life-threatening, project-sized fires burning on both ends of the Forest.

These two raging fire complexes immediately received high priorities on the Siskiyou National Forest as human life and private property were in dire danger.

Terry continues:

We flew over the Silver Fire. It was in section three, right over the top of a hogback ridge. When you fly for 4-5 miles in the Silver and Indigo Creek drainages, knowing that country as steep as it is with its continuous fuels and inaccessibility, you knew that if you didn't catch that son-of-a-gun it was going to go at least 5-20,000 acres before anybody could get to it.

But, as long as you have a fire that is roaded you're going to catch it. At first you may lose some ground but eventually you'll stop it because you'll be able to backfire from one of those roads.

But anyway, I knew the Silver Fire was going to get big, so I relayed to Grant's Pass: "You're either going to catch it now or it's going to get big." I tried to relay what that meant. My reply was: "Hey, we've got Takilma threatened with a large fire down there that's burning in a fell-and-bucked timber sale unit. Right now that's a higher priority." I asked about jumpers and they said there was a load on the way. I asked about a retardant plane and they said they might be able to get me one. I said, "I'll take it."

We flew some more to check on other fires. I thought of my situation: It's a once in a lifetime look and I was damn tickled to be able to see it. To me it reminded me of what old timers used to tell me about the Siskiyou when we would have storms move through that would produce a hundred fires. We got out of that cycle for many, many years. The Siskiyou used to be noted as a fire forest and from the land scars around here that shows to be true.

We flew back over the Silver Fire. At this time there was a retardant ship floating around. I told them: "Airtanker 08, there's no way one retardant ship is going to totally handle that fire, so what I would like you to do is at least try to prevent
the spread to the south." I felt that they may be able to wet that side down and then we could attack the north flank with the jumpers when they got there. Well that didn't work, not enough retardant but the jumpers did make it in.

At this point, the Silver Fire was left in the hands of the smokejumpers and the lone retardant ship that did make it in to help, but only for a short time. This is their story of their on the ground efforts to fight the fire:

Jeff Kinderman was the lead smokejumper out the door of the plane that day. He remembered his thoughts just prior to his exit. Jeff felt that this was going to be another long haul situation. The jumpspot was rocky, steep and brushy and he described it as a "roll-your-own" situation.

Drifting downward and effectively absorbing the inevitable crunch that marks a jumper's arrival on the spot, Jeff Kinderman and his crew of seven found themselves safely on the ground and within a short distance of the menacing Silver Fire.

Their initial plan was to construct a helispot that would be used to ferry in additional ground crews. The idea was to built the helispot first and then split forces and go down the flanks building firelines to the creeks. Kinderman and crew at first thought that this strategy would work as long as they were backed up with retardant drops. But this did not occur. Neither did the plan to split forces and attack the flanks, for one jumper had seriously sprained an ankle and was unable to walk. This changed things. Now the construction of the helispot was intrinsic to the survival of the crew.

From down below the smokejumpers could hear a radio request called in by Siskiyou Air-Attack asking for more retardant. Terry was told that Airtanker 08 was returning to Medford Airport. He then asked, "Is there only one retardant plane available?" The reply from Grant's Pass was, "10-4, and you're lucky to get that one." Terry replied, "It will need many more drops." Terry then felt very concerned for the smokejumpers below, he knew they faced trouble without any air support.

Strategy now shifted down on the ground for the smokejumpers. One jumper was left to attend to his injured partner while the other six began to build the helispot. In the meantime, the fire began to roar. Shortly after the helispot was built an evacuation helicopter was requested for the purpose of removing the injured smokejumper. But to no avail could a helicopter be located that wasn't committed to other duties.

Another request was then put in for additional smokejumpers. They had already been dispatched and sent on their way. Within the hour 13 more smokejumpers would arrive, some from North Cascades in Winthrop, Washington, and the remainder again from Missoula. This would bring to 21, the total number of initial attack personnel on the fire.

Meanwhile, veteran smokejumper Leslie Anderson said she felt like the proverbial "albatross" sitting on the ridgetop that afternoon watching the fire behave erratically while she tended to her injured ankle. About the last thing that a jumper wishes to have happen is to be shut down because of an injury, especially during an intense fire situation such as this.
She wondered how she would get out of there now that the requested helicopter was not coming. She sensed that the fire was going to blow up and it did. As the fire crept closer, Leslie describes its action as if it had a mind of its own. Due to the intense radiant heat of the fire, the trees about her were rapidly igniting in succession. Instantly they became super-heated and were engulfed in flame from base to top. The movement of the fire towards her in the form of giant trees going up in flame, one step at a time, left the image much like that of an advancing fire-monster whose footsteps were consuming everything in its path.

Leslie describes her feelings then:

I knew there was no way that this helispot was going to last. We checked out the ridge, there was one more spot available for another construction attempt. My jump partner, Scott Belknap, carried me again, this time further away from the fire. Some of the crew had begun building line down the west flank. I was concerned for them. Things were not going well.

Leslie was disturbed about the twisted turn of events. The presence and aid from her partner, Scott Belknap reassured her that they would make it safely out. Meanwhile, the smokejumpers sent down the slide to try and put in fireline were also experiencing extreme and radical fire behaviour. The following is an account furnished by Bear Stauss, veteran Missoula Smokejumper:

At the time we began constructing fireline we were unable to accurately estimate the actual size and critical conditions comprising the Silver Fire. We decided to break into two groups. Kinderman plus two others were working the top, while myself plus four more were working the flank. While digging line it was quite evident that we were highly undermanned for the work that had to be accomplished.

From the beginning we had problems losing the line due to extreme steepness of slope and limited personnel to hold the line. Of the four people accompanying me, one was a sawyer leaving only four of us to construct and hold line. The further we dug, the more time I spent checking the line behind us to see if it was holding. Numerous times I had to reconstruct the existing line. All the while the temperature was increasing (I believe it easily exceeded 100 degrees Farenheit) and the fuel loading, combined with low fuel moisture intensified the situation to the point we knew our attempts at measurable suppression were near futile.

At this point we were constructing line near a towering tree that was engulfed in flames at the base. Almost simultaneously as we viewed the extensive brush nearby, the tree and brush ignited with a thunderous and deafening roar that sent an intense blast of heat upon us, forcing us scrambling to seek shelter. Stephens and Johnson were crossing a small rock out-cropping when the blast occurred. Johnson was able to seek shelter behind a boulder while
Stephens was subjected to much of the heat due to the inavailability of shelter. Ben Speakthunder dove behind a small rock ledge while I simultaneously jumped over him to seek refuge behind a nearby tree.

Feeling that Speakthunder was too close to the heat and his shelter was inadequate, I went to him and led him to where I was. He was crouched behind the rocks and due to the roar of the flames verbal communication was limited. Therefore I felt it necessary to personally approach Speakthunder and see to it that he had better protection from the heat. Rau, the last of the five, was sheltered behind some rock and brush.

This entire incident lasted a matter of seconds but seemed much longer. This appeared to be a critical turning point of the fire because from here on we could hear several other portions of the fire blowing up. The preheating of fuels led from one blow-up to another. To add confusion to the situation, communications were limited due to technical problems with the radios.

At this point Helispot 1 was burning over on top of the ridge. The third plane load of jumpers had finally made it to the ridgetop and all efforts now were directed towards crew welfare, safety and another helispot construction.

Bear Stauss continues:

It was at this point that we realized control of this fire was a definite impossibility. I received a transmission from Kinderman saying they were unable to handle the situation at the top and needed assistance. I informed him we were in a similar predicament and were unable to send any personnel up to the top due to safety precautions. The explosiveness of the fire had the possibility of easily overtaking anyone who would attempt to get to the area where Kinderman was working.

Admitting defeat, we backed off from the fire, lined out all possible safety zones and escape routes, and proceeded to select a plan that would take us away from where we were, ensuring the safety of our lives. After discussing all possibilities of escape amongst ourselves, we reached a decision and eventually retreated by sidehilling and hiking back to the top of the mountain to where the others were preparing a helispot for immediate evacuation.

It took the west flank smokejumpers a little more time to tie in with the rest of the forces atop the ridge, and when they did a massive effort was made to construct the second helispot and retrieve all the gear before it was destroyed in the fire. What spotter Jim Cyr had first described as "depressing" became reality and his initial feeling that the Silver Fire was going to be a rough one can be fully felt by his statement: "It was the worst fire of all the ones I had seen from the air, I knew we were in for a 'gobbler kind of deal'."

It took a tremendous effort to get a helicopter into Silver Creek. By the time the Jet Ranger appeared on the horizon and gently lit upon the mountain
top, "relieved" was the general feeling expressed by Leslie and the other smokejumpers who received a free ride out on the bird. For the remaining 14 who had to hike out, that is another story.

Daylight faded and the ridge became smoked in. Sadness for lack of a flight out did not overly upset any of the remaining smokejumpers now retreating from the appropriately nicknamed helispot "the Alamo". Within minutes after departing the fiery ridgetop, "the Alamo" went up in smoke. Guided by the glow of the blazing inferno they then proceeded with their hike down into the bowels of Silver Creek.

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Darkness came upon the smokejumpers. The sky turned nasty and dark. All along their hike-out they could hear the advancing Silver Fire. Their mission now was to get as far ahead of the fire and into a place that would be safe for a night's rest. A radio message was relayed from Grant's Pass directing them not to proceed any further. This was issued in concern for their safety as this was not the best country for night hiking. The message was well received, for the smokejumpers could go no further.

They had run into sheer rock walls and any further advancement at this point could lead to a disastrous fall. They were now "bluffed out".

Sleep came fairly easy to the tired troops that evening. The ancient practice of sleeping with one's feet braced against the stout bole of a large tree while reclining in a slanted position on uneven ground was assumed. The jumpers recalled that all night long they could hear snags and trees going down in the forest. They had little food but it did not bother them; not nearly as much as the echoing roar of the rapidly advancing Silver Fire.

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That night the Silver Fire continued to burn intensely. Lake of the Woods Lookout Melissa McDowell continued to watch the glow as it expanded to seven hundred acres. She thought quietly to herself about the welfare of that smokejumper crew nestled somewhere deep in the canyon. There had been no radio contact once the jumpers entered the hole. She thought that before the fire had gotten big that maybe the smokejumpers would get a chance to put it out, but this was not to be so. Now she was all alone in her tower and they were far removed; no one was to hear from them until later on the next day.

She knew that eventually they would make it out and move to other fires. But she also knew that the Silver Fire was here to stay, uncontested with a will of its own.

The following day the smokejumpers made it to the bottom of Silver Creek. They then spread out in search of an easier way out. In the process they located an old mining cabin in total disarray. They continued searching and located an old trail which eventually led them to a long forgotten mining road.
During the waning afternoon hours on September 1st, the smokejumper crew reached the top of Flat Top Mountain where transportation awaited them for their journey back to civilization. They did not realize at that time just what was in store for the remote and isolated fire they had attempted to suppress. Few imagined that it would ever get that big, but nature and the elements dictated the show.

The smokejumpers realized that they had given their best but there was just no stopping this furious beast. Soon they would return to their respective smokejumper bases, where they would cautiously await the next fire call into places unknown and perils unforeseen.
THE FIRST WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: SEPTEMBER 1ST TO SEPTEMBER 5TH

During the first week of the Silver Fire it was extremely difficult to see the fire burning in its entirety. Thick smoke centering over the unroaded North Kalmiopsis area was severely restricting visibility and limiting pilots from flight time and reconnaissance excursions into the fire area. From the many viewpoints surrounding the central fire area, all that one could see was a huge layer of smoke and ash filling the Siskiyou skies. The smoke and cloud cover was so intense that all non-fire related aircraft were banned from entering within a twenty mile radius of the fire or below a safety ceiling set at ten thousand feet by the Forest Service.

The inversion layer that Siskiyou Air Attack had predicted began forming the morning of September 1st. Shortly after the smokejumpers fled the oncoming fire and received safe transportation out, the valleys and canyons of the Siskiyou National Forest began filling with the thick and pungent smoke from the fire. Throughout this day, two fires, the Silver and the Lazy, continued to expand and grow; however, at different rates.

Initially they were about four miles apart, but the Lazy Fire, having gone unnoticed through much of the early part of the previous day was now threatening to unite with the ever-expanding Silver. The Lazy Fire had been one of those "sleeper fires", a holdover from the storm. Lying in dormancy, it had been developing slowly, smouldering in the forest litter awaiting an opportunity to take off and run.

Both fires had been steadily increasing in intensity and it was hard to assess their boundaries because visibility had been so poor; however, what was occurring in the area between them was far more frightening than just being "blind" to the fires. In the course of that afternoon and ensuing evening, the formation of the firefighter's dreaded enemy, the thermal inversion, with a hot and intense fire burning beneath it occurred. To the veteran Fire Staff Officers of the Siskiyou all the warning and watch out signs were there. Sooner or later the air mass would lift and fresh air would mix and rekindle the inferno.

Normally air temperature decreases from the ground upward. But in this case the heated air from the fire was rising and so was the surrounding airmass, this inverted state of temperature was allowing for the accumulation of unburned gases and the superheating of the fuels within the inversion sphere. On the ground, in the area between the two fires, the fuels were becoming preheated and superdry. It wouldn't take much for the whole valley to blow; just a tiny hint of oxygenated air would do it. It was only a matter of time.

Then it happened. On the third of September at 1745 hours the Silver and the Lazy Fires merged in a consumate marriage of flaming old growth and fiery hillsides. A fresh draft of oxygen laden air was sucked into the canyons of the
Silver Creek drainage providing the catalyst needed for the expansion of the two fires. The canyon exploded enjoining the two fires. The end result was an 18,000 acre conflagration, newly christened "The Silver Fire."

On September 4th the fire was estimated to be burning directly north of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness spreading southwesterly surrounding Bald Mountain on its southern end. It had burned to within one mile of the Wild and Scenic Illinois River near Deadman Bar and had also produced two frontal spot fires of approximately 400 and 160 acres. To the north, the fire had spread across Indigo Creek and jumped to the eastern base of Fish Hook Peak. Along the southwest perimeter near the Little Todd Creek area it burned vigorously adding acreage to the total. Still, no one could see into the interior valleys where the fire activity in these steep canyons was boiling, fiercely consuming some of the richest and largest stands of virgin, old-growth Douglas-Fir timber found anywhere in the world.

On the fifth of September the Forest Service was able to get an infrared reconnaissance flight over the fire. The analyzed results produced a revised acreage figure of 22,000 acres. Still the fire remained unmanned and it is knowingly considered to be a stroke of good fortune that no one was left out there to try and put in out under the prevailing conditions. Even though the initial enduring efforts of the smokejumpers did prove futile, the right decision had been made not to keep anyone under the umbrella of this explosive situation. Although it may have appeared that nothing was being done on the ground in Silver Creek, back at Forest Headquarters the entire Fire Staff and Expanded Dispatch were working arduously to secure the forces that would be needed to squelch the budding inferno.

Fire Staff Managers during this first week had an incredible amount of problems and decisions to evaluate and act on. Their concerns were numerous. Perhaps the biggest question at this point was whether the Galice Complex Fire which had now grown to 20,000 acres was going to join with the Silver Complex Fire. Also, to the south, the Longwood Complex was eating up local resources and draining the Forest of its complement of firefighting forces. This dilemma left no option at all but to begin calling in as many regional and out of region personnel as necessary.

Miraculously, luck was on the side of the Forest managers and the two big complexes did not merge leaving the Siskiyou free from the crisis of a doubly proportioned, campaign-sized wildfire; however, the Forest now had three major project sized fires to deal with. The phones began to get busy and help was called in from all parts of the United States and from several different government agencies. With many major fires burning in Oregon and California, the last days of August and the first few days of September, brought about the largest mobilization and deployment of fire-fighting forces in the history of the United States. Approximately 22,000 men and women from many different agencies, began the roll-out process and headed out to the fire burdened Pacific Northwest.

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One of the first telephone calls placed from Forest Headquarters was to Moscow, Idaho, where Dick Hodge, a member of the National Incident Command System was requested by the Forest Service to assemble his team of specialists
and come to Oregon to take charge of the Silver Fire as Incident Commander. On September 3rd, shortly after he arrived and attended briefings by Siskiyou Fire Staff Officer Wayne Spencer and Forest Supervisor Ron McCormick, Dick Hodge was given full responsibility of the Silver Fire and was officially delegated as Incident Commander.

The Incident Commander is responsible for all incident activities including the development and implementation of strategic decisions and for approving the ordering and releasing of resources. One of the first things that Incident Commander Hodge needed to do was to organize his General Staff. Staff members included highly experienced personnel from many different government and state agencies. Each was assigned specific duties and responsibilities intrinsic to his role on the fire. Principal staff positions included Information Officers, Safety Officers, Liaison Officers, Operations Section Chiefs, Planning Section Chiefs, Logistics Chiefs, Finance Chiefs and other Agency Representatives.

Once together the purpose of the General Staff is to develop an Incident Action Plan. Usually prepared at the first meeting, this plan outlines the general control objectives reflecting the overall incident strategy, and the specific action plans for the ensuing operational periods. Once the meeting of the Core team: the Siskiyou Fire Staff Officer and the Siskiyou Forest Supervisor was completed, the extremely hot "fire-ball" was placed in the hands of Incident Commander Hodge.

The quickest and easiest way to assess what a fire is doing is to get oneself in a position to see the fire and analyze its behavior. On September 3rd, for the first time, I.C. Hodge and members of his team flew the fire in a fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft. Due to heavy smoke, little could be seen. They did notice the presence of a large column rapidly rising indicating the fire was making a run. They then realized that the Silver and Lazy had merged. Due to heavy smoke throughout the area and with darkness rapidly approaching, they then headed back towards the airport. Due to the adverse conditions, they noted having a rough time locating the airstrip to get back down.

The full team held a meeting on September 4th and strategy was developed to implement the four task forces needed to deal with immediate concerns. Concerns were: (1) Evacuation, (2) Public Information, (3) Intelligence and Strategy, and (4) Logistics (camp locations and resources). Also at that time, it was agreed upon by the Forest Supervisor and the I.C. that a representative from the local environmental community would be added to the team temporarily, to be used as a resource and spokesperson for environmental concerns.

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The Silver Fire was now approaching Bald Mountain. This area just north of the Wilderness has long been considered the spiritual high-ground of the local environmental movement. A quasi-environmental base camp had been set up there for several years. It was the intent of the Forest Service to use the environmental representative to help locate these individuals. Their established camp was presently under the dire threat of burning up and its occupants needed to be evacuated.

Even though the Silver Fire was burning remotely away from any large town or city, (the closest small community being Agness, approximately ten miles away,
the largest being Grant's Pass, approximately 25 miles away), the need to evacuate the few known individuals and one family living in the remote territory was vital. Everyone feared that the erratic behaviour of the fire could turn at any moment and time was of the essence. The Forest Service then conducted a search and rescue operation to remove those people from the fire area.

Their first destination was to the top of Bald Mountain to ensure the safety of the folks up there. Even though much controversy engulfed this area, now was not the time to judge issues but rather to save lives.

At 1500 hours there still had been no word of the two people on Bald Mountain. A helicopter had been dispatched by the Forest Service to try and locate them. Their camp was found but had been burnt-out. The area around the camp was bare, even the coveted medicine wheel set up to honor the forest spirits had been decimated. Indications alluded that both environmentalists had fled the mountain in front of the advancing fire front. Forest Service personnel remained atop Bald Mountain as long as possible searching for the evacuees but were then forced off the mountain when the peril of their own demise became evident.

Later on it did turn out that the two companions who had been camped atop Bald Mountain did make it out safely, but not without an acute recognition of the fury of Mother Nature.

Other evacuation procedures involved the removal of the James family from their position on the Briggs Ranch located west of the advancing firewall. The fire was beginning to move towards them and in a threatening manner. They needed to be located and removed.

All logging contractors had also been told to move their equipment from the north and west sides of the fire. At this time there were two active timber sale areas lying within reach of the Silver Fire. All persons known to be in the path of the fire were notified and removed.

From herein all trail-heads leading into the Wilderness and northern sections of the Forest were closed as well as the Wild and Scenic Illinois River. It now was too smokey to get a reconnaissance flight of the river and trails to check for additional people.

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Public Information concerns were expressed deeply by the communities of Agness and Gold Beach during this initial phase. Many residents were worried how they were going to be affected by the conflagration and needed to know just what type of danger they were in. On September 5th, town meetings were called in both communities. Residents and community leaders were briefed on the fire status. They were also told what to expect upon the arrival of firefighting forces and were provided information about strategy and logistics.

Strategy and Intelligence came up with the solution that the Hodge team would handle the hot and fiery west side of the blaze, while the east side of the fire would be monitored by the Galice Complex contingent. In their recon-
nailance of the fire, they too searched Bald Mountain and the rest of the Forest but to no avail as visibility diminished to zero.

Within the Logistics sector, sites for fire-camps were selected for the many crews and support personnel that would be coming in to assist. Areas were chosen in suitable areas on the southeast side near Brigg's Mine and in Agness on the west. These sites were selected because of their accessibility to the fire and because they provided safe areas to stage crews and equipment.

Things were happening quite rapidly. More and more crews were dispatched to southern Oregon, many coming from outside the Pacific Northwest. The Siskiyou National Forest was soon to be inundated with new visitors, many unfamiliar with the type of terrain they would be trodding upon.

By day's end on the fifth of September, many of the immediate concerns of the IC and Staff had been addressed. Local residents were feeling reassured and confident knowing that resources and equipment were arriving and that more were on the way. For now, it was a matter of waiting and seeing what the fire would do next as the crews began to get lined out for their tedious work.

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It has been noted that the drought conditions in southern Oregon were extreme that year. Many people were concerned about their springs and water sources. The summer had already begun strangely. Perhaps no one expected the southern end of the state to turn up so dry, but after three years of deficit rains the forest floors were powder-kegs. The storm event dealt a severe blow to the woodlands as the weather factors for the end of August were critical.

Prior to the storm air temperature readings were consistently in the high nineties reaching the century plateau several times. During the first week of the fire air temperatures were measured above one hundred in several places; more notably, remote weather sensing devices were recording fuel temperatures on the forest floor well over 120 degrees. Fuel stick readings throughout the forest averaged between two and five and consistently remained there.

The Siskiyou had not had these conditions for many years, causing many locals to jokingly refer to it as the "asbestos forest". Being close to the coast the humidity influences had helped to keep portions of the forest damp in the past, but not so this year. During the early morning hours of September 1st, Quail Prairie's remote weather sensing devices recorded a 4% relative humidity. The humidity recovery normally associated with nighttime valley cooling and marine influence was just not occurring, and it was under these conditions that the Silver Fire spread throughout the northern forest.

In light of the intense fire behaviour during the first few days, virtually no extreme winds were present except during the storm. One would shudder to think of the consequences if severe winds had added to the pre-existing conditions. But nevertheless, a fire was burning and it was taking with it the tremendous primeval forestland which had remained untouched by fire for many years. For the time being many feared that the Silver Fire would once and for all settle the debate on the usage of the resources in the roadless areas. Many claim the fire could have been caught if the roads had pre-existed, but that's a separate story in itself.
The first week of the Silver Fire challenged the conscious thoughts of many people. It put to rest for the time being the current controversy of the newly released Siskiyou Forest Plan. It seemed most interest now lay in the fire's activity and the efforts needed to control it and put it out. Most separate interest groups found themselves united in the desire to see the devastation stopped. For the time being people laid down their causes and picked up pulaskis and shovels. There seemed little sense in arguing then about the social value of a charred and blackened forest.
DESTINY IS FATE DISTORTED WITH IRONY

The North Kalmiopsis Controversy

by

Michael G. Apicello

On August 21, 1987, the Siskiyou National Forest released to the public its long awaited Draft Forest Management Plan. The purpose of this plan is to set management policy on the Forest for the next ten to fifteen years. It is also intended with this plan to seek resolution on some of the controversial issues challenging the Forest for many years.

Of major concern to the Forest are its large unroaded areas and old-growth timber tracts. Presently the Forest's most controversial unroaded area, the North Kalmiopsis, is undergoing immediate rehabilitation in the aftermath of the historic Silver Fire.

Two main issues centered on the North Kalmiopsis 1/ area focus on the proposed cutting of the old-growth timber stands and the development of roads into those areas.

The North Kalmiopsis unroaded area measures a total tract size of 110,175 acres, of which 72,000 acres are estimated suitable for timber production. Approximately 75% of this unroaded area consists of extensive stands of harvestable timber. During the Silver Fire, 44,900 acres of this controversial ground was touched by fire in varying degrees of burn intensity. For many years this area remained untouched, visited occasionally by those seeking seclusion and remote experiences. Historically, it was frequented by miners and explorers hoping to uncover its vast wealth of resources.

Perhaps the richest attribute of the North Kalmiopsis unroaded area is its outstanding timber tracts of large and virginal, old-growth Douglas-firs. Thriving upon the forested hillsides and along the fertile creekbottoms exist some of the healthiest and largest trees found anywhere in the world. Walking in this old-growth forest among the towering firs is an experience relative only to the past when much of the country's forestland existed in this primitive condition.

But now, many of those tracts are gone. In the east, rampant harvests in the 1830's devastated areas such as the heavily timbered Adirondacks. Perhaps now, only in such diverse and protected areas of the Eastern Forest, and in the remaining tracts of western unroaded areas and designated Wildernesses, such as those that occur on the Siskiyou, can this experience in grandeur be found.

1/ Author's note: the terms "North Kalmiopsis" and "North Kalmiopsis Roadless Area" are used simply to facilitate word flow and reading ease.
But even grandeur has its shortfalls:

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On August 31st, during one of the worst crises ever experienced on the Siskiyou National Forest, a calm-voiced female caller dialed the Westside Zone Engineering Office stating that: "Perhaps the bomb would convince the Forest Service to stop harvesting old-growth." Surely this statement was issued with the intent of producing a reaction which it promptly did.

Immediately the building was evacuated and all progress made that morning in efforts to mobilize people from that office onto the burning forest was stymied. The building was evacuated and the employees were dismissed. A thorough search of the building was conducted and no bomb was found.

The ironic twist governing this incident was that during this period in which quick and effective responses could have been made to direct personnel onto the firelines and save trees, valuable time was lost.

Meanwhile, out there in the North Kalmiopsis, an undetermined number of the coveted old-growth trees were consumed to the whims of wildfire.

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The deep quiet woods of the North Kalmiopsis had been at peace for many years. Not even the wild untamed fires of the past had managed to destroy the peace and tranquility found beneath the majestic, princely canopy of the long and sweeping, fir-boughed limbs. High winds, heavy rains, weighted snows and creeping brushfires did little to hinder the Forests growth. Each year another ring of fibrous increment was added to the bole.

Years passed and the stately trees quested higher, reaching up for the open lit skies; quietly dropping their sunshaded needles and underlying limbs, no longer needed, their growth tasks complete. For many years the history of the forest recorded itself within the heartwood of the trees. Their outer rings within protective shells of thickened bark, hardened by the seasons, prevailed in the consistent production of fine grained wood.

And every year the shell got tougher, expanding more as the the bark grew rougher. The aging giants through time would shed, and their blown out tops to the forest floor would descend; adding fuel and nothing more.....

At times it seems that the forest exists solely as the workplace of the forester and logger, occasionally visited by the hiker or two, each one seeking from his own point of view.
For deep inside the earthly bowels of the evergreen forest reside many flora and fauna whose nature is solely to harmoniously abide; an intrinsic part of the community biotic, now witnessing sorely a dilemma despotic. Within the vast corridors of the emerald maze, its canyons waving towards paths yet unblazed; what's often found when all alone, is nothing more than the old-growth sound: the quieted, empty, peaceful rush; the security and joy of seclusion with trust. The area north of the wilderness zone is an entity questioning just what do we own.

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For many years the local timber industries logged within the outer boundaries of the forest. Roads were built as needed. In essence one might say the roads followed the timber. In the early days of the Forest timber appeared to be an infinite resource. But now the scene has changed and much of the profitable and easily accessed trees have been harvested.

However, the steady deletion did not hamper the forward progress of the timber harvests; for many years the North Kalmiopsis had been regarded locally as a timber reserve and when the time was right the trees would be logged.

When the Siskiyou forest was converted from forest reserve to national forest in early 1907, it contained many diverse tracts of huge and beautiful trees. It was viewed as a cornucopia of natural resources. Timber, minerals, fisheries and some homesteading opportunities were available to those brave enough to enter this wild and untamed land. Many of the pioneer families that have successfully managed to survive in the area did so on pure guts and willpower. Much of the land was unsettled and improved transportation systems were virtually non-existent. Travel was endured on foot, horse or mule and it seemed to the settlers then that the limits of the forest knew no end.

As years passed more and more settlers moved to the area. Many staked claims and homesteaded while others sought to recover forfeiture land. In time, land barons prospered acquiring many acres of southern Oregon forestland. Within their ownships they established mills and began cutting trees providing much needed lumber for the growing northwest and other places throughout the country.

The early loggers were unsung hardworkers, taking on the heavy and physical tasks of felling and bucking the stately trees. Felling an old growth giant with a double-bit axe and a "misery-whip" was not a task for the tin-hearted. It took an iron will and a fortitude beyond fear to take on this challenge day after day. To many it seemed like the resource availability would never end.

Over time, the advent of the automobile, logging truck, steam donkey, diesel engines and other mechanized equipment opened up new opportunities to utilize the forest. Slowly the logging roads began their processions winding up the river canyons taking the big trees as they went. In many cases roads were used only as secondary routes. Often times the roads were designed simply to tie in to river bars in which logs could be unloaded and rafted downstream.
In those days it didn't seem to matter how far off the road or the river one went to find timber, it was everywhere; and when one side of the river was exhausted a switch to the other was made. Slowly the riverbanks were depleted, and as time passed the timber movement continued its rise up onto the ridgelines, crossed through the mountain saddles and quested into the tributaries of other major rivers and inland creeks.

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The 1930's saw the development of the primary roads entering the major drainages. The forties and fifties were boom years, not just for loggers but for the communities as well; they too were growing up and out of the forested timber lands. Big timber was building the milltowns and the milltowns were feeding the nation with the wood it required. Both the citizens and the Forest Service were benefiting in numerous ways. New roads enabled the Forest Service to maximize its potentials not just for timber but for other interests as well. Road development did not hamper the general prosperity of the region. Roads were looked upon as a boon, people could venture easily into areas and firefighters could reach fires quicker.

As the growth progressed, logging equipment evolved to meet the needs of a prospering trade. New technologies in cable logging systems and woven steel wire were discovered while methods to reach trees further away were tried and developed in numerous ways.

As decades passed, many foresters could see that inevitably the timber supply would diminish. After the major burns in the thirties and forties when much timber was destroyed, many logging operations either switched to logging fire-killed timber or moved on to greener forests and resumed their cutting elsewhere. Because of large fires such as the Tillamook Burn, notice was taken that some timber resources may not be inexhaustible after all, especially after large consumptive wildfires.

The sixties arrived and the generation of change began. Many environmentally oriented people began vocalizing how they felt about the multiple-use management of the public's domain. Groups such as the Sierra Club shed new light on conservation ethics and portrayed to many how logging practices adversely affect the character and aesthetics of the land. In many cases it did not matter to them on whose land the extirpation was occurring, what did matter was the prevention of further destruction and depletion.

Logging activities, especially clear-cutting with tractors, were depicted as the rape and scrape of the landscape. Activists began the fight to preserve forested lands and the environmental movement began to flourish. Small seeds implanted in the American mind sprouted advocacies about how land could be better utilized and later grew into major environmentalist philosophies dictating other alternatives on land-use. Land use in America became the rallying cause; and the Public Domain the battleground.
The voices of the environmental movement caused the Congress of the United States to listen to factions of its people in their desire to see portions of American forestland set aside for perpetuity. In 1964 Congress enacted the Wilderness Act which changed the wildlands of America into Wilderness preserves. On the Siskiyou, the Kalmiopsis wildland became the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. This event was later enhanced by the expansion of the wilderness to its present size of 179,850 acres under the provisions of The Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978.

The establishment of The Kalmiopsis Wilderness broke open local arguments about the value of these areas to the communities of southern Oregon. Many of the timber industry people felt that the area put into wilderness status was too much land taken out of the commercially available land base. Environmentalists disagreed and argued that due to its isolation and the fact that there weren't major roads into the area, (also adding that much of it was marginal land for timber production), the Kalmiopsis Wilderness then became an accepted refuge in southern Oregon.

The conflicting views between the industry lobbyists and the environmentalists indicated the need for further definition of the multiple-use management concept of the forests. More specifically it was needed to be established just what areas would be managed under what precepts.

But for some this was not enough. It was further deemed by Congress that there was more land available to study for potential wildernesses and/or other management activities. Because of this, the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) process was enacted.

RARE I was not a perfect process. It was initiated in 1972 with the purpose of studying and considering unroaded and undeveloped areas within the National Forest System that could also be considered for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The North Kalmiopsis was adopted into that process as an available area. But the RARE I plan was faulted because of inconsistent inventory processes.

The plan was later revised and RARE II was enacted. RARE II established a new inventory, building upon and improving the evaluation process. Suitability of an area was the primary criteria, not whether or not an area should be Wilderness. The final purpose of RARE II was to: (1) consider roadless areas that should be designated as wilderness, and (2) determine roadless areas that should be made available for non-wilderness uses. The public was then allowed to be active in commenting on the process during the summer of 1978.

The RARE II decision of January 1979 then allocated the Forest's roadless areas to other non-wilderness uses. As a result of that decision, the North Kalmiopsis area was dropped from further consideration. It had been assessed as not fitting the evaluation criteria for any further consideration or wilderness review, thus opening the area to other interests and further conflicts.

Since that decision, area plans for the North Kalmiopsis had been locked up in lawsuits filed by environmental organizations protesting specific timber
sales in the roadless areas. Injunctions to halt activities had been fought for by attorneys representing the Oregon Natural Resources Council, the Sierra Club and by members of the radical environmentalist group Earth First!. The debate raged on for several years until 1984 when the passage of The Oregon Wilderness Act established other wilderness areas on the forest. The passage of this act dropped the North Kalmiopsis from any further study as a roadless area.

Again, injunctions were filed against the Forest Service halting road construction and harvest on timber sales. One of the results of this deluge of protest was the establishment of the Bald Mountain Sanctuary, founded by the environmental movement atop Bald Mountain on the northern edge of the wilderness. This was the outpost searched so diligently by the Forest Service during the initial days of the Silver Fire.

Nevertheless, the injunction issued by Federal Judge James A. Ridder in the North Kalmiopsis Roadless Area was dissolved in January of 1985. It appeared then that the business of planning and running the forest would resume as normal; but this was still not the end of the argument.

Since the injunctions were lifted road construction resumed. Timber sale planning activities progressed and at the time of the fire there were two active timber sales in the area, the South Indigo and Sapphire. These sale areas then became the sites of civil disobedience and trespass. Shortly prior to the August 30th storm, a group of Earth First! protesters chained themselves to logging equipment, causing a temporary shut down of yarding activities on the South Indigo Sale; they were then arrested and taken to the Curry County Jail in Gold Beach.

No one knows for sure just how this conflict will end. At present the Siskiyou Draft Environmental Impact Statement offers the people a choice of 13 different planning alternatives or directions. Some of these lean on the side of intensive cutting while others sway towards the establishment of preservation and extensive custodial areas. One thing for sure is that the result of the final analysis is going to be interesting, to say the least. Whether the area will stay as a multiple-use National Forest or as a proposed recreation-centered National Park remains to be seen.

To this day, neither group has let up; not even the fury of the Silver Fire could stop the fight. The battle continues; for what priority, that's hard to say.

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Within two weeks after the release of the long awaited for Siskiyou Forest Draft Forest Management Plan, a severe, dry lightning storm unleashed its fury upon the North Kalmiopsis, leaving in its trail an extensive tract of blackened trees and charred forestland.
THE SECOND WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: SEPTEMBER 6TH TO SEPTEMBER 12TH

[PRIORITIES SHIFT AGGRESSIVE FIREFIGHTING BEGINS]

Initially the Silver Fire was given a low priority with respect to the fact that there was no immediate endangerment to human life and private property in the vicinity of its origin. But on September 6th, priorities shifted. Twenty-two thousand acres had violently burst into flames during the first week of the Silver Fire and on those acres many valuable and stately old-growth firs went up in smoke. It appeared then that there was no stopping the Silver Fire and its running flamefront.

When the smoke cleared briefly enough for the Forest Service to finally get a close up look at the Silver Fire, the reality of staggering resource losses was overwhelming. Luckily for the Siskiyou National Forest, the high priority Longwood and Galice Fire complexes were nearing containment and control, enabling the release of resources so desperately needed on Silver. The rapid containment of these two fires was aided by the fact that they were more readily accessible by existing forest roads. Suppression tactics were initially more efficient on the Galice and Longwood Complexes because of the roads and also due to the fact that immediate high priorities were assigned to these fires.

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On September 6th the Silver Fire had spread across Indigo Creek and continued to run on the lower east slopes of Fish Hook Peak. Rampant spreading also occurred on the southeast perimeter near the Little Todd Creek drainage. Along its remaining perimeter the fire steadily expanded. Not much could be done to halt the Silver Fire as it continued on with its southward run and began its climb up the north face of Bald Mountain. Eventually it surrounded Bald Mountain, intensely burning many old-growth trees and leaving as its epitaph a severely devastated, denuded and charred mountain area.

Fire activity in the steep canyon bottoms continued to be a major concern. Troublesome spots needing immediate attention existed along the western perimeter especially at Indigo Creek. Rapidly the drainage was filling with smoke from the continual burn out of the old-growth stands contributing heavy smoke to a building inversion; however, the fire remained north of the Illinois River with approximately 1200 acres burning within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

On this day, when it became obvious that the resource loses were going to be substantial, the priority on the fire was shifted to high. Closures of the Bear Camp Road and the Illinois River Trail remained in effect. Recreationists were encouraged to avoid the Agness area because of the congestion due to the heavy fire traffic. Yet at this time there was no threat to any structures and the
biggest hazard noted then was the heavy driftsmoke pouring into the Gold Beach and Brookings coastal communities.

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During the next two days in the northern section, the fire crept further up Lazy Ridge. On the 8th, it made a significant run upon the ridge and challenged dozer lines put in place the day before. For the next two days the fire continued to steadily increase in intensity on its northern run imposing a severe threat to the South Indigo Timber Sale area.

On the tenth of September the fire was burning hot and intense in the headwaters of Indigo and Breezy Creeks. And, on the northeast sector, the fire jumped into a minor portion of BLM land. The Forest Service caught the blaze there but continued to have difficulty in this area holding their handlines because of the steepness and rocky terrain. Combined with the threat of an approaching thunderstorm forecast for that afternoon, it was hard to gauge what the fire would do next.

By the 12th of September the Silver Complex Fire had grown to 28,100 acres. It had yet to consume any structures or claim any lives. In fact, up until this time there had not been any significant accidents reported as the firefighters maintained a high level of safety consciousness.

Indiscriminately though, the fire continued to burn, claiming for its own whatever piece of ground the wind or slopes would put in its way. It was still hard to judge where the fire was heading or when the next major run would occur and it was totally taxing to the people on the ground attempting to work safely ahead of the fire. To do so safely required constant calculation; and the strategic movement of forces on the ground was a logistical nightmare in the face of the unpredictable behaviour of the fire.

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In the past, when wildfires occurred naturally, and there weren't any organized firecrews, roads or modern equipment to aid suppression, fires burned throughout all seasons of the year. Much of their movements were determined by the prevailing winds and other elementary factors. Many of these fires were left to burn and go out on their own. At times, very little effort was given to suppression on late season fires as winter rains were usually reliable, even if they were a little late. But such was not the case with the Silver Fire. No rain was predicted in the long range forecast and the three year drought-like conditions stubbornly persisted.

Many had hoped that a late summer rain would fall upon the tinder-dry forest. The fire's activity during the past week left fearful impressions in the minds of many that potential disaster was lurking in the 'big back yard' of several southern Oregon communities. There was no doubt about it - now that the fire commanded a high priority it was going to merit the numerous ground forces needed to combat the blaze.

Of the twenty-two thousand firefighters mobilized after the storm, a high percentage of those were dispatched to southern Oregon. Initially, fresh crews were hard to find and many of the new arrivals at Silver Base were from other
fires. Forest Service policy dictates that after a two to three week tour on a fire that tired crews be rested and either sent home or rotated to another fire. Because the Silver Fire was beginning to display the classic symptoms of a major campaign fire, many of the initial attack forces on Silver's firelines would later come back for a second tour of duty.

But this campaign was just starting. After the arrival of the complete overhead team on the sixth of September at Silver Base in Agness, organized crews from other forests and out of region began moving in. The regular fire routine of strategy and planning began that morning. The difficult task of deciding who needed to go where and what strategy would be applied when was then lined out to the present crews. On the sixth of September there were 242 personnel assigned to the fire. Of this figure, 41 were designated overhead.

That day the smoke was extremely thick on the forest. It was virtually impossible to see what was happening on the ground and, from the air there was much difficulty in obtaining an infra-red flight desperately needed to pick up mapping detail. However, one thing that was extremely clear was the grave threat that the Silver Fire was imposing on the South Indigo Timber Sale. This area was then selected as the primary focus of the early suppression efforts.

At the strategy meeting it was determined that indirect attack procedures would start on the fire in the morning. Much of the remainder of the day was spent in establishing camp, lining out crews, securing provisions and working out communication problems. As more information became available decisions were made and acted upon.

As the ground crews were being lined out the next day, two tractor-dozers recruited from the nearby logging operations began constructing line down Indigo Ridge from the South Indigo Timber Sale. Permission was obtained from the Forest Supervisor to build these lines into this sensitive area. They were then constructed with minimal impacts to the land in mind. The hand crews then took off building fireline where the dozers could venture no further. Meanwhile, other crews were sent to the Brigg's Ranch to encircle the homestead and protect the structures.

On the southeast corner of the Silver Fire, it was noted by the I.C. that some burning-out was occurring by district crews independently of planned operations in the Flat Top area. [There's a real sense of protectionism when it comes to battling forest fires on one's home turf and it appeared that the home folks were not willing to let the fire gain ground in areas they knew they could effectively stop it.] It helped considerably.

Later that day more equipment made it to camp. The arrival of a medium class helicopter made it easier for the safe transportation of crews in and out of critical areas. Also, the caterers made it to camp and minor logistics problems began to work themselves out; however, supplies were still short and the fire kept growing.

On September 8th, a spike camp were set up at Sam Brown camp in the northeast sector. Crews there were then ordered to build fireline between the Chinaman Road and the Bald Mountain Road on the eastern flank of the fire. Three reconnaissance teams were also sent off Fish Hook Peak to secure flagged lines down to Indigo Creek. These brave souls had to fight extremely thick
brush and ended up swimming, floating and wading down Indigo Creek to Indian Flats where a medium class helicopter airlifted them out. They were extremely exhausted; yet their task was complete. It was also noted that they did an outstanding job.

Later on that day the Incident Commander, Chief Staff Officers and the environtmental representative walked the newly constructed cat-line down Indigo Ridge. It was concured by all that the line looked good and would have no significant impact on the land.

On the ninth of September there were six dozers, 11 engines and four helicopters assigned to the fire. A total of 6.5 miles of handline had been constructed and improved. Additional crews had arrived during the night and there was now a total of 587 people on the fire. The complex had also been divided into two branches and direct attack was undertaken on the flaming north front of the fire. As the crews on the northwest side were attempting to finish lines around the South Indigo Timber Sale, crews along the northeast flank were retreating due to extensive crowning. With a chance of thunderstorms predicted for the afternoon and heavy smoke still causing visibility problems, no estimate of containment could be determined at that point.

On September 10th, the decision was made to move the military to the Silver Fire from the Longwood Complex. The Incident Commander expressed a need to use them along the troublesome northeast sector in the construction of secondary firelines. There were 670 troops in the Army contingent assigned from Fort Ord, California. They were ready and available and had received fire training on the Longwood Complex and upon arrival at Silver they would be put immediately to work.

By the end of the day the fire continued to upset the suppression efforts on the northeast sector. Crowning-out dominated the landscape and there was little that firefighters could do except watch as the tall green trees became fiery entities illuminating the western nightsky.

On September 11th the Army arrived. Personnel on the fire now reached the highest figure that it would during any time throughout the campaign. There were now 1,797 support troops engaged in the effort. Spike camps were set up all along the fire's perimeter and it appeared then that there were enough ground forces to begin direct attack.

During the afternoon the ceiling and smoke lifted which permitted the air support operations to drop water in a direct attack fashion on the west side of the fire in the Silver and Indigo Creek areas. A Reconnaissance flight was also attempted in the Indigo drainage but the pilot was unable to scout the area due to the heavy smoke. He later had to cross over to Pine Flats on the south side of the fire in order to prevent becoming smoked out.

That evening the IR flight had picked up a spot directly across Indigo Creek. After a diligent search of the area it could not be found and was later reported as a false alarm. A sigh of relief was expressed by the overhead chiefs as they knowingly agreed that the forest was just not ready to have this section go up in smoke.
The 12th of September was a day filled with major firefighting efforts. The whine of the helicopters droned throughout the day as increased visibility allowed for aerial water drops on the western side of the fire. Progress was also made building primary firelines in the West Indigo-Hobson Horn-Breezy Creek area. Another primary fireline was also completed which tied into the Illinois River at Pine Flat; and once again, crews were temporarily pulled out near Chinaman Hat because of flare-ups. For three days the Silver Fire dictated its will crossing over the line many times on this section of the forest. Today though, it appeared that the firelines were going to hold.

On the north end of the Silver Fire, between West Indigo and Breezy Creek, line building was aided by the detonation of 4,500' of explosive fireline. The use of primacord which has proven effective in the past was clearly useful in this situation. After detonation, little was needed to improve the line and a small crew of sawyers finished the job. The blast from the explosives rocked the hillsides and the boom could be heard for miles. Many knowing locals tuned their ears to the resounding rumbles wafting through the canyons, recognizing the fact that every echoing blast was a significant sign of progress being made in the construction of the Silver's firelines.

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The U.S. Army continued building handline along the eastern flank of the fire. They also helped the regular crews constructing fireline near Fish Hook Peak. It is noted in the l..C.'s notes that the Army did an outstanding job, completing all tasks assigned, with one extra-dedicated company of soldiers putting in extra hours to secure their strategic position.

Throughout the rest of the day nearly two thousand people labored on the firelines. During the heat of the day they utilized the high summer temperatures to aid them in their burning out efforts. By day's end the fire was estimated at 25% containment; however, there was much line needing to be built but significant progress had been made. Many crews had now completed their second week day without a day off from fireline duty especially those that had come from other fires onto the Silver. A much needed rest and relaxation phase was about to begin for the tired crews, and in the morning, fresh and healthy bodies from incoming crews would awaken at four to jump back at the Silver's firelines.

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The weather for the week was predominately hot and dry. On the coastal side of the fire it remained smoky and balmy. Temperatures soared in the high eighties to the upper nineties. And luckily, the thunderstorm that was predicted for the middle of the week did not develop, neither did the high winds that were also expected. You might say that at this stage the forest considered itself very lucky. Things could have been worse with an east wind episode but the influencing airmass remained quite stable, benignly bestowing gentle breezes across the land.
Relative humidities also remained moderate during the beginning of the week. Fire activity abated during the evenings and on the tenth of September through the twelfth, nighttime humidity recoveries reached 100%.

On September 11th, some moisture began to fall on the west side of the forest and hopes were raised, but briefly. No measurable precipitation was recorded and the Silver Fire did lay down - but it was only resting.

For off to the east, many distant miles away, perilous east winds began their advance towards the stubborn Silver Fire. It was just a matter of time before the winds would awaken the beast from its slumbering nap. And it was highly feared that when it did, the Silver Fire would open its widening jaws in its unsated search for new forest fuels.
FIREFIGHTING IS HARD WORK

By
Michael G. Apicello

On the subject of fighting fires, a long time veteran friend once said: "It incites a new courage in the virtue of bravery; it humbles and saddens the heart."

There is a strange drive that motivates individuals to take on the tedious task of suppressing wildfire. The work is not easy, nor is it predictable. During the deep of sleep, the bliss of relaxation or the routine chores of mundane life, the fire call knows no limit. When the fire alarm beckons, firefighters roll. Where to, is often unknown and does it really matter? In a short matter of time, they know where they'll be. With pulaskis, shovels, and chainsaws in hand it's off to the fire to rescue the land.

There's a crazy sense of dedication involved. The work holds little time for glamour and glory. The esteem one earns is the sweat on his brow, the knowledge gained is sometimes in sorrow. One takes the bitter with the sweet; a forest saved is a line that held. A tear filled heartache is often felt watching the consumate waste as a raging fire ignores all humankind's efforts, erasing a forest in a matter of moments. But it's back to the line for the forester's friend as another hard shift beckons. In the early hours long before dawn, or throughout the dark and tenuous night, the endless fireline seems to beckon, its ribbony trail a beckoning hand guiding oneself to the end of the fire.

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From all over the United States, one hundred and twenty seven organized crews came to fight the Silver Fire. Qualified groups of women and men; Black, White, Indian and Hispanic, from many diverse backgrounds and cross-sections of life, they came to southern Oregon. The Siskiyou National Forest with all its wildfire soon became a melting pot of a sea of firefighters. They came so sudden and rather fast to accomplish a job which was no easy task. Never before had the Forest seen so many visitors at any other given time. And during the days of the Silver Fire, the lonely Kalmiopsis was not wanting for friends, as each of these crewmen toiling deep within its rugged and remote interior heartland were destined to become intimate friends of the land.

The initial crews on the Silver Fire came from other forests. Many had "jumped" from fire to fire working on several districts of the Siskiyou National Forest before reaching the Silver Fire. The regular crews and recruited locals that knew the terrain, were used as special forces: line scouts, liaisons,
officers, and leaders. It was up to them to guide these friendly visitors down the trails and through the brush towards the fiery flamefronts of the Silver Fire.

Additional crews came from other National Forests all throughout the Region. From the Wenatchie Forest in Washington state, to the Malheur Forest, a distant sister located high in the dry, Oregon desert - from the Mt. Hood up on the north state line to the Willamette Forest in the heartland of Oregon, they came from all over and throughout the Northwest. Hot shot crews with names like Zig-Zag brought with them veteran crew bosses like Paul Gleason and his experienced crewmates. Off of the Olympic, Umpqua and Winema, from places with names like Siuslaw, Deschutes, and Ochoco - all of the crews from Region-six began pouring in. And as neighboring forests, such as the Rogue, rapidly extinguished blazes burning on their lands, they too sent capable support over the ridges and nearby hills to help in the Siskiyou conflagration.

And into the camps from other states they came. Crews from Arkansas, Mississippi, Virginia and Texas - Alaska, Montana, Arizona, and Pennsylvania. From all over the states they came, and in awe they got to witness one of the worst natural caused wildfires in the history of the United States. With varying degrees of experience and background all of these troops shared a common work ground.

Certainly one felt secure upon seeing these crews moving through camp. They appeared alert and ready for work even though their 1987 fire season centered on personal sacrifice and long periods away from home. For many of the crews there was little time for dealing with personal affairs in between battling the various blazes touched off all over the western forests.

As the many crews entered the local area they touched upon the resident's lives. Friendships developed, naturally, and often through the process of requesting simple items such as the transfer of messages to their long unseen families and friends. One of the results of this outward and friendly communication with the local residents, was the establishment of a ham radio station set up in the camps to relay the firefighters messages home.

It was little things such as this that made the tours of the visiting troops easier to endure as they entered the world of the Siskiyou Forest and its surrounding communities.

But not just from the Forest Service did the crews arrive. Groups from other agencies, the BLM, Park Service, Oregon and California State Forestry, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Army, the Oregon Air Force and the Oregon Army National Guard, and personnel from many local and state government agencies arrived also. The list is endless and yet they came. The National Weather Service sent representatives from district offices, and very specialized crews such as the terra-torching units and the ping-pong teams were called in from far away places north of the country.

From numerous states and diverse social backgrounds, all of the people assigned to the fire shared one common goal - to put it out and aid in the process. There was no time for show-me trips, for the arduous duty was the task at hand.
The Fireline Handbook defines firefighter as: the basic resource used in the control and extinguishment of wildland fires and works either as an individual or as a member of a crew under the direction of a higher level supervisor. I find this to be an accurate description. For every firefighter assigned suppression duties, be it overhead or simply ground pounding, the basic training begins at the dirt and gut level of swinging handtools and operating chainsaws. As one becomes more proficient and logs his time, paying his dues and constructing miles of fireline down to bare mineral soil, he earns the right to determine his future in the firefighting regieme. But it doesn't come easy - not without sacrifice and certainly not without preparation and training.

Preparation. There is perhaps no better word in the fire manager's list that describes so well the readiness of a crew. For every hour spent on the line, for every shovel full of dirt tossed on a snag or a burning log, there is no better way to uncover the mastery of fighting fires than being on the line. It is here on this proving ground that character is built. It takes only one time out witnessing a crowning fire run overhead that the distinguished respect for wildfire is instilled forever in the mind.

Training is the most important step in the developement of a firefighter. Most new recruits are young and usually "green", that is without experience. Country skills learned in the field are often the basis towards success on the line. Yet each and every person must equally endure the rigors and demands of the varying levels of intensive training. Before one starts the training processes one must first pass the health and fitness requirements. It is not enough that you must carry your weight, but the qualities of reserve strength, stamina and endurance are intrinsic to the accomplishment of a sound and good job.

Most firefighters are in excellent health. If they start off slow or a little overweight, soon to be changes are seen as the tedious work begins. The most important asset of the firefighters' equipment is a body composed of physical well being. Conditioning plays a major role. For some of the advanced and highly specialized forces, such as helitack, hotshots and smokejumpers, the training schedules are intense. Perhaps this is why many of the local folks respond so well to these newcomers when they see them on the streets. They look good. They're healthy, confident and extremely alert.

Training regimes are not easy. Physical conditioning involves running, often over steep terrain, and many other exercise drills. Hours are spent practicing landing rolls, rappelling, let-downs and survival techniques. Principles of tree climbing, rappelling, and emergency rescue and evacuation procedures are rehearsed and practiced to the point where reactions become instinctive. Working safely is constantly stressed. Watching out for yourself and the other guy is extremely important. Much of the success gained on fires comes from the unity instilled as a cohesive group of trainees learns to work as a team. After it's all laid out and begins to function, the end result is a well tuned, lean and efficient fire fighting machine.

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There is something unique about the person encased within the uniform of flame resistant clothing. Basically, the firefighter is an outdoors person. Yet why in the world would they want to spend their summers overdressed in buttoned up, hot and smelly fire resistant clothing? Most I know would prefer to recline on a warm river bar somewhere out in the woods soaking up the rays and heat of the summertime sunshine. Yet here they are ready for dispatch.

With high topped boots laced tight about the ankles and extra pairs of heavy socks tucked neatly into p-g bags, their fire packs are always ready to go where ever the firecall summons. Include in this a heavy jacket, or a warm camp sweater along with so many other things seemingly out of place packed in this not so typical travelling bag. Packed away also is the safety gear: the personal fire shelter, gloves, hard hat, moleskin, canteen and other necessary items. The firefighters' harness is loaded with items necessary to survive. It's an endurance trek with every step hacking out the path of an untried fireline.

To understand the motives why a person chooses to take on the dirty, hard, and often boring job of suppressing wildfire is to question why it doesn't rain when you need it. It's just hard to say. The reasons are as diverse as the assorted personalities one can rely on meeting when enjoined with the people that make up a crew. But from my experience gained working with hundreds of comrades on fires, there are certain peculiarities that tie the troops together as a whole.

First there is the willingness to serve. (Most folks that don't enjoy the work usually leave the profession, many after their first time out.) It's the returning regulars that make you feel proud. These people are the select masters of the task at hand and they do so willingly with the focused and dedicated desire of saving the forest. It's the strong willed that return year after year, not only searching for new adventures but returning to take on the responsibility of protection and training new crews.

It has been my experience, after returning to the firescene after a long absence, to run into crew chiefs who I long ago shared experiences with on other major fires. Seeing these familiar faces is inspiring, knowing that these folks are still on the lines evokes confidence and respect for their many veteran years of firefighting experiences and the consistent service they offer to the forests.

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Camaraderie is another motivating cause; on firefighting crews it is definitely needed. After a period of time working together, certain traits begin to surface from each and every crewmember. Abstract madness, especially after arduous stints when tempers and bodies wear thin, usually surface in order to restore teamwork and unity. Somewhere in the physical process, attitude adjustments must take place and this is why lightheartedness is necessary. To many firefighters the services they perform are stepping stones in the development of their later careers and personalities. The communication skills they learn help build their future confidences in dealing with people, and much of what they learn about esprit de corps they pick up from their leaders and co-workers. And in the process there's a lot of joviality.
Camaraderie - it's a needed relief from the long and tedious hours of mundane work. Out on the fireline there's always a ditty to chant, or a harmless prank that's planned on some unsuspecting crewmate. Adopted personalities always seem to emerge from the creative energy of a tireless crew. Someone is always telling jokes and relating foreign tales, while yet another disagrees, inciting controversy over the daily topic. But these are the things that are needed to make a crew function as its own separate entity. Without an identity the hard work of fighting fires would be even less of a challenge. Without release a crew can blow up much like an erratic wildfire behaving badly.

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Some will contest that they are in it for the money; but seriously, how many wealthy firefighters do you know? The pay's not the greatest in relation to sweat, a fact highly attested to usually by the last person in line, scraping and clanging an unyielding shovel. But the incentive is there to make a small sum of money over a short period of time. It's not very big bucks like inside trading - it's more like earning a few decent paychecks that can tide one over through the winter months or maybe even pay for a few college terms. One must remember that the average firefighter is a friend of the woods; mopping up in suds soaked soil is vastly estranged from stardom in L.A..

Travel is another important factor in the choice of becoming a firefighter. At a moment's notice any crew can be sent anywhere in the U.S.. To many this is an open chance for travel. The government provides the transportation and usually the destination is another scenic part of the country. Knowing that you're on your way to a fire guarantees an intimacy with the new land being visited. There's just no end to the benefits.

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It doesn't take just organized crews to put out a fire. There are numerous overhead, casuals and volunteers that provide intrinsic services also. Along with this group there's also the local loggers and industry people who always seem open and ready to work together in times of distress. Perhaps that's the one beauty to be seen in the ugly reality of fire, and that is when the many folks come together, bound in a common cause, saluting the forest and themselves by conquering this terrible menace.

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Well the Silver Fire saw it all, almost four thousand personnel helped in the effort. With all their efforts in the many hours it took, building and burning out the lines, still the weather dictated the show. But without the many diverse personalities that presented themselves that summer in the southern Oregon hills, the show would have been boring without them.
THE THIRD WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: SEPTEMBER 13TH TO SEPTEMBER 19TH

Fire activity in the Fish Hook Peak and Hobson Horn areas continued to cause problems for the firefighters. Numerous flare-ups and vigorous burning added more acres to the fire's total size. The fire made several strong runs up the steep slopes but luckily the blackened lines successfully held. The efforts of the previous week had shown good results due to the serious burning-out duties performed there by the crews.

An aerial reconnaissance flight on September 13th reported the area on the north side of the fire under Fish Hook Peak as very smoky and hard to assess. Along the west side, from Indigo Creek to Silver Peak, visibility was reported clear with the fire burning hot - but on the ground. The primary concern at this point was to secure the north, northeast and southeast flanks of the fire. Even though the main emphasis was directed on saving the timber sale to the west, it was vitally important to somehow prevent the fire from slipping further into the unroaded and wilderness areas.

Along the southern front, where the fire was beginning to take on a normally quiet attitude, several flare-ups occurred near Pine Flat and Flat Top Mountain; however, nothing significant developed out of these and major efforts continued in the endangered northwest sector.

On the 14th of September there had not been any reports of major fire movement in the past twenty-four hours. For reasons unknown, it began drizzling with a trace of moisture falling throughout most of the day. With the help of the cooler weather progress with line construction and equipment arrival continued. That day, and much of the next, was spent in the evaluation of suppression costs and the determination of the future needs of the firefighting efforts. Costs to date were well over three million dollars and with no estimate towards full containment, these figures were expected to rise rapidly. The Silver Fire was becoming a very expensive event.

On September 16th, the fire rested at 30,000 acres. Because the last few days had been relatively calm with regards to fire behaviour, during this "lull", much work was accomplished completing lines and revamping the firecamps.

In the meantime, operations at Silver Base were progressing well. Finally, the new caterers had arrived and were now set up serving hot meals to over two thousand people stationed on the fire. Not an easy task.

During the past three days the military had put in a very active stint on the treacherous hillsides and performed in an outstanding manner. They received their demobilization notice on the 14th and were discharged two days later. They departed in the morning leaving behind a rear detachment whose duty was to load the lowboys and remove their equipment. The military was then replaced
with other U.S. military troops as the Oregon Army and Oregon Air National Guard began arriving later that day.

Other equipment that arrived on the fire that day included one heavy duty Vertol helicopter. Upon arrival, this extremely versatile aircraft was put to work dropping water and retardant from a thousand gallon, remote-controlled bucket suspended from a cable underneath. The Vertol was immediately placed in action and soon became a major factor in the rising hopes towards full-containment.

By the close of day on September 15th, there were nine helicopters, 22 engines, 3 dozers, 12 water tenders and 13 other main support vehicles assigned to the Silver Fire. Also, an additional 6,000 feet of explosive fireline had been utilized to the southeast of Fish Hook Peak. Things remained relatively calm until the 16th.

September 16th was a radical day on the Silver Fire. The dreaded nemesis, the east winds, had arrived. The day began with much activity with the wind factors setting the course for the suppression actions taken during the week and lasting throughout the duration of the fire.

Prior to the arrival of the east winds, the day-shift plans called for a "big push" towards completing the firelines in the northeast, north and southeast sectors. The efforts of the Army and the regular crews had displayed good results and there was an optimistic hum buzzing through the fire camps. Sam Brown camp had been scheduled to demobilize and the troops assigned there were getting ready to transfer to Silver Base, but before the day was over these expectations would be readjusted.

At approximately 1100 hours a major flare-up occurred on the northwest division of the fire. Strong east winds blew the fire out of Indigo Creek to within a mile and a half of the Briggs Ranch on the Illinois River. The fierce, dry winds caused an intense increase in the fire's behavior along the fire's western flank sending a wall of flame directly towards the South Indigo Timber Sale below Fish Hook Peak.

Permission was then given by Forest Staff Officer Wayne Spencer at 1020 hours to use retardant on the edge of the wilderness and also in the wilderness area along its northern boundary if needed. Aesthetics was the primary concern as the Siskiyou hills which were already charring an ugly black, did not need to be painted red. It was considered important not to diminish the integrity of the wilderness anymore than necessary with the use of the red, dye-colored retardant.

Steadily the east winds continued to howl blowing hard along the west side of the fire. The flaming front raced along its western edge between Indigo and Silver Creeks. It spared nothing in its quest abetted by the wind. Anything or anyone in its path was in jeopardy. The Forest Service then put evacuation measures into effect.
A 20 person Hot-shot crew, the Boise Inter-Regional, was moved to the Briggs's Ranch to protect the property and evacuate the family. Crews and loggers on the Lower Indigo Timber Sale were ordered out of the area. Regular firefighting crews were moved off of the southwest side and retreated far away from the advancing flame front.

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An alarming fear raced through the hearts and minds of the first Hot-shot crewmen sent down to evacuate the James family from the Briggs's Ranch. Apparently the two resident children had selected this morning to go for a hike up the trail to the top of Silver Peak in order to view the fire. Little did they know that they were walking right into the mouth of the hungry Silver Fire.

Monty Wilson, TMA for the Gold Beach Ranger District, and Mr. James, father of the children, began tracking them starting from the valley floor. Grave concern was etched on their faces as the dry east winds blew across the sweat on their brows.

An Air Attack helicopter was also dispatched to help them in the search. From up above the forested canopy, they spotted the children at mid-slope on the trail. They then set down on Indigo Prairie, and immediately, crewmen from the rescue ship hurried down the trail and gathered up the children. They were then united with Monty and Mr. James hiking up from the bottom. The entire group was then transported safe and sound back to the ranch.

The children had taken the hike because they wanted to see the fire. From the safety of the helicopter they finally got their view. Air Attack then flew the children out to Silver Base at Agness. Mr. James elected to remain at the ranch and assist the IR crew assigned there.

Later that night the IR crew would attempt to burnout along the lines and up the Silver Peak Trail if the fire and weather would allow it.

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During the blow-out, the loggers were moved off the hill as the fire approached the bottom of the timber sale area. The big Vertol then flew in and began dropping retardant. By seven o'clock that evening the fire was still presenting major problems and roaring actively on the north side of Indigo Creek.

In a major effort to protect and save the timber sale, an additional six crews were moved to the line that evening. They burned out approximately five miles of line along a secondary firetrail constructed from Briggs Ranch to Indigo Prairie. They also burned out along the northeast side of the trail from Briggs Ranch to Silver Creek. They did not get the opportunity to burn out the entire Silver Peak trail as rolling fire above them would not permit this to be done safely; however, they did manage to protect and save the ranch.

The crews continued the process of igniting all of the unburned fuel in between the fireline and the main fire ridding themselves of the danger of unseen flare-ups as they moved on down the line.
The burning out was going well and by nine o'clock the following morning, the Indigo Ridge fireline had been burnt-out. By noon-time, burn-out had also been completed down to Indian Flats along a line that successfully held.

Another much needed fireline had also been installed with a bulldozer from the road at the bottom of the South Indigo Sale, eastward to the creek. This move was made in order to protect one of the timber sale units that was not protected by the main fireline.

As the day progressed, heavy smoke began laying thickly in the valleys hampering air operations. Some bucket and helicopter work continued, but only on the northeast side of Fish Hook Peak. Crews on the southeast side of the fire, at Sam Brown Camp, held their line against the push of moderate winds. Fire activity increased rapidly on the ridges, but the valleys were overall calm.

I should mention here that on September 16th there was one close call in the air operations phase. In heavy smoke, while directing water drops, the Lama helicopter pilot suddenly turned ill in flight. No one was sure if the smoke got to him or if he had been stung by a bee. He was forced to abort the bucket suspended below and narrowly made it back to Sam Brown Camp. He was taken to the hospital and released after observation.

During the evening of September 17th, the smoke cleared a little and some air operations resumed. It was also noted that all burned out lines seemed to be holding. Four crews went on night shift to hold the line and mop-up hot-spots.

On September 18, several hot-spots were located outside the fireline on Indigo Ridge. Ken Bavaro, fuels specialist on the Chetco Ranger District, had been assigned to patrol the fire using the portable, hand-carried, infra-red Probeye device. This device, operated much like a large-format video camera is used for scanning areas and sensing heat not visible to the naked eye. Ken and his crew had walked most of the fireline on the fire and as hot-spots were located, crews were called in to put them out.

On September 18th the winds picked up and a new strategy was enacted to put in a relocated line from Fish Hook Peak westward to the main fireline. Around the Timber Sale area, a maze of fireline was developed to contend with the erraticness of the fire. By the time all of the logical firelines were in place around the sale area and burn-out was completed, an additional thousand acres had been consumed. However, most of this was scrubby brushland and of little commercial value, yet the burning out of this area was intrinsic to the security of this vital area. Too much valuable and adjacent timberland was now at stake and much precious forestland had already been lost to the fire.

As the threat of the Silver Fire consuming the sale area became evident, many of the local timber managers from the private sector, as well as the Curry County Commissioners, visited with the I.C. to gather information to update their constituents and employees. They were most pleased with the Forest Service's efforts and thankful that the timber sale had been saved.

Throughout the night most of the firelines held. But still it was smoky and hot around the fire's perimeter, especially below the timber sale area where the
new cat-lines had been installed. But it was a good thing they were there, for without them the resource loss would have been staggering. In the meantime, during the darkened hours of the night, another thick and menacing inversion layer began settling in the area.

The morning of September 19th greeted the firefighters with choking smoke and a very hazy sky. Working under the pressure of another building inversion put a concentrated fear into the minds of many. Not knowing what the fire was going to do next brought to light the fact that major management decisions would have to be made if the fire should suddenly erupt and cross the Illinois River. If the fire were to do this, the results would be quite harsh as the fire would be open to run in this difficult and steep terrain. Options were discussed and a decision was made not to replace the National team with a Regional team as was originally planned. In the end, after a meeting of the Staff and Core Team, it was decided that the persistent Silver Fire would be readressed by another National Overhead Team.

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By the end of the third week the Silver Fire had increased to 38,800 acres. On September 16th when the east winds began to blow, it increased another 4,400 acres in the course of that afternoon. Throughout all this activity no one was injured seriously and no fatalities occurred. Even though the fire was not relenting in its menacing manner, it had not claimed any human lives. Acute safety had been a rallying cause, especially with so many troops from "out of town".

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The weather for the week witnessed the development of a warming and drying trend that began after a brief period in which a small amount of moisture fell during the preceding week. On September 15th, the winds took a sudden northeasterly shift and for the next three days they blew quite steady, and at moderate speeds. The winds speeds averaged between 15 and 20 mph, with a very steady flow, and in other places on the fire, higher gusts were recorded.

It should be noted that even though a windspeed of 15 to 20 mph may only seem like a slight breeze, when it is fanning a fire it can have devastating results. The two most important weather related factors that influence wild fire are fuel moisture and wind. The combination of both of these factors acting together on the Silver Fire was extreme. Everyone knew how dry the forest was; but the winds were unpredictable. During the third week of the fire, the firefighters had been lucky to hold what they did.

I might also add that the direction of the wind directly influences the manner in which a fire behaves. It also directs the fire's spread by pushing it in the direction of flow. The wind also acts as a drying catalyst, sucking moisture from the forest fuels.

Throughout the week the warming trend continued searing the already arid woodlands and tinder-dry forest. Temperatures continued to rise and the fuel stick readings still measured very low. If the past week's weather was an indication of what was in store for the Silver Fire, things did not look well.
Perhaps the biggest blow delivered by the weather was the tremendous amount
of smoke pushed into the settled communities surrounding the fire by the
persistent winds. Over on the coast on the westside of the forest, the
apprehensive townspeople were beginning to wonder just how far away the Silver
Fire really was. While enveloped in smoke, this eerie phenomena projected the
illusion that the fire was burning very nearby perhaps even "in the big back
yard." For many days the valleys palled, the air got thicker, and summertime
faded into an orange-brown shroud.
SMOKEY VALLEYS

by

Michael G. Apicello

Summer is the time for fun. Children play and adults dream. The great outdoors provides heightened meaning as people hie to the forestlands' calling. Clear and pristine, western rivers beckon, their cool rippling waters an inviting refuge from the heat. It's the time of year we long await; it helps us shed our winter skin. As sun-kissed rays beat down upon us, hearts are light and new growth achieves higher levels. The world becomes alive, a blossoming symphony, and all throughout the environment, tendered by the gentle hands of mother nature, the land bears sustenance and precious fruit.

Summer is the time for toil. Fires rage and columns boil. Rolling smoke covers the land, people sweat and try to understand. It's the time of year when growth is erased by oppressive heat and tendered flame; when creeks and streams begin to dry and rivers drop to lower levels. It is a time for fear when the imposing smoke of an approaching fire chokes ones lungs and threatens to sear the drought induced withered grasslands. Worst of all, it is a time when nature's forces ignore the processes of guided men; when forestlands so placidly sought for rest and recreation, are closed to man, and instead, within their woodland boundaries, raging wildfires are fought.

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The summer of 1987 began as a bust. June arrived in chilly fashion with misty fog twisting and winding its dripping fingers through the interlaced limbs of the evergreen trees. On the coastal side of the Siskiyou Mountains the weather remained unseasonably cool. There were chores to get done and we eagerly awaited the warming sun; however, its intermittent appearances did little to enhance our summertime fun.

We made our first major "sun-run" to the Chetco River sometime in July. Usually at that time of year we find ourselves camped along its scenic and placid river bars at one of our favorite hideaways. The sparkling water had not yet warmed to its full summertime potential and our first official swim was rather brisk and cold. Normally, by this time of year we've turned ourselves into healthy and well tanned recreationists, but not so during this unusual summer. It seemed to be that every time the weather took on the notion that it was going to get hot, the sun would then disappear behind some rising clouds and remain hidden.

This went on for several weeks on the coastal side of the Siskiyou National Forest. In and out the sun would drift, evoking unanswerable questions about
just what the summer had in store. In the later part of July, the sky became cloudy again after a brief interlude with the sun, and it appeared once more that true summer was evading us.

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When August began, it too was a little cooler than usual. Although the coastal fog persisted, and at times for long durations, it had not rained in many weeks and the land became quite arid. Nevertheless, our garden was producing well and the cool weather crops seemed to enjoy the prolonged season. Meanwhile, in the pepper and tomato beds, the adventitious roots of these hardy plants quested deeper, searching for moisture in the slowly drying mountain soils. Apparent growth registered slowly, and without constant heat we feared that there might not be a crop.

We also noticed, along with the slow growth cycle of our flowering plants, that the flow of our spring was tapering off. This was rare as it had never failed us in the past and always supplied us with clear, mountain water. About mid-August we noticed another abrupt change in its output as it dropped considerably again. Several of our friendly neighbors reported the same problem. It was turning out to be a challenging year for gardening and other funtime things.

In early August we were subject to drying winds. Their influence helped to turn the pastured hillsides dismal shades of withered brown. But at that time we did not lament, for it was getting hot and we were rather enjoying the heat, late as it was. The last two summers had inured us to drought and we readily assumed that the fall rains would arrive on time. We even looked forward to a summertime rain as often experienced late in the season. The summer progressed and life maintained itself. We weren't worried about our water supply; a bit concerned but not overly afraid.

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During mid-August I listened to a broadcast on the Ashland public radio station. A scientist/philosopher was lecturing on an upcoming event called The Harmonic Convergence. He spoke about what it was and how it would effect the future of the planet. He said that according to the Mayan Calendar that the Earth was going to enter a New Age in which things would finally begin to come together for mankind as a whole. "Wow!" I thought. I always felt that the world needed more unity and this profound theory was making me feel like there truly was hope for the planet and all its confusion.

The dawning of the New Age was scheduled to begin at daybreak on August 16th. Around the world on mountaintops, and other idyllic places, many people were planning to gather to meditate and pray together.

The Mayans believed that on this day a configuration of the planets within this solar system would reach a prophetic alignment. According to their prophecy, this was to be the start of the new age signifying the arrival of changes, peace and a new intelligence. In this harmonic converging of humankind's new awareness and the astral influences of a balanced solar system, mankind's problems would find resolvement. Not a bad concept, I thought.
I pondered some more. I considered the basis of this theory and explored its scientific foundation while trying to evaluate its degree of truth. I concluded that I couldn't understand why for some people it seemed that the inevitable success of humankind was solely a dictation of celestial forces and that there really was no God — but several. The Mayan belief that intelligence manifests itself through periodic change was intrinsic to the foundation of the convergence. I then reasoned to myself that man's faith is tested in several ways and that this was just another trial.

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On the morning of the convergence I was sleeping outside. My two young sons were curled up next to me snoring peacefully in their sleeping bags. I awoke early to the first breaking rays of the sun emerging from the backside of Bosley Butte. There was something special about being in the morning air and rising to the first signs of a new day dawning. My eyes blinked lazily then opened wide.

I really did not expect much to happen, nor did I expect any great spectre to manifest itself in the sky; however, the opening rays of the sun felt warm and in the stillness of the emerging dawn, I offered up a morning prayer. To me it did not matter if the planets converged, I felt pure and happy just to be alive.

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Out in the meadow the pastured animals began to rise, slowly seeking their morning feed and moving towards the shadier copses of green leafed trees. The morning sun had graced us with its vibrant rays and our home and pastures were gently warmed. As the sun rose higher in the early morning sky I slowly arose to begin my chores. There were eggs to be collected, crops that needed water and garden soil that needed to be tilled. My "work force" was still asleep, their slumbering bodies slowly dispelling their nighttime boyhood dreams.

The summer seemed normal then for it had taken the sun a long to find us; now it was sneaking away as it usually does whenever you begin to take it for granted.

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I would like to add that we live up high in the Oregon hills, atop a mountain ridge in a saddle area called Windy Gap. It is far removed from any town or highway and its most frequent visitors are the mighty winds that blow through it on a regular basis. To the east of us is Bosley Butte, and to our west is the Pacific Ocean.

On Bosley Butte there exists a lonely lookout tower. At night we could see its propane lamp shining through its enclosed glass windows. Its soft yellow glow became known to us as a special sign signifying "friend". This watchful sentinel tirelessly searched the endless hillsides for wildfires and smokes. We were very thankful for its vigilant presence and every evening we bid "it" good night.

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On the evening of August 30th, I slept alone outside on the deck. Far to the east, brilliant flashes illuminated the sky. I could hear the distant echos of rumbling thunder, a discordant lullaby from the nighttime sky. I felt secure where I was, but considered the possibility of moving inside. Instead, I elected to watch the summer sky, counting the shooting stars as they fell between the lightnings' flashing.

But by morning things had changed. I did not wake up to the bright yellow sun that I had grown accustomed to greeting. There was a definite haze in the sky. The odor of the air did not smell fresh and it left an acrid taste on my lips. As I cautiously arose, a surge of memories, long forgotten in my psyche, flooded my senses. Smoke? Fire? Could there truly something burning nearby?

I had inhaled this aroma too many times to ever forget it, but never this heavy since my firefighting days. The thought of a forest fire burning nearby totally frightened me. I thought of the forty acres of dry pasture surrounding the house and the thousands of acres of parched grasslands surrounding us here in the high country. I quickly jumped out of bed and placed a few calls, the first one to the Forest Service.

I asked them if they had any fires reported in the vicinity. They said that none had been sighted over on the coast but that inland there were many smokes rising from the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and places beyond.

I looked out the window - daylight had finally reached its peak. Sure enough, coming through the gap, from an area beyond Snow Camp Mountain I could see the air roiling in a dark brown column of smoke and ash. It was rising rather rapidly and heading our way. It was unbelievable how fast that the smoke drifted in, succumbing to the powerful currents of Windy Gap.

Some time went by and the smoke got thicker. Again, I called the Forest Service and this time I was given more information. I was provided the exact legal and looked it up on my map. The fire's origin was almost twenty miles away but a strong east wind was pushing it towards us, using Windy Gap as its final outlet before spilling the smoke over ocean waters. I was also told that smokejumpers were "in" on the fire. This relieved me. I felt the fire was in capable hands.

Over the course of the next few days the fire grew in the face of shifting winds. Volumes of smoke were offered to the airmass and large columns blocked the sun. The radio began reporting tales of numerous fires burning on the Siskiyou Forest. I thought of all the places I had visited and worked there in the past; it was sad to hear they were burning, I wished that I could help. I called the Forest Service again, this time volunteering to assist; it was obvious that the fires were getting out of hand.

Two weeks passed and still the sky had not cleared. All the doors and windows to the house remained shut. The brown haze continued to block the sun and slowly a gray ash covered what were once destined to be sun ripened tomatoes. The water flowing from our spring dropped off considerably again, but we considered ourselves lucky, for our neighbor's had run completely dry.

I thought of our situation. If the fire should make a run at us there was nothing to do but leave the property. Our hillside was steep and there was no
way to stop a raging uphill grass fire without a tractored fireline and adequate water. Some of our more fortunate neighbors enacted these very same measures. Although very few wildfires rarely ever burned to the coast, the ones that had done so in the past, annihilated the coastal communities and burned up many homesteads and prairies.

Overnight the weather cooled, and the tremendous amount of suspended particulate matter coalesced in the maritime saturated air. Pushed by an offshore flow, a tiny amount of rainfall fell upon our pastures. But it wasn’t enough to soak anything down and our short-lived hopes for a wetting rain rapidly dissipated. By nightfall, the winds had shifted back to the east again, the sky cleared, and the big forest fire burning in our backyard expanded once again.

For the next three days the wind blew steady. There was nothing to see outside of our windows and our vista view disappeared once again. All of the livestock, deer and domesticated animals filed to the bottom of the canyon searching for water and cleaner air. Things began to dry out in the garden and our water pressure dropped again, this time severely. With this dilemma on our hands normal household activities came to a screeching halt. Water was used on a limited basis and all of the laundry was taken to town. We later learned that water shortages were happening all throughout the county.

The next few days we sat around spellbound, witnessing the smoke grow even denser. We considered leaving the area in search of clean air. Even down by the beach, the sky still churned an awesome gray and we considered an inland trip to escape from the smoke.

I knew that there were other fires burning inland. I had heard that Takilma and O’Brien were immediately threatened. To me, this was my old jumping ground, I had seen many acres burn in that valley and had been on many fires over there in the past. I couldn’t picture the area engulfed by fire but I had heard some rumors that that the Longwood Fire had gotten totally out of hand and that Cave Junction was under siege.

Curiosity overcame me. After two weeks of hearing the daily reports of rampant fire in southern Oregon I decided to take a trip over to the valley to see for myself. I guess the old fireman in me had never left. I needed to know just how bad things really were. It was very hard for me to sit still and watch while the forest I cared about vanished in smoke.

When I rode over to the valley I was half expecting to see rampant wildfire on the hills. However, I was drastically mistaken. Once through the Collier Tunnel on highway 199, I entered something that reminded me of emerging from the Lincoln Tunnel on a smog filled day in New York City.

The entire Illinois Valley was socked in with smoke. We had to shut the windows in the car and seal off the vents. The outside temperatures were burning hot. We began to question the wisdom of the trip. Nevertheless, we continued on. The streets of Cave Junction were bustling. All throughout the main street the sidewalks were ablaze with yellow-shirted firefighters, many enjoying a day of "R and R". I asked one of the men how things were going. His grizzled reply was, "Terrible." I felt then that things were not going to well.
We continued on and literally drifted into Grants' Pass with the smoke. All over town people drove about with their car windows shut and their headlights on. In several places throughout the town there were signs on the sidewalks encouraging volunteers to sign up and help with the fire effort. I also peeked into the local Forest Service offices, their dispatch rooms were a flurry of activity. People were moving in and out. From the numerous fireshirts and government vehicles it appeared that the Forest Service had taken over the valley.

Well, the entire day was one filled with dastardly smoke. My escape to the valley left little to be seen, but a lot more to the imagination. We didn't see much open flame but we knew that fire was everywhere. We then decided that it would be best to return to the coast.

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Over on the coast, the wind had taken a sudden shift. Cool moist air blew in from the ocean and for awhile we were treated to a breath of fresh air. During the second and third weeks of September, we watched the columns grow. After the east winds pushed the fire to more than 50,000 acres it crossed the Illinois River. I'll never forget that day.

Because the maritime breeze had pushed the smoke to the east we were able to see when the Silver Fire broke through the inversion layer and blew its top as it crossed the Illinois River. Rising high out of the east, dwarfing Snow Camp Mountain and shadowing Bosley Butte, like a nuclear cloud over a vacant crater, the huge column exploded into the air.

We silently watched it from the deck of our home. My wife and boys were intrigued and asked about what was occurring. I then explained what a blow up was but the scene we were viewing needed no further explanation. My young son asked, "Is the fire coming to get us?" I reassured him that it was not. We stared in awe and quietly wondered just how far and how long it would blow. It remained an unanswered question for several hours.

But something good happened on that day, perhaps not just to us but to others as well who may have witnessed the phenomenal event. It brought our family closer together and made us realize that no one owns the land. That we are all here to participate upon it, and use it as we must, without abuse. That the resources provided for the dominion of man are extremely precious and that humankind as a whole is responsible for how we treat them. The consumate fire highlighted the fact that resources so readily given, can easily be taken away. That the forests we fight over are not truly ours to possess, especially in disharmony; and for all our planning that it might not matter so much what we do today if we do not project what we wish to leave behind. I slowly reinforced what I've always felt within, and that is that Forestry is not really a one time decision but an ongoing process that requires sound stewardship as its guiding principle. In light of all the current controversy it seemed to all make sense.

I sat and watched that column grow. Taller and higher it rose. The dense, black and deep brown folds of the rapidly shifting waves of the column rose higher and higher into the sky. There was nothing that we knew of that we could do to make it go away, like many others we silently prayed. I thought of the masses that had gathered together, in unison praying for the Harmonic
Convergence. I wondered then what they were feeling now and silently hoped they continued praying. The Silver Fire knew no division. It treated us all equally.

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For several more weeks the smoke drifted in and out. Finding clean air was like playing hide and seek with feathers in the wind. There wasn't much cover to turn to and hide in, and every time the wind shifted we were vulnerable again. When the smoke blew out of one community it inundated another. For the rest of the summer it went on like this. Many people who suffered with the smoke and experienced difficulty breathing, remained indoors. Several even left town vowing only to return when the smoke finally cleared; however, they were surprised as they did not expect to be gone so long.

Yet the smoke hung in there, pungent and unwavering. Its lingering presence put an early end to summertime fun and many referred to it as "the summer that wasn't".

No one knew just how long the Silver Fire was going to last but everyone agreed it was the Big Event of the season. The Forest Service did all that it could to assist the communities with this plight while many other agencies sent additional personnel to help. In all, it did become a summer of unity as many people came together to help. "Fire Aid" was alive and well, an invitation to harmony in the smoke filled communities of southern Oregon.

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The smokey valleys continued to survive even with the low water and thick dense smoke. Everyday we heard continuing tales of wildfire consuming yet another pristine forest watershed. It was hard for some to keep back their tears. Even the fire with all of its destruction was bringing together the misplaced unity so direly needed in order to resolve the controversial forest issues. Maybe the planet was converging.

There is little more that needs to be said. Eventually we knew that the smoke would clear. Either the weather or the firefighters would conquer the blaze, of this we were totally sure. We anxiously awaited normality to resume and continued to endure for 72 days, inhaling smoke and counting our blessings.

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Slowly the Silver Fire burnt itself out. The rains returned and a peaceful sigh was felt throughout the valleys. For many it was a summer of enlightenment with trials along the way. Much was lost but a lot was gained. And in the end we all felt richer. There was perhaps one disappointing outcome - the tomatoes in the garden never ripened.
THE FOURTH WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: SEPTEMBER 20TH TO SEPTEMBER 26TH

The fourth week of the Silver Fire witnessed the steady growth of the fire's perimeter on all flanks. Direct and indirect suppression tactics continued where applicable. Most of the firelines that were needed in order to protect the resources of the South Indigo Timber Sale area were already installed and had been successfully burned out. When it became evident that the fire was going to make a serious run up the slopes towards the sale, a 200' blackstrip was burnt out inside the fire lines. This strategy proved to be very effective and eventually led to the saving of many valuable board feet of down and standing timber.

On September 20th, the acreage figure for the Silver Fire was listed at 40,770 acres. Containment figures also rose to 70%. Forty miles of fireline had been built by hand and dozers, and 11 miles of natural breaks, such as rock outcrops, major creeks and fuel-less mountain ridges, had been utilized.

During the first days of the fourth week of the fire, the hand crews continued to work both day and night shifts in a major effort to maintain and hold the burnt out the lines on the west side of the fire. Progress was noted as very slow due to the steep terrain and heavy brush, but the work accomplished by the hand crews there held up very well. Hot spots, however, were still a major concern. Smoke continued to plague the firefighting efforts and visibility continued to be limiting. Not only was the immediate fire area inundated by the smoke, but all throughout southern Oregon could its effects be felt.

On September 22nd, light east winds began to blow on the blackened firelines in the Sugarloaf Mountain area in Division B of the North Zone. Fanned by these winds, the fire then made a run up the south slope of the mountain. Fire crews there were instructed to build handlines on the north side of Sugarloaf Mountain in order to stop the blaze. This was a highly strategic point and a very critical area, one in which the Silver Fire should not be allowed to escape out of. Any further advancement to the north by the fire here could lead to its entering the heavily timbered Snail Creek drainage. The possibility of it escaping into this remote and wild country could very easily lead to the Silver Fire making another devastating through old-growth forestland. The thought was very frightening.

On September 23rd, handline construction efforts continued on the north face of Sugarloaf Mountain. Concerns here were for additional spotting. A "push" was made in the area to complete the fireline; however, it was not finalized until the next evening.

Poor visibility continued to hamper the firefighting efforts. Because flight time was becoming hard to come by and impossible to predict, Forest Service pack strings were utilized to bring in supplies and equipment to the
remote fire camps. The spike camps down at Conner's and Brigg's Ranch utilized this slow but very reliable means when the helicopters could not make it in.

The inversion continued building throughout the day. East winds contributed some problems but because they were light, no extensive damage occurred. Humidities continued to be low and temperatures remained in the high nineties.

The southern front of the fire continued its journey further south into the wilderness. By the 23rd of September, the Silver Fire had eaten up more than 8,000 acres of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness with no apparent sign of slowing down its southward movement. Also at this time, it was noted that the east side of the fire had been contained. Work continued on the western flank of the fire with burn-out and indirect attacks. To the north, the fire had dealt the crews one serious slopover, but it had been contained and mop-up and patrol continued in the area.

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On September 23rd there were 49 crews assigned to the Silver Fire. Of this total, 28 were on the line at all times splitting shifts between day and night. There was a total of over 1,300 firefighters now assigned to the fire and it should be mentioned that many of these crews had never been in this type of terrain before. Because of the harsh nature of the topography of the Siskiyou National Forest, it was important that the out-of-region crews be advised of the dangers that lay out in the field.

Many of the eastern crews came from the relatively moderate sloped forests of Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Mississippi. There were also crews from Michigan and Minnesota, as well as personnel from some of the northeastern states such as New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In all, a total of 127 different crews were utilized from 22 different states. Several of the western crews later travelled back to the Silver Fire after their first tour of duty.

Up until September 23rd, the safety record for the entire fire included only one reportable accident. It was noted that this may be a record for a fire operation of this size. It appeared that all of the crews from out of region were performing well with a high interest in crew welfare and safety. The low frequency of reportable accidents can be directly attributed to the aggressive approach towards safe working practices drilled into the workers by diligent crew bosses and the exceptionally high-class safety officers assigned to the fire.

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September 23, 1987 was also a day of transition for the overhead team governing the management of the Silver Fire. It had been a tenuous tour for I.C. Hodge and his Staff, and after two days of R&R they came back to the fire rested and ready to undergo the intricacies of the transition process.

An Area Team, headed up by Incident Commander Jim Reser and his Staff, had assumed command of the Silver Fire during the hiatus of the Hodge team. But still there remained the question of whether or not the Silver Fire was going to carry on with its erratic behaviour; and if so, then it was jointly agreed that
a National Team should continue to govern the incident. However, because the Area Team had been at the Silver Fire prior to this decision, they were effectively utilized as a short relief team for the Hodge Organization. They remained there until the new National Team arrived and assumed responsibility. The Reser Team was then released and dispatched to take control of other fires in the south.

The transition went smoothly, and the second National Team headed up by Incident Commander Gordon Rheinhart took over command of the Silver Fire.

On September 24, 1987, the Silver Fire continued to dictate its forward motion to the south. During its first three weeks it had eaten up much valuable timberland in the North Kalmiopsis' unroaded areas and it was now sweeping unchecked into the Wilderness. On this day the Siskiyou National Forest released its initial estimates of resource damage. They were heavy:

The estimated amount of timber killed originally stood at 72 million board feet on the north slope of Bald Mountain. In the Silver and Lazy Creek drainages 15 million board feet was also estimated killed, and in Indigo Creek, an additional 10 to 50 million board feet was estimated as fire-killed. The total value assigned to these losses was put at roughly 7.5 million dollars. Damage to the watershed was estimated as severe and immediate rehabilitation plans were enacted. Emergency plans were also developed for reforestation and reseeding needs where necessary. An assessment team was also established to assess the problems that were beginning to surface with the probability of any future salvage logging operations.

It was later ascertained after the fire that 272 million board feet of timber had been scarred in the Silver Fire.

Also on this date, major concerns of the Siskiyou National Forest were listed as follows. They included:

- Preventing the fire from entering the Snail Creek Drainage,
- Preventing the fire from entering further into the Indigo Drainage,
- Keeping the fire out of fell and bucked timber in the So. Indigo Sale,
- Not letting the fire cross the Illinois River or enter into Collier or Lawson Creeks,
- Avoiding taking any unnecessary risks to humans,
- Fully containing the fire,
- Keeping the fire out of the BLM lands to the east,
- Keeping costs down,
- Maintaining a contingent of 45-50 crews,
- Releasing all fatigued crews and those crews with ill crewmen,
- Releasing the Siskiyou crews as soon as possible,
- and Preparing for winds during lulls in the weather.

Many of these concerns were stringently met; however, others were totally under the control and influence of the totally indomitable and whimsical Silver Fire.
On the 24th of September, the fireline was completed around the troublesome Sugarloaf Mountain and the South Indigo Timber Sale areas. Seventeen crews on the dayshift had been assigned to this area and finished the grueling task.

The fire then made another run at Sugarloaf Mountain which was tenously held. Twenty-one loads of retardant were used in the effort and the danger of the fire spreading to the north was adequately squelched. If it had overcome the mountain an additional 20,000 acres could have easily been lost. After the run, the crews accomplished burn-out duties and began mopping up.

The fire had also burned up to the Illinois River in one spot on its western edge, but it was yet to cross the river. It was the hope of the Siskiyou Staff Officers then, that the fire would not cross the river and that some action be taken to prevent this. But this was not to be, and for the next two days the Silver Fire kept rolling, building up steam and preparing itself for an event that would startle many.

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The new Incident Commander, Gordon Reinhart, inherited an event that presented challenging goals to his firefighting expertise. After meeting with the Core Team, his Staff and other pertinent advisors, a set of land management objectives was drawn. Of these, several would be met. The major objectives dealt with limiting cat-road construction in the unroaded areas and limiting the total fire size to less than 100,000 acres. Of grave concern was the integrity of the Wilderness and the sensitivity of the roadless areas. These two factors alone presented a whole different set of constraints in wildfire management, and perhaps this is why the Silver Fire remains the focus of much national attention even today.

After addressing these concerns and setting objectives, it was back to running the fire show for I.C. Reinhart. After the run on Sugarloaf, the fire's behaviour was mitigated by a cool maritime influence which lasted the next two days. This lull enabled the new I.C. and his staff to enact needed changes in the base camp operations and set their course for the long haul ahead.

September 25th and 26th were relatively quiet days on all fronts of the fire, yet the Silver Fire continued its creeping movement to the south. The north had all but been sealed off after the run at Sugarloaf and the South Indigo Sale.

The eastern flank had been fairly inactive, allowing for the completion of much needed mop-up. The western flank continued to be monitored and handline construction continued.

All in all, a general feeling of accomplishment was shared and the latest ICS 209 listed the fire at 80% containment. But that afternoon something developed that put a cloud over this optimism. For coming out of the northeast, and ignoring any progress that had been made thus far on the fire, the east winds began to blow and bore down heavy on the Silver Fire.

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During the fourth week of the Silver Fire the weather was characterized as hot and dry. Temperatures throughout the Forest remained in the high eighties to mid-nineties. Fuel temperatures on the ground exceeded 120 degrees in several instances and fuel stick readings remained in the 2-5 range. Relative humidities plunged to the low teens and hovered at about 25% during the week.

For most of the week the area had been under a weather pattern that created an inversion layer 3,000 feet thick. This managed to keep the "sleeping giant" relatively calm – but should it lift, its potential danger would be overwhelming. The inversion continued to limit visibility and hampered the movement of troops and supplies. Observation of the fire and its hazards from the air was virtually reduced to zero.

The weather to date was summed up best in the Escaped Fire Situation Analysis report, it read: "A Fall weather pattern has not become established to date and no major weather change is expected in the next 10 days. Explosive fire activity is still occurring on some portions of the fire – even though the fire is considered 80% contained. Full control of the incident is likely only after a significant weather change including a long duration of high humidity and/or precipitation."

It had been an eventful week. Much work had been accomplished and priorities were clearly established. Now everything hinged on the fire's behaviour and what the weather would dictate. Little did anyone know that the worst was yet to come.
THE FIFTH WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: SEPTEMBER 27TH TO OCTOBER 3RD

At four o'clock, on the afternoon of September 27, 1987, the Silver Fire decided to redefine its boundaries and set a new course as it jumped across the Illinois River. Fanned by very steady and moderate east winds, it blew-up along its southern boundary. In doing so it put to rest the question of whether or not the Illinois River would serve as a control line. On this day, there was little that could be done to prevent the fire from consuming the precious resources of this fertile watershed.

The intensity that the fire displayed was awesome. The event happened rapidly with little advance warning. Not much could be done in front of it.

When the Silver Fire crossed the Illinois River at South Bend Mountain it re-emphasized the severity of its nature. During the first four weeks of the Silver Fire, it burned almost exclusively in an area open to multiple-use forest management practices. Although this area was predominantly unroaded, everything that was needed to protect the resources there was tried.

Fire in the old-growth stands dictated immediate action, and numerous firefighting resources were committed to saving these timberlands. But now, the intrusive spread of the Silver Fire deeper into the Kalmiopsis, and its ravaging run through the wild and scenic corridor of the Illinois River could not be stopped. It was now too dangerous to place human bodies in front of the inferno as it ran through the steep and brushy terrain on the south side of the river.

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Blow-ups are magically eerie phenomena, and when they occur, they evoke many slack-jawed reactions. What caused this blow-up was the explosive ignition of unburned gases trapped beneath the building inversion layer. The effect was clearly described by L.C. Reinhart in his statement: "The blow-up effect was just like opening the draft on a wood stove, when the oxygen reached the super-heated gases, they ignited explosively. The extreme fire behaviour generated flames up to 400 feet in height." He also added: "I'm extremely concerned about the safety of the firefighters in this situation. Firefighters will not be put in places where their safety is jeopardized."

Immediately prior to the blow-up, there weren't any crews working in the vicinity of the headwall of the fire. The I.C. Team had recognized this potentially dangerous situation and made the right decision not to place anyone at the head of the fire.

At the time of the blow-up the fire had not yet burned down to the river. Strategy called for using the Illinois River as a natural barrier with the hopes that the fire would stop itself there. But the wind and explosive conditions
would not comply with the plans of using the river as a barrier to the Silver Fire.

After blowing up, the Silver Fire was pushed by northeast winds and headed south in the direction of Tincup Pass. Tincup Pass is a high elevation mountain saddle situated between the Big Craggies Botanical Area and Hayward Peak. The north face of the Pass is heavily fueled and very steeply sloped. In the past it has experienced intense burns as evidenced by the heavy fire scarring on its vegetation and loose soils.

On this day, a natural cycle of fire in the wilderness was repeating itself as hot, high flames coursed through the area. Although the Silver Fire was the largest fire to ever burn on the Siskiyou in this era, it was not the first. Past fire occurrences have directly attributed for the many types of rare and exotic plant species found in its diverse ecotypes. Ironically, fire is the dependent factor needed to proliferate and regenerate some of the unique botanical species found only in the Kalmiopsis, as it helps to open seeds and prepare the site by eliminating the competing brush and overstory.

Suppression strategy then dictated that containment efforts be directed towards checking the spread along the prominent ridges as soon as the winds subsided and the weather permitted. Handcrews were then directed to build fireline in the Wilderness using the ecologically sound "light-hand-on-the-land" philosophy. What this meant was using discretion about how and where the line would be constructed, without a permanent marred of the aesthetic quality of the wilderness, yet insuring completion of the job to a satisfactory and effectual degree.

The biggest problem at that time was determining where the main control lines should be installed. Because of the extreme brushy nature of the land, a realistic time-frame was needed to calculate and project if the line construction could be completed before being met by the running head of the Silver Fire. It was determined unfeasible at this point to risk placing anyone too close to the fireline as there were clearly no definable escape routes. It was also decided that the lines would have to be placed well ahead of the fire and deeper within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

On September 28th, the plan to fight the fire using fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters in the wilderness was enacted. This action brought up the concern about using long-term retardant in this sensitive area. Approval was sought from the Forest Supervisor and while awaiting his reply, the Vertol and several other medium class 412 helicopters continued dropping water on hot spots in other areas.

Also on this day, Wes Nicholson, FMO on the Chetco Ranger District, closed all trails leading into the wilderness. A trail crew working in the Tincup Creek Area was notified to evacuate. Local citizens working to secure a line around the privately owned Tolman Ranch on the Chetco River were also informed about the fires movement towards them.
Meanwhile, in the town of Brookings, alarming radio messages were played over the airwaves talking about the possible evacuation of the Upper Chetco School and the closures of the main forest roads. Because the effects of the fire were evidenced by the large amount of smoke and ash inundating the town, a general scare raced through the minds of many. The fire event was causing quite a stir and locally people were reacting; however, at no time was anyone living outside of the Siskiyou National Forest in any dire jeopardy.

At nine o'clock on the morning of September 28th, aerial reconnaissance reported 30 mile per hour easterly gusts on the fire causing it to spread downhill and eastward back into the wind. The fire was pushing directly south and rapidly heading towards the Curry County line. Because of the high winds though, nothing could be done on the threatened east flank. Operations were then redirected back to the southern front and options for aerial attack were considered. They were: (1) using helibuckets on the ridges and, (2) burning out the heads of the draws with the flying driptorch or the "ping-pong" machine.

The Silver Fire was acting up again prompting the Forest Supervisor to issue an area closure on certain roads adjacent to, and within the general fire area. Hunting season had just opened and many local residents were expressing interest in viewing the forest fire as they proceeded with their hunts. It was time to shut down parts of the Forest as the risk to the public was great.

On the 29th, the Silver Fire stood at 57,064 acres, of which 14,000 were burning in the Wilderness. There were 56 crews assigned to the fire now, most of them on the day-shift. At night, the fire was behaving radically and burning uncharacteristically hot. Because of the smoke and the harsh terrain, night operations were suspended for safety reasons.

Also on September 29th, a major spot-fire had been ignited at the base of Collier Creek on the western flank of the fire. A Hot-shot crew hiked into this remote area and attempted to begin construction around the 150 acre spot fire. Four additional crews were sent in later to help out with this effort. The threat of a major flare-up occuring in Collier Creek would have devastating results. There was absolutely no time to lose.

The majority of the Collier Creek drainage is inside the Wilderness Boundary. The Chetco Ranger District could not afford to lose this piece of pristine ground. With east winds blowing, the potential of losing this section was grave. Because the general lay of the basin was a natural chimney running east to west, any fire in this drainage pushed by an east wind, could send the fire flaring up to the main forest road and a major backfiring effort would have to be made. This was another very critical area. If the Silver Fire raced up this canyon it was a dead run up the face of Snow Camp Mountain, and if it were to top the ridge, watch out coast and Pistol River! (and also my home!).

The winds were definitely causing problems. Containment figures were reduced to 70%.

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In the south, the fire passed slightly beyond Tincup Pass and reached a ridge about two miles east of the Illinois River. The firefighters had been
utilizing the bare rock ridges as a natural barrier and all of the crews were forced to back off when the threat of the fire overrunning them was imminent. Later on, the arrival of a slight southeast wind helped them slow down the spread of the fire - but only for a while.

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On September 30th, it was reported that all firelines north of the Illinois River were holding. The fire did make a run in the vicinity of Sugarloaf Mountain, but handcrews, aided by helicopters dropping water, held all of the lines there. The persistent problem area continued to be the south front of the fire.

South of the Illinois River, dense smoke obscured the fire, and once again, crews were unable to take any suppression action. The east winds had produced another spot fire about two miles north of Collier's Bar on the western bank of the Illinois River. It was burning in steep, rugged terrain and was estimated to be 50 acres in size. Two crews were dispatched and spent most of the day making their way cross-country, fording the river and arriving late in the afternoon. They remained overnight and continued work dawn's first light.

Dense smoke continued to be a problem. Commander Reinhart stated: "Our options are limited, and are very situational depending upon what the weather is like this day. We would like to use the helicopters to fly in additional crews to reinforce those on the spot fire in Collier Creek. But again, we're at the mercy of the weather. Heavy smoke down there is keeping us out."

It was also reported that the fire was actively burning below Helispot-30 at Tincup Peak. The main fire was obscured by smoke and the potential here for a major run was extreme. The crews were ordered to retreat and camp for the night somewhere between Hayward Peak and Granite Butte. The day ended with little progress made in this zone of the fire; the Silver devil would not relent.

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The Silver Fire continued burning into its third month on the first of October. East winds and smoke continually plagued and hampered the firefighting efforts. Twenty five crews had been assigned to work on the north end of the fire, while eight others were assigned to the south. On the north side of the Illinois River the fire was mopped-up 600 feet into the burn on the north end of its perimeter and 300 feet along the flanks. Crews made excellent progress working the northern end.

In Collier Creek, rubber rafts were cleverly used to ferry supplies across the river to the troops working on the spot fire. The spot fire was 70% lined and the crews working there were hot-spotting and mopping up as needed. Two additional crews were committed to this effort and began their trek into the area. They were unable to find a safe route through the precipitous bluffs and rocky cliffs along that portion of the Illinois River. They were then forced to return to the Brigg's Ranch for a night's rest before reattempting another way in during the next morning.

The three crews that were ferried into the wilderness the previous day began building a "light-hand-on-the-land" fireline along two ridges on the eastern
flank of the fire below the Illinois River. One crew was working uphill from
the river, the other two were spotted at Hayward Peak and began working eastward
toward Granite Butte. Their mission was to construct a hellspot first, just in
case the fire was to blow-up again. If it did, this was their only escape route
and in lieu of the sporatic flying weather, no one wanted them too close to the
fire.

At approximately 1600 hours on October 1st, gusty unstable winds from the
southwest, associated with the arrival of a new weather front, caused extreme
fire behaviour on the south side of the river. The fire was reported to have
reached Heather Mountain and was consuming Hayward Peak. The crews retreated.
At this point, all they could do was watch as the massive smoke columns invaded
the sky and took over the scenic horizons.

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The next two days, October 2nd and 3rd, seemed like a futile race against
diminishing time. The Silver Fire continued its run up the sides of Hayward
Peak and expanded rather explosively threatening Granite Butte. Tincup Peak
went up in smoke and there was little that the firefighters on the southern
flank could do to prevent it. They continued to construct the line between
Yukon and Klondike Creeks, but the behaviour of the fire was hinting that this
line was not going to hold - not if it persisted with its stubborn attitude.

Line construction was finally completed on the spot fire north of Collier
Bar and the troublesome blaze was in the mop-up phase by nightfall. "We got
some flying weather in that area, and used a helicopter to assist the handcrews
in cooling down the spot fire," reported Gordon Reinhart. The crews had made an
outstanding effort and that area was secured.

Firelines on the north end continued to hold and mop-up progressed well.
Crews were lined out hunting down the isolated smokes in the many sections of
line in that area. There was a quite a large number of people working there,
but as the I.C. stated, "Conditions may warrant a larger force on the line than
we normally would have at this point in the fire, but we simply can't take any
chances."

The Silver Fire kept burning, it knew no boundaries. It had been subjected
to the winds and expanded with every breath. By week's end it measured 66,421
acres. Where and when it would stop - no one knew.

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The dominant weather factor for the week was the easterly flow that began on
September 25th. It did not subside until the end of the first week in October.
These winds were characterized by their steady flow across the high mountain
ridgetops. They created numerous problems for air attack and added much lost
acreage to the existing total. The spot fires they produced required major
efforts and suppression duties. There was little that could be done in the face
of these winds and at critical times, the gusts blew strong. Not only did this
fan the fires, but it also helped to dry and pre-heat those fuels ahead of its
front. In critical areas like the Craggies, it posed the threat of casting
firebrands well ahead into Collier Creek; it was a never-ending struggle trying
to second guess the winds.
The long range forecast did not predict any precipitation for the next 6-10 days. Relative humidities ranged extremely low, especially when the fire blew-out earlier in the week. On the 30th of September, the relative humidity plunged to 10% at Quail Prairie Lookout. It remained low all throughout the week. Humidity recovery at night was very negligible. Fuel stick readings also remained quite low. The Silver Fire was now entirely under the influence of the natural forces. The weather would just not cooperate and a warming trend was predicted for the upcoming week.

October began with smoke in the skies and high winds inviting further destruction.
NOTES OF A FIELD OBSERVER: THE WILDERNESS ON FIRE

[From the Journal of Gary "Tex" Martinek and the notes of Terry Burgess]  
(Edited by Michael G. Apicello)

The following account was furnished by Gary "Tex" Martinek, Chetco Ranger District Pre-sale and Cultural Resources Technician. During the fifth week of the Silver Fire, Tex and his partner, Terry Burgess, also a Forester on the Chetco R.D., shared the duty of fire observers stationed atop both Tincup Peak on September 29th and 30th, and also atop Pearsoll Peak during the first week of October. The following account was taken from excerpts of Tex's journal which he kept throughout this detail.

During the last ten years, Tex has been involved actively with the reconnaissance and relocation of the old Heather Mountain Trail which leads from the Tincup and Fall Creek Confluence on the Chetco River, up the steep and brushy slopes to the top of Heather Mountain, where it then ties in with an old wilderness trail leading into other heartland areas of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Tex and Terry were not strangers to the wilderness land which makes this account even more meaningful. When I talked to them shortly after the Silver Fire, their thoughts and comments were of wonder and awe. Watching the Kalmiopsis "blow-up" was a sight seen by many, but very few were as close to or in the ideal position that these two were in when the event happened - this is their account:

(Tex's narrative begins upon his return to North Silver Base Camp in Agness, Oregon after he and Terry came down from Tincup Peak.)

OCTOBER 1: SILVER BASE CAMP: AGNESS, OREGON. 0853 A.M.

I'm sitting here at Base Camp waiting for re-assignment, so I decided to write down my impressions of the last few days:

We left the Chetco Ranger District about 5:45 a.m. on September 29, 1987. Late as usual. We had a hard time finding a rig because they were all off on fires. We ended up with the Jeep Scrambler, a little wind-up toy which we just about had to push over Cape Sebastian. We reported to the Burnt Ridge spike camp / Snail Helibase to await our flight to Tincup Peak. Old stomping grounds for me from the Heather Mountain to Tincup Creek trail days.

For gear we were outfitted with our personal packs, a sleeping bag each, a sheet of plastic, a piece of rope, a case of M.R.E.'s (the new version of "C"
rations), and a 5 gallon jug of water. We were told to expect to be out there at least three days.

Finally, we were told that our flight was ready and headed out for Snail Hellbase. Turns out we were going to fly in the Bell 206, the same ship and helitack crew we worked with on the east side of the Silver Fire last week. I gave my wife's name and phone number to one of the women on the helitack crew and asked her to call collect and inform her that I would be spiked out in the Kalmiois Wilderness for awhile and would be out of touch except by radio. The only disheartening part about our plan was that if we had to get out in a hurry, and if it was too smoky to fly, we would then have to walk out to Pearsoall Peak, on the trail; a long walk that would eventually get us out, but on the wrong side of the Kalmioisp. Also our observation point was located about a half mile above the trail - thick brush all the way.

The flight out was pretty uneventful, we got to see the ridge between Granite Butte and the Illinois River where the hand crews were working to try to cut off the fire and stop its spread to the southeast. I also got the pilot to give us a quick tour of the advancing fire front; what we could see through the smoke anyway. At that time it was on the north face of Hayward Peak, burning through Tincup Pass and on the north side of Tincup Creek, west of the top of Hayward, basically in the same area where it blew out the day before (Sept. 28).

We landed on the highest point of tincusp Peak and immediately took the weather and reported it. We also decided that we would have a much better view if we moved our observation point to the northernmost peak of the mountain even though it was a quarter of a mile from the hellspot. We spent the next hour or so moving our gear and locating the best observation point and a flat spot to set up camp. (Tex's notes also provided sketch maps of the area.)

(Day 1: Tincup Peak – September 29th, 1987)

That first day on Tincup Peak turned out to be real interesting. The first thing we saw was the helicopters airlift two hot-shot crews into the saddle between Hayward Peak and Mt. Billingslea, directly across the canyon from us. Two other hot-shot crews were flown into the Illinois River area at its junction with Yukon Creek. The job of these four crews was to build handline down the ridge top between Yukon and Kloundike Creeks from the Illinois River clear up to Granite Butte, a distance of about three miles. The crews on the top also built a hellspot on Granite Butte in case they needed to be evacuated in a hurry. My job besides taking weather and monitoring the fire behaviour was to be a look-out for those crews on top since they could not see the fire (Hayward Peak obscuring their view of the fire).

The excitement began about 12:30 when it started getting hot and the wind began to blow from the north. The fire made a run to the ridge top and took out the entire north face of the ridge from Tincup Pass almost to Hayward Peak and spotted into Tincup and Yukon Creeks. The crews on top had by this time moved to Granite Butte and were in a safe spot. Aircraft could not be used due to poor visibility and smoke. We were asked to stay on duty since we were the only ones who could see what the fire was doing. We decided that I would take the late shift while Terry slept, and after morning check-in and a good look around at the fire, I would catch some sleep while Terry took the morning shift.
I got a good scare during the night because I was pretty rummy from lack of sleep. I was out on the observation point and enjoying the stars. I was watching the glowing embers from the spot fires across the canyon which looked just like city lights at night from an airplane. Well I decided to walk back to camp and when I got up and looked to the west there was a big red glow in the direction of the Craggies. I damn near grabbed the radio to report that the fire had advanced into the Craggies when I noticed this red glow had sort of a crescent shape to it. Turns out that what I was seeing was the moon setting behind Big Craggie - red glow compliments of the smoke.

The rest of the night was uneventful.

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(Day 2: Tincup Peak - September 30th 1987)

Day 2 up there turned out to be quite exciting. I was just finishing my breakfast and Terry was on the observation point. I had noticed some build-up to the north and was just leaving camp to join Terry when I got a radio call from Recon 1, the forest spotter plane. The build-up I had seen turned into a column and it was growing. Recon 1's message was that the fire was making a run through some reprod and thick brush and into old-growth timber. He expected another blow-up in the afternoon as the old-growth became pre-heated. An inversion layer had kept all the heat and smoke trapped in the valleys all morning, but now the column on the north face of Hayward punched through. We estimated the height of the column to be 10,000 to 12,000 feet. The fire was at that time on the side of Hayward Peak facing away from us and quickly going for the top. From our vantage point you could see the silhouette of the mountain with this huge plume coming off the top. It reminded me of photos of Mt. St. Helens blowing its top. This run hit it's peak as the fire hit the top of the mountain.

The heat slowly began to dissipate and the column died back. The smoke again was trapped underneath the inversion layer. It stayed that way for a few hours, our visibility being cut back to 1/2 mile in all directions and the smoke getting thicker and thicker. All air operations had to be stopped due to the poor visibility. It started feeling real ominous for us. We could hear the fire roaring from a number of different directions but could not see it through the smoke. We started talking about our escape route options which amounted to abandoning all our gear and walking out to Pearsoll Peak, a long hike...

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Finally it happened... enough heat and hot gases had built up under the inversion for a big blow up and blow up it did! Within a few minutes three separate columns broke through the inversion and started to clear out the smoke. The first column was on Hayward Peak. The old growth had preheated and exploded into flames as Recon 1 had predicted. The second was in the bottom of Tincup Creek below Tincup Pass and the third, and worst for us, looked to be coming off Heather Mountain. As soon as the inversion broke, Recon 1 was again overhead and he confirmed our fears. The fire had jumped Tincup Creek and was burning up the ridge separating Tincup from Heather Creek. It was on our side of the canyon now, approximately one and a half miles away and getting closer.
It didn't take all that long before the base of all three columns had blended together. We estimated the base to be three miles across, taking in the entire canyon from Hayward Peak to Heather Mountain. Our estimate of the height of the column was 22,000 feet. Although it was so big and so close, it was hard to guess. At this time we could see the flames crowning out the old-growth on Heather Mountain. It seemed like I was on the radio constantly talking to the aircraft, Silver Base and the Division Supervisor who had the crews across the canyon from us. Finally we noticed that the creek below our position was smoked in and we couldn't tell if there was fire below us. About 1800 hours I called Silver Base and asked them to check the creek out on their last evening recon flight. They asked me if I was concerned about spotting and I informed them that I could not see the creek below me due to the smoke. That must have put the icing on the cake because they told us to grab our personal gear and get up to the helispot in a half hour. It took us very bit of that half hour to haul our gear back up to the top. We arrived at the helispot just as the copter was landing. The pilot gave us a great tour of the fire on the way out, and we landed at Silver Base where I began writing this journal.

The following day (Oct. 1) was a day of rest, showers and real food. (Rather than those gross MRE's) We were still on stand-by, but our only duty was to attend the crew boss and strategy meetings.

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(AUTHOR'S NOTE: From this point, both Tex and Terry were taken off of Ticup Peak and flown back to Silver Base where they awaited re-assignment. They spent the next day, October 1st at Agness Camp where Tex recounted his stay atop Ticup Peak. On October 2nd, both he and Terry spent most of that day in route to Pearsoll Peak where they were to be stationed atop that peak utilizing the old lookout there as their observation post.) The story continues.....

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OCTOBER 3RD: 2012 (8:12 P.M.) PEARSOLL PEAK LOOKOUT: KALMIOPSIS WILDERNESS ELEVATION 5098'.

Well here I am again, spiked out in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.....

I'm going to backtrack here a bit, back to October 2nd... We received our reassignment the evening of 10/1 and got our gear together from Silver Base Supply. Same stuff: MRE's, water, a sheet of plastic and some rope, our personal gear, and a 4-wheel drive pick-up... off to Pearsoll Peak.

We had to go through Grant's Pass on the way here to drop off some paperwork for Silver Base, so we went over Bear Camp Road. We got to drive through some of the Galice Fire on the way and I was amazed at how close these two fires got to one another without burning together. We got hung up for awhile on Galice Creek waiting for some fellers to clear the road. Seems like a huge Douglas Fir burned off at the base and came down across the road. Must have been quite a crash because it broke up the pavement on impact and filled up the creek with broken chunks of the top. I helped the fellers roll the chunks out of the road and we were on the road again.
Our stop in Grant's Pass (on 10/2) was real quick but good in the respect that we were able to pick up a camera and a pair of binoculars. So, I've been able to record the fire on film from Pearsoil. Mostly lots of shots of Tincup and Heather Mountain with big smoke columns rising off of them, although I have taken a couple of tourist shots: sunrise, Selma Valley, the lookout, and a panoramic view of three photos of the entire fire from north to south. I hope to have some extra prints made so that I can have a copy for myself.

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The ride up here was a trip and a half as usual. Four wheel low range all the way from the Illinois River to Pearsoil Peak. I had never driven the piece of road from Chetco Pass to the old mine site below the lookout before. It's mainly used as a hiking trail these days except for the occasional dirt-biker, but we went for it anyway. I hope the district this rig came from doesn't mind it coming back with no paint! (just kidding) Actually, it was rough - but not too scary, except for the last half mile or so. That piece was like a mountain goat trail across bare rock. Once I started that last piece I had no choice but to go all the way since there was no place to turn around except at the end of the road. Obviously we made it or I wouldn't be writing this.

I did have a good scare at one point where I had to cross a small slide over the road. I was about halfway across when the rig slid sideways a few feet and I saw my life pass before my eyes. Had I slid off the road I would have gone down a least a thousand feet before I hit something solid enough to stop the rig. I also learned that the road did not go all the way to the top, but stopped about a half mile and a thousand feet in elevation short of the lookout.

A good trail goes from the old mine at the end of the road to the top. This time we only packed up what was necessary for a short stay, remembering how hasty it was packing our red packs to the helispot on Tincup. Also, we figured since we had a good trail we could pack up and down to the rig daily for anything we might need.

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I just walked outside the lookout to answer nature's call. The moon is up and kind of bright, a few stars are also out. To the west, towards the fire, everything is smoked out. I can just barely make out the outlines of the closest peaks. To the east I can see the lights of Selma way off down the valley. I think I'll stop now for the night. It will feel good to get out of my boots, out of this cold wind and into a warm sleeping bag.

OCTOBER 4TH: 1152 HOURS. PEARSOIL PEAK LOOKOUT; ELEVATION 5098'.

It is cool and real windy up here this morning. Sixty degrees at 1100, visibility is endless except in Tincup Creek and the lower Chetco River. The fire gets closer to home all the time. I heard on the radio this morning that they started building tractor line this morning from High Prairie down the ridge to Tolman Ranch. They're also looking at Keith's ranch by the Upper Chetco School for a fire camp. They've decided not to fight the fire in the Craggles, too dangerous, and a long shot at best anyway.

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Think I'll stop now for the night. The light is poor for writing and the wind is just howling up here. I can see the fire glowing a few miles away on Mt. Billingslea, Tincup Peak, and Heather Mountain. It crossed the saddle between Heather and Tincup this evening and is now on the south slopes of both mountains; getting closer to the Chetco all the time. So much for all that work I put in on that Heather Mtn. trail!

It also cooked the west side of Heather today. I expect more fire activity. The radio just said east wind conditions through Thursday, but more about that when I continue this journal tomorrow. Pearsoll Peak signing off, good night world.

OCTOBER 5TH: 0835 HOURS. PEARSOLL PEAK LOOKOUT: ELEVATION 5098 FEET.

Good Morning from the top of the world! The temperature is in the mid to upper fifties with the wind howling out of the east, shaking the tower. Presently I can see a helicopter dropping to Granite Butte with supplies for the troops out there. We're suppose to get a supply drop too, later this morning (more of those yummy, ha ha ha, MRE's).

Visibility is great again this morning except around Heather Mountain which is still burning. This strong east wind is kicking up the fire all over. We can see smokes popping up to our north, northwest, west, and southwest. I can also see a big cloud of haze from the Galice Fire to our northeast and from the Happy Fire down in California. Silver Base Air Recon told us this morning that about 235 acres were burning on the south and west faces of Heather Mountain, creeping closer to the Chetco all the time. I expect the fire to really kick today with this east wind blowing. The lookout's reporting wind speeds from 30 to 40 mph.

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Let me tell you about the old Pearsoll Peak Lookout. A little background first. This lookout has not been used in years except occasionally by a spotter during lightning busts. Early this spring there was some talk about flying the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel by helicopter to the Kirbyville Museum where they were going to refurbish it to it's original condition, and open it up for public view. It is actually a historic building, I believe it was built during the Great Depression by the C.C.C.'s. It does not sit up on a tower like Quail Prairie lookout but on a stone and cement foundation on the ground. There's really no need for a tower up here anyway since this is the highest peak around for probably 20 to 30 miles in any direction. there are also no big trees up here that you would have to look over. What few trees there are stand between 5 and 10 feet tall and look like they should be in a bonsai garden, very scenic.

The lookout itself is in very poor shape. Vandals have broken in and torn up the inside. Lots of the windows have been broken and boarded up, and the whole thing inside and out is covered with graffiti. Regardless, I'm sure glad it's here. There's no place to set up a shelter with our plastic tarp, and protection from the wind up here is a necessity. The wind blew so strong up here last night it actually shook the building on its foundation, and it gets cold at night.
The first thing we did on arrival after checking in and taking the weather was to move into the lookout, open what outer shutters on the windows we could, and clean the place up a bit. The place may be trashed, but it's home for now.

OCTOBER 5TH: 1542 HOURS. PEARSOLL PEAK:

I'm sitting here in the sun watching the Kalmiopsis burnup from Tincup and Yukon Creeks to the Big Craggies. The wind has slowed to 8 to 10 mph., the temperature is in the upper 60's.

OCTOBER 5TH: 1950 HOURS. PEARSOLL PEAK:

It's dark out now, still the almost full moon is lighting up the evening pretty brightly. I took a photo of the moonrise over the Selma Valley, hope it comes out. I can see at least half a dozen fires glowing in the dark. Three of them are quite large especially the one near Mt. Billingslea. I can also see where the crews are camped out on Gold Basin. They have a warming fire going and I can see their headlamps blinking on and off. Just before dark we watched the choppers fly them in their dinners and other supplies.

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: at this point Tex continued writing his narrative about the Kalmiopsis and the Silver Fire situation.)

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The environment up here is typical High Kalmiopsis, lots of barren rock, peridityte and serpentinite; scattered bonsai trees mostly pine and a few cedar, and low growing, knee-high and shorter brush: manzanita, snowbrush, rabbit brush, creeping juniper, tiny myrtlewood bushes and various Ceanothus brush which I couldn't even begin to identify. There's also a little bit of Sadler's Oak and some type of really coarse grass which looks a little like beargrass, but it's not.

As for wildlife, the major forms up here seem to be yellowjackets and some kind of tiny biting fly. The flies are actually worse than the bees except at mealtime when you have to fight the bees for your dinner. I've gotten really good at smacking them fast and hard before they can sting me. One did bite me on the wrist and it swelled up so that I had to move my watch to my other wrist. It went down over night though. There's also quite a few birds up here. Yesterday, almost all day long a hawk (either a Cooper's or Rough Legged) put on a great show for us hunting the surrounding ridges. I've also seen a flock of wild pigeons and camp robber jays. The first ones I've seen west of the cascades. There's smaller birds too but none that I could indentify without a book. I've also seen deer and bear sign near the lookout and smelled a skunk or civet cat at one point but have not seen any of the above critters walking around. Heard on the radio that a bear cub got into one of the crews lunches and another crew that was spiked out got raided by a family of ring tailed cats (a member of the racoon family).

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Speaking of the radio - between our forest radios and the fire net radio we can listen to: the whole pacific northwest, all 5 districts on the forest and
the S.O., the air operations (except for the retardant bombers), all of the Silver Fire, of course, and the Happy Camp Fire and Salmon Complex fires in California. Sometimes it's quite confusing listening to three fires at once, and if you don't hear clearly who's calling you sometimes you don't know which radio to answer on. Those guys down in California are sure having a rough time. Everyday we hear of two or three injuries or medical evacuations. Mostly wrenched knees and sprained ankles.

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Well it looks like I've got another fire to keep an eye on. The one in Yukon Creek is making a run up Hayward Peak. Pretty soon that poor mountain won't have anything left on it to burn. The fire on Mt. Billingslea is still going strong too, although the rest of them seem to have quieted down for the night. Just heard on the radio that the Happy Fire just had a major slop over. Sounds like they're afraid to do anything about it in the dark — I don't blame them with the luck they've been having.

[The idea of keeping this journal is great. As much as I hate to write, this has turned into a wonderful way to pass the time. Who knows? Maybe somebody else may be interested in reading it.] I'll be home soon hopefully, or at least maybe I'll get reassigned over to the Chetco side of the fire. I hear they're looking for some line scouts over there. That's just up my alley, even though it's rougher duty than what I'm doing now. Speaking of Chetco, I hear they located fire camp up at Fairview Meadows near Snow Camp Mountain. That's a long drive to where they're working. I'm surprised they didn't put it somewhere down on the river.

These fires are sure pretty at night.

Well, I'm tired and rambling on, the radios keep chattering and the lookout is rattling and banging in the wind but I don't think anything could keep me awake tonight. 'Til tomorrow, Good-night from the top of the world.

**OCTOBER 6: 2020 HOURS: PEARSOLL PEAK LOOKOUT.**

Well, the fire really raised a ruckus today. Burnt up Mt. Billingslea, the north slope of Tincup Peak, including my former lookout post and camp, more of Heather Mountain, and it's well into the Craggles. It's still moving up Tincup creek in this direction too. Got as far as Granite Butte today. The blow up must have been incredible. I heard on the radio that they could see the smoke column from Grants Pass. Too bad I wasn't there to see it, I had a different job today. But Terry was and she said she took lots of photos.

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(AUTHOR'S NOTE: the following account was furnished by Terry Burgess describing her observances on October 6th, while Tex was out scouting.)

Terry states:

My duties for the day included observing the fire and monitoring the weather every half hour as there was some burn-out scheduled for later on that day in
Yukon Creek. After Tex left, I continued recording my weather observations and reporting in.

At about 0930, I noticed the first column building directly in front of me. It also appeared that the inversion was going to break at any time. Throughout the day I had been in contact with Iden Asato, the Division Supervisor directing the crews ahead of the fire that were planning the burn-out operation in Gold Basin.

During the morning and throughout the afternoon, I had been experiencing strong winds. I knew that they would greatly affect the fire's behaviour.

At 1530 a major blow-up occurred which left me in total awe. Luckily, I remembered to grab the camera and began taking many pictures. I had never seen anything like this ever before. The fiery scene in front of me was nothing but a full horizon of huge columns and towering flames, especially the ones roaring over the top of Granite Butte. I was very afraid, but not for myself. All of my fears rested with the Hot-shot crews down there in Gold Basin. I could easily see that with the way the fire was behaving that if they remained down there, they would be in mortal danger.

I then called Iden to check on them. He informed me that they were aware of the danger but had all successfully moved into a safe location somewhere outside Yukon Creek. I was very relieved. Earlier, the communication with the crews had been very intermittent. Now that I knew that they were safe I continued to monitor the weather and watch the fire. It was extremely hard for me not to take my eyes off of the phenomena that was occurring, it was an incredible event that one never forgets. I'm truly grateful that I had the camera. I waited for Tex to return and later on we shared our experiences of the day - a very eventful day!

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(AUTHOR'S NOTE: at this point, Tex goes on to tell the events of his day scouting down on the Chetco River.)

Well I had a different job today. My assignment for the day was to check out the old mining road from Chetco Pass down to Taggart's Bar on the river. It's all part of the wilderness now, a part I've never seen before. I was supposed to see if you could get a 4-wheel drive vehicle down there for ferrying supplies. It's pretty neat country. The road goes right through one of the old mines with the remains of some old cabins, old truck bodies that look like they date from the early 1930's, and an ancient steam shovel. The road finally wound its way down to the river and crossed at a ford. I thought I was at Taggart's Bar but the country didn't look right so I crossed the river and kept on exploring. After a while, and a lot of walking, I realized that the road forded the river in more than one spot and I was not at Taggart's Bar at all but at a place known as Trapper Joe's camp. The river is really pretty in these upper reaches, especially with the fall colors coming on. It's still icy cold too! That really surprised me for this time of year.

Well, I continued on and got to within a mile or so of Taggart's before time got short and I had to turn around. It was sweltering hot down there, after being used to it being cool all the time on top of Pearsall. I measured it at
95 degrees in the shade. No wonder the fire was blowing up. From the bottom looking up to the north, the entire ridgeline from the Craggies almost all the way back to Pearsoll was engulfed in smoke. The trip back was uneventful except that I stopped at the river and took a cold bath. My first since our arrival at Pearsoll 4 days ago (there's no water up there and what little we have is for drinking and very rudimentary clean up). It felt great, even though I was all sweated up again ten minutes after getting out of the water. Now if I could only figure out a way to get a hot meal! Theses MRE's are getting real tedious!

Got back to the lookout in time for dinner and watched Granite Butte burn up while I ate. Also took a couple of sunset-through-the-smoke photos and got a call on the radio from Curtis. He's in Brookings and he, Billy, and Denise drove up to Quail Prairie Lookout to look at the fire.

# # #

I found out this evening that we'll be leaving here tomorrow. We've been reassigned to a fire camp at Gardner Ranch near some little town called Brookings. Wonder where that could be? Oh well, it's back to the old stomping grounds. Hope they'll let me commute home! I'll call my wife as soon as I get back to civilization and let her know.

I'm about to sign off now. We're really smoked in. Can't see anything off this mountain. I'm still monitoring the radio though. That crew is still spiked out down below in Gold Basin. Not very far from the fire at all. Buenos noches world, 'til tomorrow.

OCTOBER 7: 0824 HOURS: PEARSOll LOOKOUT.

This morning started out with a bang - quite literally. The wind woke me up about 0500. It was really blowing hard and I was in a cold draft. I had just started to drift off back to sleep when bang! crash! the wind blew one of the supports out from under one of the big window shutters and it came crashing down. Luckily none of the windows broke out. (A couple of them have no glass anyway.)

Worse than that we could see lightning striking to the southwest, west and northwest. Not a pleasant feeling at all since this decrepit lookout has no lightning protection and the vandals have strewn metal debris all over the top of the mountain. Needless to say that was the end of sleep and we went on duty early. All the lookouts were calling in lightning strikes from the Winchuck clear up to Sixes River. No fires spotted from them so far.

The wind is blowing strong and steady and we've recorded gusts from 30 to 35 mph. We can see occasional rain squalls from Mineral Hill to Saddle Mountain, but so far we've only had a couple of drops. There's kind of an ominous smoke which appears to be coming from the west side of the Craggies. We can't tell if it's smoke being pushed by the wind or if the fire has jumped to that side of the Craggies. So far we haven't had a confirmation from any of the other lookout. Just talked to Melissa on Lake of the Woods. She says that smoke is from the main fire which is on the west side of the Craggies at this point, somewhere in Collier Creek I guess.
Also got some bad news. They've yet to find a replacement for us so we're to stay here 'til at least noon or until this weather front passes over. I'd give my left hand for a hot cup of coffee about now!

Just heard a call from Rex Coalsen, our Coos Forest Patrol Fire Warden, he reported a smoke on the East side of Mt. Emily. Look out Brookings - here she comes!

**OCTOBER 7: 1128 HOURS:**

This is the slowest day we've had up here yet! I think it's just the anticipation of waiting to leave on top of listening to the Chetco folks trying to find the fire on Mt. Emily. Recon 1 has flown the area but couldn't see through the smoke hanging over the river. Wes just ordered a helicopter with a bucket. The fire fight continues...

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

October 7th was the last day of duty for Terry and Tex stationed atop of Pearsoll Peak.

After reporting into Gardner Camp Terry worked for Plans and Operations for about five days before being released. She had bitten into an M.R.E. brownie up on Pearsoll Peak and broke off a filling. On October 12th, she was then demobilized from the Silver Fire. She had performed in an outstanding fashion during her duty as a Fire Observer and also at the Gardner Camp - experiencing on the Silver Fire what very few people ever get to see. After demob, she then returned to the Chetco Ranger District and assumed her duties as a Silvicultural Forester.

Tex was then dispatched as the major line scout locating and flagging the main southern fireline through the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. This route later became known as "The Burma Road".

It took many days to construct "The Burma Road" through the extremely thick and heavy brush of the rugged Kalmiopsis. When I saw Tex many days later at the Gardner Camp, he had just come in from the brush - cold, tired and very hungry. His spirits were good; however, his body was bruised from his ankles to his shoulders. It was demobilization time after that for Tex. He had done an outstanding job on the Silver Fire and it was the perfect time for a well deserved rest.
THE SIXTH WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: OCTOBER 4TH TO THE 10TH

During its sixth week, the Silver Fire roared. It continued to display the classic behavior of a run-away wildfire and there was little that could be done to stop it on its southward run. Each day that it burned, it consumed more ground of the precious Kalmiopsis Wilderness. As the winds blew steady all week long, the fire grew, and the firefighters retreated. There had not been a break in the adverse weather and the long range forecast did not predict any advancing cooling or rain.

On October 4th, Incident Commander Gordon Reinhart ordered firefighters to fall back and establish a new fireline outside the wilderness boundary on the western flank of the fire. Plagued by the onset of another east wind episode, and accompanied by unseasonably hot temperatures, he decided then that a section of the main forest road would have to be utilized as a primary containment line.

"We've examined every potential fireline between Heather Mountain and the Wilderness boundary," he said, "and under these extreme burning conditions there is no safe nor defensible fireline inside the wilderness."

Firefighters then began working on the western flank fireline. The fireline, which utilized several miles of already existing roadway, was also augmented by four miles of dozerline and six additional miles of handline. When completed, the line extended from Quail Prairie on Long Ridge, northward, to the vicinity of Game Lake.

"We have been totally at the mercy of the weather since the fire crossed the Illinois River, moving back to this location is the only way we can confront the fire on our own terms," stated Commander Reinhart.

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Selecting the location of the west flank fireline was an immense decision requiring much conscious thought. There was a lot of ground between the high, craggy ridges of the botanical area and the roaded fireline. Looking east towards the fire, into the Collier Creek Drainage, it was evident that this was the proper decision. Opportunities were severely limited to get anyone safely into the unforgiving ground of the Big Craggies area, especially with the east winds threatening. By the close of day on October 4th, the fire had gained 350 additional acres; more notably though was the fact that 90% of the dozer line was in and 50% of the handline.

On October 5th, the west flank fireline was nearing completion. "Once the lines are in, we'll complete our preparations by installing pumps, hose and portable water tanks," explained Incident Commander Reinhart, "then it's a matter of waiting."
Over on the east flank there was no time to wait. The Silver Fire was once again, getting out of hand. Fixed wing aircraft dropped 18 loads of retardant on the ridgeline between Yukon Creek and Klondike Creek. These drops were ordered to reinforce the hand line constructed during the past few days by the Forest Service Regular crews. In their toil they encountered steep terrain and rocky bluffs in this convoluted section of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

The retardant was used to close a "gap" that the hand crews could not reach. Two Hot-shot crews were then ferried in to complete the final portion of the line and burn it out. It was expected that with the east winds at their back that they would be able to get an effective burn-out with a minimal danger of spotting or slopover.

Meanwhile, at the Collier Bar spot fire, and on the firelines north of the Illinois River, mop-up and line improvement continued. "We successfully burned out that hazardous brush patch on Sugarloaf Mountain yesterday," Reinhart said. "It makes all of us feel better, knowing that the soft spot in the line has been eliminated." As things began to cool down in the northern sectors, attention was then directed towards rehabilitation efforts that were scheduled to begin as soon as people could safely enter the burned over areas.

By late evening on October 4th, plans had been finalized to establish another main fire camp at the Gardner Ranch fifteen miles up the Chetco River. With a perimeter of over 100 miles, and the active firefront heading both south and west, this was deemed a necessary move in order to facilitate access to the firelines.

By the end of day on October 5th, the Silver Fire expanded to 71,340 acres. It had flared up during the afternoon, and by late evening it had added on an additional 3,390 acres, most of this in the wilderness. The southern point of the fire continued rolling as it now approached within one half mile of the Chetco River. Steadily, the Silver Fire was advancing towards another scenic Siskiyou river watershed. Things were looking rather grim and in the town of Brookings, people panicked.

Erratic winds on October 6th, caused the biggest blow-up of the fire yet. Pushed by the gusty winds, the fire gobbled an additional 8,000 acres in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. By late afternoon, six thousand acres burned on the southeast side near Tincup Peak, raising huge columns of ash and smoke to astounding heights while dropping fiery embers and firebrands south into Tincup.
Creek. At this point, a nine to twelve mile wide flamefront was reported by observers monitoring the fire. And on the southwest side of the Silver Fire, an additional 2,000 acres burned deeper into the Big Craggies Botanical Area. There was very little that could be done as the Silver Fire assumed total command.

The big blow-up sent ash and tinders high up in the sky. It was reported on the local radio station that the Tolman Ranch, a privately owned parcel on the western edge of the wilderness area, was in dire threat of burning up. The ranch owners were aware of the situation, and for many days prior to the blow-up, they worked arduously, clearing and constructing very wide firelines around their cabin and other structures. They also plowed and disked their fields to rid themselves of the tall, high prairie grass. The situation was reported as severe and threatening as fiery "clinkers" began falling on the remote property. Luckily, spot fires did not occur as the Forest Service heavily committed themselves at the Tolman Ranch to protect this piece of private ground.

At the ranch, the Forest Service directed several crews and resource advisors to establish control points and set up an elaborate pumping system entailing the use of 11 Mark III pumps hooked up in series. The Tolman Ranch was fortified and very heavily protected. It did not burn.

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Smokey conditions prevailed in southern Oregon as strong east winds continued to push the haze and ominous plumes over the Brookings and coastal communities.

On October 6th, thirty-three crews were sent out to the lines. Two Hot-shot crews were placed on stand-by with a three minute response time set up as their guideline. Strategy goals continued to emphasize confining the raging Silver Fire within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Accessibility to the fire was still very limited and indirect attack continued as the general mode of operation.

Determined crews continued to reinforce the twelve mile western flank fireline. This section of fireline stretched from Game Lake south to Quail Prairie, approximately five miles from the fire. A terre-torch crew was set in place and ready to backfire if the situation presented itself; and if it did, vast amounts of real estate would have to be sacrificed.

A decision was made on October 6th, to divide the Silver Fire into two zones, the north and the south. Because the fire was so big, encompassing over 100 miles of fireline, it was taking considerable time to transport crews and shuttle equipment around. It was also hard for one I.C. and his Staff to cover the fire in its entirety. It was then determined that the North Zone should be taken over by a "new" National Team. Dick Hodge's initial overhead team was then recalled and placed in command of the Silver Fire's northern zone. Commander Reinhart and his troops continued to direct the South Zone efforts, working out of the newly established Gardner Ranch Camp.

"We recognized several days ago that the fire would get too large to manage with one incident team," said Incident Commander Gordon Reinhart. "With a perimeter of over 100 miles, travel time was becoming a major logistical
problem. Dividing the fire into two major zones will greatly improve operations."

The infra-red flight on the evening of October 6th produced a revised acreage figure of 79,318 acres. With the only logical firelines well ahead of the firefront, it became apparent that the Silver Fire had the potential to exceed the 100,000 acre mark at the rate that it was moving. It was very late in the season and the normally expected autumn rains were not showing up; the situation on this day, was assuming crisis proportions. The crews were apprehensive, the townsfolk worried, and the Silver Fire - definitely unsated.

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During the early morning hours on October 7, 1987, residents of southern, coastal Oregon were rocked out of sleep by crashing thunder and brilliant flashes of lightning overhead. Reports from ruralites in the Pistol River area claimed that the lightning started about four in the morning and persisted for several hours. Many of the downstrikes crashed upon the open waters of the Pacific Ocean, and luckily, only a few touched ground upon the forest; but nevertheless the action began very early as smoke arose from a lightning strike - only it wasn't on the Silver Fire!

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Approximately eight miles from the town of Brookings, on the southwest slope of Mt. Emily, one crisp downstrike struck the tinder dry duff and forest litter and ignited a wildfire that sent up a smoke pall that was seen by many local residents. Its appearance set the phone lines humming.

On the previous day, a Silver Fire Information Center had been established in downtown Brookings. The center provided phone numbers that could be dialed to obtain information about the big Silver Fire. On this day, the center's first full day of operations, The Silver Fire Information Center was deluged with phone calls from local residents calling in the smoke on Mt. Emily!

Response to the spot fire was immediate. Rex Coalson, local fire warden for the Coos Forest Protection Agency, and Ray Sundblad, Fuels Specialist on the Chetco Ranger District were the first firefighters on the scene. All remaining field going personnel from the Chetco Ranger District that were not assigned to the Silver Fire, also rolled out on this call. The fire was just beginning to take off and run when it was effectively suppressed by the Chetco personnel. Their quick and efficient response was commendable. The fact that they contained the fire and mopped it up in rapid order helped tremendously to soothe the fears that were racing through the community.

The presence of the encroaching lightning strikes evoked feelings of grave concern by the firefighters situated out there on the Silver's firelines. It was all they needed in light of what they already had to deal with. Fortunately, the Mt. Emily fire was all that evolved from the renegade storm.

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The Silver Fire continued its advancement towards the Chetco River. It had expanded widely on its east and west flanks and it was teasingly creeping to the
northern banks of the Chetco River. Many of the local residents began to get vociferous about how they felt if the fire should cross the river. A recurrent fear quickly arose, that events similar to the 1918 wildfire that decimated this coastal area, would occur again. Many of the local fears took quite an effort to suppress and the Information Officers worked overtime fielding calls and soothing peoples' fears.

The fire's southwest front advanced to within three and a half miles of the western fireline. The fire continued to burn through the Big Craggies Botanical Area and by the end of day on October 7th, it had consumed about a third of the 3,800 acre floral preserve.

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Perhaps the most positive aspect about the suppression efforts was the outstanding safety record that was continuing to be upheld. Many of the firefighters were suffering from colds and tired feet, but still, the reportable accidents were very infrequent. Blisters, poison-oak, colds and minor scrapes were the predominant ailments.

By the end of day the fire stood approached 80,000 acres. In the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, 35,960 acres had been burnt. Containment remained at 70% with no estimate for full containment or control. Personnel on the crew totaled 1,413 with 54 crews assigned to the firelines. There were 14 engines, 4 dozers, 12 helicopters and 12 water tenders. Crews continued flowing in and out of the fire camps and a little city had evolved at the Gardner Camp.

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On October 8th, seventeen fresh crews from Alaska, New Mexico, Arizona, and several southeastern states were dispatched to the Silver Fire to relieve some of the tired crews.

Fireline construction continued to be the main event and a major linebuilding effort was underway on the south side of the fire. Ten crews were building line from the Tolman Ranch eastward into the wilderness. It was estimated that several days would be required to connect this 12 mile stretch to the existing fireline in the Gold Basin area on the southeast side of the fire. This route was planned to follow several of the old hiking trails and a portion of the Chetco River flowing through the heartland of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Four other crews were digging line between the Chetco River and Gold Basin from the opposite side. Work also began on a six mile stretch of desperately needed fireline from the Gold Basin area near Klondike Creek, north to the Illinois River.

All of these firelines were being dug two to four miles ahead of the spread of the fire using hand tools and natural breaks in a conscious effort to minimize the impacts on the land.

One of the reasons this endeavor was proceeding so well was the fact that the weather suddenly turned cool and overcast skies helped to slow down the spread of the Silver Fire.
On the twenty mile long western fireline, crews continued to improve the line, fortifying and widening wherever necessary. At this point the major control line had yet to be tested by the unpredictable Silver Fire.

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The south zone of the fire (south of the Illinois River) was burning entirely within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Efforts there continued to be focused on keeping the fire contained to the wilderness.

The north zone of the fire (north of the Illinois River) was nearing total containment, as more than 500 firefighters worked on completing the last portion of fireline there.

Regarding the north zone, Forest Service Regional Forester, Jim Torrence, tentatively approved about $485,000 for rehabilitation work in the previously burned non-wilderness areas of the fire. The funds were slated for use in erosion control and grass seeding desperately needed in order to minimize the damage to existing roads and drainage facilities. Studies were also planned to assess rehabilitation possibilities in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Siskiyou Forest Supervisor Ron McCormick shared, "This work will go a long way towards holding the soil on the slopes. We have experienced some fire damage and want to prevent further loss."

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On October 9th, the Silver Fire reached 81,480 acres. More alarmingly, it was nearing 12.5 million dollars in suppression costs. Estimated resource damages remained the same for the timbered North Zone, and in the South Zone it was difficult to assess the losses incurred in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. For the time being, gone were some of its more scenic areas, and only time would restore them. For now, the burnt over areas of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness would remain as blackened scars - solemn epitaphs symbolizing the raging fury of the Silver Fire.

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The Silver Fire was now burning into its 41st day. Approximately 44% of the fire now lay within the wilderness. During the last three days the fire settled down. On October 8th, it registered a 620 acre increase, the smallest increase in over a week.

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It was also noted in the Silver Fire Daily Update, released on October 10th, that an overall reduction in heat was reported on the fire. This was attributed to a mass of cool air that had settled over the fire during the last few days. Fog and higher humidities were recorded in the canyons, particularly at night; however, east winds continued to blow, but gently on the land.

The big question now was just how far would the Silver Fire Spread? It was becoming clear that perhaps the best way to retard its spread was to continue with the extensive burn-out program in critical areas; of course, these actions
would be subject to the weather and the winds and it was all that could be done while waiting for rain.

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Waiting for the rains had been on the minds of many. Prior to the start of the Silver Fire, many people knew of the danger that existed in the woodlands. Now that wildfire had struck its discordant blows on the Siskiyou National Forest, many wondered when it would ever end. During the sixth week of the fire, the weather was no help. In fact, it did more to instill fear rather than defeat it.

The weather for the week was characterized by steady east winds. They continued to dry out the fuels and added to the inversion factors that kept reappearing over the fire. Temperatures remained in the upper nineties, while relative humidities rapidly plummeted. No precipitation fell at all, and the fuel stick readings remained low. It was man against the elements now, and during the sixth week of the Silver Fire, the elements prevailed.
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

by

Michael G. Apicello

The Siskiyou National Forest and the Forest Service, in southern Oregon, have generally been on good terms with their neighboring communities. But lately, due to the North Kalmiopsis controversy, relationships with certain groups have been strained.

Off and on during the past decade, numerous individuals and various groups, representing diverse interests and alternative viewpoints about how federal forestlands should be managed, have focused their opinions strongly against the Forest Service and its forest management policies.

Because this critical audience comes from such diverse backgrounds, at times their conflicting objectives and convictions have created heated arguments between themselves, with the Forest Service caught in the middle, taking on the brunt of their anger.

Two specific groups that I happen to be addressing are the local environmental coalitions and the political lobbyists of the timber industry.

Many of their embittered arguments center about the philosophical definition of the multiple-use concepts of the Forest Service and the resultant land-use practices that are enacted because of those policies.

Lately, the major issues in southern Oregon have been the amount of timber allocated for the annual timber harvests and the areas in which the timber should be cut on the National Forests. Inevitably, the arguments between the timber industry and the environmentally founded preservation groups always seem to center on the moral and economic issues of cutting old-growth forests and the construction of new roads into major unroaded drainages.

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First, let me provide some background:

During the 1970's, many changes were enacted in the on-the-ground forestry practices that changed the way the Forest Service did business out in the woods. Because of policy reformations brought forth by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), enhanced conservation measures and improved quality compliance with regards to environmental concerns have become further instilled in the practices of federal land managers, especially on the National Forests through the NFMA.
Due to increasing interest from the general public, and their demand for information about the National Forests, both the NFMA and the NEPA acts opened "new windows and doors" for the public to look through and participate in the resource planning processes.

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The NEPA process, basically a decision making process with quality results expected as its results, encourages productivity and the enhancement of an "enjoyable harmony between man and his environment." It is also mandated in purpose to "prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man (humankind)." And herein lies the basis for the heated controversy between the private timber interests and the environmentalists.

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Because the NEPA process requires an interdisciplinary approach to timber sale planning, which is bound by law to take in all aspects of multiple-use management, the NEPA process has been the "open avenue" allowing for other voices to be heard in the forest. Vociferous responses then emerged from other interest groups as the environmental movement grew from coast to coast.

NEPA's basic responsibility - to identify issues, concerns and opportunities on what ever actions are taken by the Forest Service on the National Forests was then scrutinized not only by environmentalists and the timber industry, but by other private citizens as well.

And by so doing, the public was then permitted much more of an opportunity to participate in the forest planning processes - as long as they became involved with those processes. And on the Siskiyou National Forest, this is the road that has been taken by several special interest groups to protest Forest Service decisions.

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The timber industry, currently facing a relatively depleted supply of timber on private lands in southern Oregon, now claims to be heavily dependent on the availability of federal forest resources. Their argument is that in order to survive, not just as a business, but also as a provider of jobs and revenues for the people of the local communities, that they must be allowed to cut more Forest Service timber.

Their argument presses on, stating further that they can no longer survive by suffering any more cutbacks in the federally dictated amounts of allowable cut. They also foresee that with a shortened rotation of harvest, between 50 to 70 years, that the future of sustained-yield management could maintain itself more effectively, and in the long run, allow for increased annual harvests.

Environmental protesters avidly disagree.

But the basic tenet of the timber industries' argument, which calls for the rapid liquidation of the remaining stands of old-growth Douglas-fir, and, the entry into some of the few remaining, extensive unroaded contiguous tracts of
old-growth timber left in the Pacific Northwest, brings into focus questions and controversy by environmentalists.

Preservation minded environmentalists heartily disagree with the rapid cutting of old-growth, citing the purpose of NEPA and the NFMA as the foundations for their arguments calling for less cutting and more alternative-uses of the National Forests.

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The environmentalists present their arguments to the Forest Service in various fashions. Many of their techniques attach themselves to legal constraints derived from their interpretations of Environmental Impact Statements written to allow for all voices to be heard. And in many cases, injunctions have been obtained to prevent road construction and the cutting of old-growth timber, often times attacking specific clauses in timber sale contracts.

Many litigation procedures enacted by these groups do follow the due processes allowed by the law and the NEPA processes - and they do so very efficiently by finding the details that question "harmonious" environmental standards. In the past, their litigative protestations have been very effective in shutting down local timber harvesting activities by disarming timber sale contracts - thereby upsetting the scheduled harvest plans of the Forest Service.

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But not all of their practices can be deemed harmonious to the nature of man. Some are rather radical.

As a last resort, and perhaps the most ineffectual argument used by the radical environmentalists are the ecotage tactics of equipment sabotage and tree spiking, as well as tree sitting and chaining themselves to gates and equipment in sensitive logging areas. These actions prove themselves futile in that they do not properly represent the true underlying meaning of civil disobedience as was originally taught by masters of the ecology such as Thoreau.

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By now you may be questioning where this dissertation is leading with regard to the Silver Fire, but as you continue to read, I hope that you will see what I am trying to illustrate.

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During the Silver Fire, some of the chronic attitudes seemed to shift within both groups. Because of the severity of the total wildfire situation in southern Oregon during 1987, many of the timber folks jumped right in and helped the Forest Service suppress the blazing fires.

Environmental radicals also seemed to help out in several ways. First off, they ceased protesting in the arena of the Silver Fire and took their arguments to the steamy halls of Congress where rising smoke is consistently visible when it comes to environmental issues.
Others volunteered locally, by helping to fight the fires on private land. And in communities like Takilma, O'Brien and Cave Junction, many residents came out willingly and enthusiastically joined hands with the Forest Service to suppress the fires there.

In all, the southern Oregon fires, especially the Silver Fire, showed everyone involved that when it came to saving forests that we were all ecologically conscious of the dangers that wildfire was posing to the environment.

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Because of all the controversy and the significant impacts of the Silver Fire Event, the Forest Service then put together the Silver Fire Information Center in Brookings. Along with this center in Brookings, other loyal Forest Service employees also joined in to help ease the strain in the outlying communities as well.

Also very apparent during the Silver Fire, was the observation of the many middle-ground conservationists that came into the Silver Fire Information Center, not just to inquire about the fire, but to specifically vocalize their sentiments about other environmental issues.

Surprisingly, many of their concerns opposed the views of both the industry and the environmentalists.

It was not uncommon to hear statements like, "I'm sick and tired of the timber industry and its 'unsated appetite for profit from the American woods' - especially when I see so much superior and prime U.S. timber being shipped overseas to foreign countries in its basic raw form." That statement, issued by a retired logger and now an active senior citizen, was directed specifically at the Forest Service, as he explained: "for allowing this 'atrocity' to occur."

He then went pressed on further to explain that, "These actions then force the American people to purchase poor quality, imported lumber and other wood products from Canada and other countries at fluctuating, and often times, inflated market prices." (Later on he did come back to the Fire Information Center and specifically stated that he was alluding only to Alaska - whew! That was a heck of a discussion and I don't think I will ever forget his anger.)

Unequivocally, several young and ecology minded forest users stated that, "We are tired of being mistaken for radicals simply because we like to hike, fish and explore the wilderness. We're also tired of the 'stupid, uncaring terrorist acts' performed out in the woods by 'radical environmentalists' designed to maim and inflame the ordinary woodworker."

Many off-the-street, everyday forest users also stated that they were, "Just plain tired of seeing the American workingman - the fallers, buckers, and mill workers fall victim to the cowardly acts of radical environmentalists sneaking around the Public Domain with the intent to hurt and maim just for the preservation of some 'old and dying trees.'"
The diligent Fire Information Officers who listened to so much political and emotional fervor displayed during the Silver Fire, then informed these "silent" and previously "unheard" individuals that the Siskiyou National Forest now had a new forest plan in the makings, and that if they truly wished to say how they felt, then they should become a part of the public involvement process. Many people did listen, with a good number seeking more information about the forest planning process.

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You can now see why public relations specialists were called in from many areas of region six, and at maximum staffing, there were at least a dozen Fire Information Officers working on the Silver Fire.

They came from as far away as the Mt. St. Helens Monument where Chuck Tonn, Bernie Pineda, and Gail Hakola were called away from their duties there. Norm Grennell, now a project leader on the Silver Fire Recovery Team was called in from the Rogue River N.F., while Joe Meade made it in from the Ochoco. From the Olympic National Forest came Tom Sayre to help lead the group, while John Curry and Al Gibbs from down from the Okanogan. Norm Hesseldal also arrived from the Siuslaw while Dee Westerberg flew in from the Winema, and of course, I was there from just "down the road."

Meanwhile, up in Gold Beach, Susan Mathison helped "hold down the fort". All in all, The Silver Fire Information Team did an outstanding job smoothing out the bumps and scrapes that the Silver Fire was leaving in its fiery firetrails.

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At the very onset of the Silver Fire, the Forest Service determined that one of its immediate concerns was to inform the public about the status of the fire and any imminent danger that may present to human lives and private property.

Fire Information Officers were then sent out into the neighboring hillsides and valley communities in an outreach program to personally notify rural residents that did not have radios, televisions or other means of contact with the outside world, about what the fire was doing. Many rural residents surrounding the Silver Fire area live up in the hills and do not have electricity as they choose to live outside of the standard customs of mainstream America - but still, these people needed to be made aware of the fire's activities. And they were sucessfully contacted.

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Another reason for the need of qualified Fire Information Officers was to handle the tremendous volumes of inadequate information that was passed on to the general public in the form of unfounded press and radio releases based on misinformation from non-Forest Service sources.

In other words, rumors were flying and they needed to be stopped by the timely dissemination of accurate information. Many local residents, shrouded in the drifting smoke palls, did become caught up in the chaos by misleading radio
reports that were actually causing people to panic when there really was no need to.

It then became the duty of the Public Affairs Officer, and his team at the Silver Fire Information Center, to correct these rumors and reassure the public that they were not in any immediate danger.

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Personally, I will never forget some of those radio reports, especially the one that spoke about evacuating one of the rural public schools. It brought tears to my eyes knowing the fear that must have raced through some of the schoolchildren's parents' hearts upon hearing this very biting piece of mis-information. At the time of that announcement the Silver Fire had blown-up, but it was many, many miles away from that building.

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In a timely fashion the rumors were corrected, and in some rare cases people were evacuated from the front of the Silver Fire; but in general, at no time were the majority of the ruralites and the local townsfolk in any kind of danger, except maybe from the smoke.

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There were many other duties performed by the Fire Information Staff. Numerous requests were made by the local schools to have Forest Service personnel come out and teach the children about fire science, and to also explain what was going on in the woods. The children were very attentive and they eagerly listened. So did their teachers and everybody learned.

As the Silver Fire grew in size, many local politicians came out to view the fire and to obtain the answers to their constituent's questions. Congressional Representatives, County Commissioners, newspaper publishers, many local and national reporters, and several television news crews came out to learn more about the massive Silver Complex Fire. And they were all accurately informed with up to the minute details about the fire crisis.

Many meetings, mixers and luncheons were held, with the Forest Service Officers receiving top billing. Fire Information Officers were also invited to many different functions, from gatherings at the Senior Center to troop meetings of the Cub Scouts. There was a tremendous thirst for information about the fire, and the communities responded extremely well. Many thanks were given then to the Forest Service employees who helped provide a clear picture of the fire's activities; and all throughout the neighboring towns, signs were posted in the windows of homes and local businesses, stating clearly the general feeling of the interested public. They simply read: Thank You Firefighters.

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And in light of everything that happened between the Forest Service and the local communities in the last decade, it was all that was left that needed to be said.
THE SEVENTH WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: OCTOBER 11TH TO OCTOBER 18TH

October 11, 1987 was another transition day for the governing overhead on the Silver Fire. The fire was now burning in its 43rd day and it was time for the Reinhart Team to demobilize and rest. Stan Kunzman's National Team with Roy Montgomery filling in as Incident Commander assumed control of the Silver Fire on this day.

The Silver Fire was becoming quite well known as the longest running show in southern Oregon and in its fame it was demanding nothing but the finest in firefighting forces for its live and "captive audience". Roy Montgomery was to become the fourth Incident Commander assigned to the fire, counting Jeff Kinderman and his leadership efforts on the initial day with the smokejumper forces.

On October 11th, the total acreage for the Silver Fire was listed at 82,786 acres. In the Kalmiopsis Wilderness 37,866 acres had been scorched. This figure represented 45% of the total fire area. The fire was also listed as 70% contained with still no estimated date for full containment.

Personnel on the fire numbered 1,265 with a total of 46 individual crews. There were 10 engines, 4 bulldozers, 11 helicopters and 12 water tenders. To date, there had been no fatalities and no major injuries. Safety continued to be a boon, and the emphasis placed there was showing outstanding results.

Nearly 31 miles of fireline had been constructed and it was estimated that 16 more miles were needed to completely tie in the primary containment line. Pack strings were effectively being utilized as well as the large Vertol helicopter. Burning out continued to be the main suppression strategy, and because of the recent "lull" in the weather, major attention was focused on this activity.

To date, costs for suppressing the massive Silver Complex Fire stood at $12,974,965. This figure did not include the estimated loss of the resource value. It was projected that the costs would continue to rise.

North of the Illinois River, in the North Zone, the Silver Fire was reported to be 98% contained. Fire crews were completing rehabilitation on the Hobson Horn and the Illinois River Trails south of the Briggs Ranch. Several other burnt over areas were seeded and fertilized with a seed mixture designed to benefit big-game and aid in the watershed protection. A thorough analysis of the North Zone was undertaken and it was determined that several roads would be reopened north of the fire. Things on that end were shaping up well.

In the south, the fire had not jumped the Chetco River as previously feared, nor had it crossed Collier Creek. For the time being, the cooling of the
weather had allayed the fears of both the local residents and the firefighters on the lines. But still another seven miles of handline was needing to be built south of the Chetco River. Crews were also working to close up a section of line north of Collier Creek on the fire's west side, north of the Big Craggies Botanical Area. On the southeast corner, another eight miles of fireline was needed from Granite Springs, north to the Illinois River.

That afternoon, favorable weather conditions helped the fire crews burn out an additional three mile stretch in the Gold Basin area on the southeast side of the Silver Fire. Doggedly, the firefighters continued to dig fire trail on the south and northwest sides of the fire deeper into the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

By end of day on October 11th, the firefighting forces were cautiously optimistic that the present weather pattern might hold, thus keeping the fire docile so that the primary containment lines could be completed. There were many crews working ahead of the fire in the heartland of the wilderness. They consistently hoped that the fire would not blow up on them in their isolated milieux.

During the next two days, the fire continued to show reduced intensity, with most flame heights reported less than four feet in length. Fire managers continued to use the favorable conditions to enact more burning out. Continual humidities well above 25% played a large role in slowing down the Silver Fire.

On the 13th of October, firefighters were using fire to fight fire. During that afternoon a 600 acre tract was burnt out where Collier Creek drains into the Illinois River. This burn-out, which occurred two and a half miles north of the Big Craggies Botanical Area, was the final piece of handiwork needed to secure the protection of this crucial drainage. At 1330 hours, ignition began.

The Collier Bar burn-out, under the direction of Deputy I.C. Don Reynolds, was a huge success. Watching this operation from a landing just north of the burn, Bob Gardner, Forest Service Photographer, and myself witnessed a small helicopter equipped with an aerial incendiary device, appropriately called the "ping-pong" machine, ignite all of the ground fuels in this critical area.

The "ping-pong" device is an innovative and highly effective aerial ignition tool. The way it works is intriguing:

The ping-pong device is purely mechanical, it utilizes hard plastic balls, resembling ping pong balls, filled with potassium-permanganate, a highly flammable chemical compound when mixed together with certain catalysts.

As the helicopter zeros in on the spot below that it wishes to ignite, the balls drop from a hopper attached to the helicopter, into a chute where a needle plunges through the plastic and injects a green liquid into the purple powdered potassium-permanganate. At this point it is launched from the ship.

Upon injection, a chemical reaction begins inside the ball that eventually burns through the plastic. The process usually takes no longer than thirty seconds. By that time the ball is on the ground and in the fuel bed, spewing a hot and intense fire around the site of impact. From there, the fire begins to take off, thus burning out the hazardous fuels without requiring personnel on the ground.
In the Collier Bar burn-out, the use of this device was a total success. From our vantage point, we observed the complete burn-out and breathed a sigh of relief watching the silver-gray smoke drift back over the Craggles and into the blackened fire area.

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On the southern end of the fireline, fire crews were working to complete the last three miles of handline near Johnson Butte. This firetrail which anchored in at the Tolman Ranch on the southwest corner of the main fireline, was approximately eight miles from Johnson Butte. Most of this firetrail utilized the existing Upper Chetco trail.

When the handline crews reached the pinnacle of Johnson Butte, they established a spike camp below its east face. This was to be known as Windy Spike Camp. It was set up there in order to eliminate the long hike into the area and to minimize impacts on the Upper Chetco Trail. When supplies and meals could not be flown in, they were then packed in by mule-train from the south on the Dry Butte Trail. This system worked rather well.

The southern fireline stretched from the Tolman Ranch on the west, to Gold Basin on the southeast flank. It covered a distance of 17 miles. The first eight miles were fairly easy going, as most of the tread was already in; major efforts here focused on widening the fuel break. However, the three mile stretch down to Chetco Bar on the Chetco river from Windy Camp was a totally different story.

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According to veteran Branch Director Dick Kreger, the crews working there were finding the brush extremely thick and virtually impenetrable. With six chainsaws running, they were only able to gain 300 yards a day in several places. Footing was treacherous, the weather was hot, and the days were grueling and long. The crews returned to Windy Spike Camp exhausted and longing for showers and home cooked meals. They knew in time, that the fireline, under the direction of Branch Director Kreger and his hardy crews, would be completed; in the meantime, during the process of line construction, this tough piece of ground was commonly referred to as the Kalmiopsis’ "Burma Road."

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Perhaps the most significant event of the busy day of October 13th, was the total containment of the North Zone at 8 p.m. that evening. The threat of the Silver Fire attempting any escape out of the North Zone had been eliminated. The firelines had been tested earlier and they held. Since then, they were improved upon and thoroughly rehabilitated.

Incident Commander Dick Hodge was very pleased when he announced that the 57,509 acre North Zone had been secured. Fire crews mopping up the last of the hot spots there also completed rehabilitation to the former spike camps, prairies, and hiking trails. After 45 days of fire activity in the North Zone the area was finally safe.
At first light on October 14th, the Silver Fire reached 85,000 acres. It had increased by 860 acres the previous day, with most of this gain attributed to the Collier Bar burn-out. Infra-red photography revealed that the fire gained most of this acreage in the Big Craggies area lying to the west, and north of the Chetco River near Tincup Creek. The fire had not crossed the Chetco River, nor Klondike Creek on the eastern perimeter south of the Illinois River.

On the east side of the Silver Fire, the fire displayed no significant movement since it jumped the firelines there over a week ago. The Vertol was continually used to knock down hot spots and squelch the fiery snags burning near Granite Butte west of Klondike Creek. Generally, the east side had experienced intensive fire activity, with several of its firelines severely challenged. Air attack had an intrinsic role in preventing the fire from escaping this area.

During the night of October 14th, humidities dropped and east winds surfaced once again. Increased burning was noted on the southern flank of the fire. Several hot spots threatened to throw firebrands beyond the natural water breaks in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness; once again the Silver Fire displayed renewed momentum. Infra-red mapping revealed that the fire was considerably hotter and more active than it had been in the past several days. Overnight it increased to 1,431 acres, boosting its total size to 86,830 acres.

October 15, 1987 was a 'push day' on the Silver Fire. The National Weather Service issued a red-flag-warning for strong east winds with wind velocities expected to reach 25 mph on the open and exposed, high mountain ridge tops. Firefighters braced themselves and hoped that the oncoming winds would not cause extensive flare-ups. Thirty-four crews manned the firelines.

The southern front of the Silver Fire had now moved down to the north bank of the Chetco River at the confluence of Tincup Creek. Slowly this majestic watershed was surrendering itself to the gripping fingers of the Silver Fire.

The confluence of Tincup Creek is a favorite site frequented by the few rare and capable hikers that manage to brave the brushy trails to get there. Where it meets the river is a divine chasm, steeply banked on its southern slope. There are many cliffs and bare rock ledges for sitting and sunning, and the fishing is superb and the wildlife abundant. It was sad to watch this treasured site go up in smoke from the Silver Fire.

Other active areas sought for by the Silver Fire were the Darling Creek drainage, a feeder stream of Tincup Creek that flows out from the highlands of the Big Craggies. The fire also continued to steadily burn out the interior headlands of Tincup Creek.

North of Gold Basin on the southeast side, fire crews burned out a 600 acre area of unburnt fuels posing a threat in that corner of the fire. The burn-out was expected to eliminate the risk of the fire escaping further to the east towards Pearsall Peak. The Vertol continued dropping retardant west of Klondike Creek to secure the east side of this unburnt do-nut.
Work along the "Burma Road" continued to progress. The firefighters working there had a little over three miles left to go. Crews were then sent from contained the North Zone to assist with the southern efforts.

On October 15th the Fire Team discussed the demobilization of surplus crews. It was decided that alternate work assignments were necessary to keep the crews in the area in case of need. An east wind period was projected to last from October 17th until the 20th. The Forest agreed to provide district work for surplus crews until it was ascertained that they would be no longer needed. Several crews were sent to the Chetco, Gold Beach and Powers Ranger Districts to do project work for a period of six days. FFF funds (emergency funding) were provided to cover these costs.

By close of day on the 15th of October, costs to suppress the Silver Fire topped the 14 million dollar mark. They were listed at $14,062,230 with an estimated current threat of $20,000,000. A total of 1,027 personnel remained committed to the blaze, along with 9 helicopters, 39 support trucks, 8 water tenders, 4 dozers, 6 engines and 218 overhead personnel.

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Overnight, the Silver Fire gained another 2,180 acres as shifting winds continued to fan the fire. On October 16th, the fire revealed a size of 89,010 acres. More than 700 acres were burned out by fire crews near Gold Basin. The fire also continued to produce hot-spots near Klondike Creek, Darling Creek, Tincup Mountain, and the Chetco River.

The fire continued to creep across the Big Craggles Botanical Area and closer to the east side of Collier Creek. Five miles to the south, hot-spots were still active in Darling Creek, feeding heat, smoke, and thick gray ash to the slowly burning Tincup Creek drainage. The intense fire behaviour occuring there necessitated the dropping of nine loads of retardant, about 12,000 gallons, from several DC-4 and DC-7 air tankers. The primary target was Darling Creek. This action helped to cool the non-relenting hot-spots. It should be noted that the big retardant bombers had not been used in over a week on the Silver Fire.

On the east side, extensive firefighting on the ground and in the air appeared to be holding the fire west of Klondike Creek. Hot-shot crews worked the area spraying water from portable pumps and hoses. Helicopters continued to blot the area with liquid retardant and water drops.

Along the rugged "Burma Road", another half mile of fireline was completed. It was still tough going, slow and steady, but the determined crews did not relent. An additional mile and a half was left to go before the line would be complete.

Mop-up continued on the north side of the fire north of the Illinois River. Five crews were working the area there extinguishing hot-spots and completing land surface rehabilitation work. The North Zone fire team in charge of operations at the Agness Camp turned the final phases of the operation over to a transition team on October 16th. Incident Commander Dick Hodge expressed his appreciation to the citizens of Agness and Gold Beach, as well as the other outlying communities for their support.
Activities for the next two days continued to consist of hot-spotting, patrolling, and more line construction. On October 18th, the fire had reached its 50th day of burning. It had also attained a formidable size of 90,440 acres. Fire Managers were beginning to wonder if it would ever end. There was a sustained flow of optimism that the fire would eventually cease. The days grew shorter and the nighttime temperatures were beginning to cool. Inevitably, winter would arrive.

One of the more positive things to occur on October 18th was the final completion of the southern flank fireline across the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. As this exhaustive task, 17 miles of difficult handline construction, had reached the final few yards of completion, the fire crews there experienced a surge of jubilation as they reached the soothing waters of the Chetco River down at Chetco Bar. For all intents and purposes the entire main fireline was now complete around the enormous Silver Fire. If the weather would just cooperate then it was just a matter of cooling the hot-spots and burning out the remaining hazardous fuels.

The ever diligent Safety Officers praised the work of the crews who completed the task without any serious injuries. The steep, brushy terrain and difficult working conditions were said to be among the toughest since the fire started. Crew morale lifted.

However, the Silver Fire continued to pose headaches in other areas. The fire established a half mile of flamefront consuming brush and trees on the ridge between Darling Creek and Fall Creek, southeast of the Craggies. Two Hot-shot crews were dispatched to try and scratch a line on the opposite side of Fall Creek with the hopes of burning it out to prevent the fires spread to the southwest. It was definitely expressed that if the fire was to make a run here, it could explode out of the wilderness and be within short range, pointed directly at the Tolman Ranch. The Hot-shot crews were assisted there by two medium-class helicopters for transportation and reconnaissance.

To the east, a three mile stretch of the north bank of the Chetco River had fire creeping inside it. It was imperative now to put a check on the fire here and insure that it wouldn't cross the Chetco. If it did the southern fireline would be subject to an undesired challenge. Flames continued to burn on both sides of Tincup Creek near the point where Tincup and Fall Creek drain into the Chetco River. It was taking quite a while for this scenic and lonely area to burn out. All hope for its recovery rested entirely in the future.

Overall, fire managers were pleased with the work efforts to date. Ongoing worries continued to be the east winds and the erratic behaviour of the fire, but all in all, the total fire area was reported to be cooling down. It was unanimously hoped that the fall rains would come, and soon.

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By the end of its seventh week and 50th day, the Silver Fire split its acreage with 50% of it having burnt in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and the rest of it having burnt in the general forestland north of the Kalmiopsis. The cost to date totaled $14,839,950 and there was still no date for estimated full containment. Although there were continuing concerns about the dry east winds
blowing steady on the firelines, fire managers were extremely hopeful that the fire would burn itself out on all of its perimeter.

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The most significant weather factors during the seventh week of the Silver Fire were the steady east winds and the relatively low humidity recoveries, especially at night. Throughout the week, nighttime humidities remained unseasonably low allowing the fire to burn through the night. There just wasn't any moisture or wetting to found anywhere. It did not feel like October. It was definitely Indian Summer on the Silver Fire.

Temperatures did decrease somewhat but still ranged predominately in the balmy 70's. Fuel stick readings continued to range and remain quite low low, hovering between three and nine indicating that the woods were still very dry.

For many hunters the season was turning out to be a dismal failure. Herds of deer and elk had moved away from the fire, searching for water and places to bed down, far away from the acrid smoke of the long running Silver Fire.

The waning summer days may have been getting shorter and the nights a tad bit cooler, but the red-flag-watch for high east winds continued in effect, and the worries of the tired fire managers never ceased to be.
October 19th, the opening day of the eight week of the long running Silver Fire, was greeted by a fresh blowing, moderate east wind. The fire had expanded to 91,934 acres, gaining an additional 1,494 acres overnight. All of the increased acreage was within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Fifty-one percent of the total fire had now been burnt in this remotely located preservation area.

The number of personnel on the fire continued to be high. Thirty five crews were still assigned to the Silver's firelines. There were 17 engines, 3 bulldozers, 10 helicopters and 11 water tenders operating on the scene. Three main fire camps still surrounded the fire's perimeter, and several remote spike camps continued to function as distant, but necessary outposts. The pack mule trains continued to run and the basic suppression operation functioned efficiently.

Temperatures maintained in the mid-seventies and humidities ranged from 20 to 25 percent. Hot-spots were fanned by the brisk east winds causing intense flare-ups on the western and southern perimeters. The three Hot-shot crews working just below Fall Creek were forced out of the area by rolling and burning debris. With the east winds pushing the fire at their faces, they had to withdraw from the direct attack scratch line they were hoping to install. Helicopters then moved in and began dropping water and retardant to help.

North of the Big Craggles, the fire continued with its slow and menacing eastward spread in the direction of Collier Creek. Neither the Collier Creek nor the Fall Creek fires were threatening any structures or private property, but it was feared that if they should escape and run, then they could jeopardize other sensitive areas. Both current hot-spots remained four to five miles east of the 20 mile long containment line running from Game Lake in the north, to Quail Prairie Mountain in the south.

Other crews were being located after the completion of the "Burma Road". That fire line, a major 17 mile effort, tied in with the line from the Tolman Ranch over to Gold Basin. Altogether a 37 mile long fireline stretched from Game Lake to Gold Basin. This entire primary containment line was yet to be tested by fire.

With regards to the "Burma Road", Safety Officers reported that it required over 3,300 hours of power saw operations to complete this line with only two minor injuries. They called it a "truly remarkable safety achievement," considering the amount of man-hours put into the construction of this fireline through some of the thickest brush and most difficult terrain in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.
The unseasonably warm and dry weather pushed the Silver Fire an additional 1,400 acres by first light on October 20th. The persistent hot-spot continued to be on the southeast side of the Big Craggles Botanical Area. The fire now stood at 93,334 acres since its start on August 30th.

A suppression crew was then sent in to Collier Creek on the north side of the Craggles to extinguish a hot-spot approximately five miles south of the Illinois River. Hot flames raged as they located the fire on the eastern slope of the creek. It was threatening to run and jump Collier Creek yet the crew worked aggressively cutting and digging ahead of the active flaming front. Two critical lines needed to be built as rapidly as possible. This was one of the most worrisome areas and the crews worked all day striving to secure a line around it.

The main area of firefighting activity centered around the Fall Creek drainage. Firefighters were building line from the confluence of Fall Creek and the Chetco River up the slopes of Mislatnah Ridge. Helicopters continued to judiciously drop many 1,000 gallon loads of retardant and water on the site. They too worked with the minimal impact, light-hand philosophy, endeavoring ardously to stop the fires spread. Yet the fire continued moving to the north and it was desperately hoped that the scratch line being constructed on the other side of Fall Creek would hold, at least enough for burning-out.

On the southeast side in Sluice Creek, the Silver Fire continued its destructive path, spreading actively in this isolated drainage. Fire officials decided to enact burn-out there using aerial ignition by helicopters. This was done in order to prevent any possible future spotting across the Chetco River.

Meanwhile, on the east flank, the fire appeared to be laying down and no major activity was recorded. Also, in the North Zone five crews remained for patrol, mop-up, and rehabilitation work as needed.

On October 21st, the east winds began to taper off enabling the firefighters to make headway on the stubborn Silver Fire. Overnight the fire picked up another 1,460 acres; however, most of this was attributable to the consumption of unburned islands of fuel within the fire's perimeter. To date about 27 percent of the 180,000 acre Kalmiopsis Wilderness had burned and on October 21st, the infra-red map revealed only a few areas with hot fire burning inside them.

Tom Jones and Ben Worthington, district representatives from the Siskiyou National Forest, set up a graphic display of all the rehabilitation work that needed to be done at various sites around the fire. Because of their unique presentation, rehabilitation work took priority over district work as previously planned. Category I crews were then deferred for any direct attack on critical areas near the flaming front, while Category II crews were utilized for rehabilitation work on the southern end. Their primary duties consisted of: erosion control on all of the firelines, the scattering and piling of woody debris, the reestablishment of the visual quality of the recreational trails and the seeding and fertilizing of dozer built firelines.

For the Category I crews the main areas of concern continued to be the Sluice Creek, Collier Creek and Fall Creek drainages. Direct attack continued
where applicable and firefighters did gain ground on the fires there. Feelings were again optimistic. Incident Commander Roy Montgomery, in his quote of the day stated, "The combination of progress made by the firefighters and favorable weather forecasts are enabling us to get a handle on this fire. We are feeling very good about our progress so far."

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On October 22, 1987, something strange and different occurred on the Silver Fire — rain. At 2 a.m. and at 4:30 a.m., light sprinkles were reported in the Gardner Fire Camp; however, they only lasted about five minutes each. The sprinkles did little to extinguish the flames burning in the wilderness but they did help to lift the spirits of the personnel working in the camp. Meteorologists were even bold enough to predict a slight chance of measurable precipitation for later on that day. Unfortunately, it did not occur.

Overnight the fire remained relatively calm. It had increased by 760 acres, a small rise in relation to its past growth. Higher humidities helped in its slowing down, and the fire did little to extend its boundaries. Again, most of the additional acreage was attributed to the burn-out of isolated fuel islands.

There was one incident that did put a damper on the optimism that day. As a result of the burn-out on the southern line, a small spot fire ignited across the Chetco River, one mile northwest of Taggart's Bar. When the smoke column blew back over the fireline, it dropped an ember on the south bank of the river. Luckily, there were firecrews and helicopters working in the vicinity. The spot fire grew to about three acres but it was held to that size as the crews promptly contained it. It was mopped up and declared controlled the following day.

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Al Graft's Area Team, which had taken over command of the North Zone replacing the Hodge team, was also released from the Silver Fire on October 22nd. The North Zone then became a division of the Silver Complex with Jim Sullivan assigned as the division supervisor. The Agness Camp was then demobilized leaving just two crews plus the required overhead.

On October 23rd, the North Zone of the Silver Fire was officially combined with the South Zone. The main positions left in place at the Agness Camp were: two 20 person crews, a supply coordinator, a division supervisor (Jim Sullivan), 2 STL observers, and a timekeeper/purchasing agent. All subsequent planning and directions came out of the Gardner camp in the form of unified Silver Complex information network.

Favorable weather continued to be the promising factor on October 23rd, the 55th day of the Silver Fire. Overall the fire was cooling significantly and problem areas were dwindling. High evening humidities and light winds continued to assist the firefighters as they approached containment. The fire had grown only 383 acres overnight and now stood at 95,937 acres. Of that total, 51,037 acres were in the wilderness, approximately 28% of its total size. A total of 1,111 personnel were still committed to the fire.
Collier Creek continued to be the most stubborn area of resistance. Three crews remained in the area anchoring two firelines along the flanks of the fire into the rocky foothills of the Big Craggles.

In Fall Creek, excellent progress was made by the crews. Two crews were patrolling the quickly cooling fireline. A helicopter with the probeye device was also inspecting the area for hot-spots. The fire was dying back and had slowed considerably in the advances it had gained during the week.

Sluice Creek continued to burn out. The fire slowly crept down to the river and was monitored by the crews there. It was burning quietly, consuming the unburnt fuel and slowly eliminating the threat of crossing the river.

The Klondike Creek area was in patrol status. It too was scanned by the aerial probeye. No major hot-spots were found.

After 55 days it was noted that there had not been a major accident on the State's largest fire in quite a while. Firefighter safety had been stressed constantly and the results were paying off nicely.

By the close of day on October 23rd, the total cost of suppressing the Silver Fire was listed at $16,496,693. There was a total now of 113 miles of fireline surrounding the fire with 0 miles left to build. The total fire area was listed as 82% contained with the southern sector noted as 55% contained. There was still no estimated time of total containment, but it was getting closer!

Overnight the Silver Fire cooled down significantly. On October 24th, it had topped the 96,000 acre mark but only registered a 120 acre increase during the past 24 hours. It was the smallest gain in over a month. Basically the only areas with major fire activity were the previously mentioned four areas along the southern and west flanks. The incorporated north zone was 100 percent contained and listed as being in "patrol" status. Personnel were reduced overnight by 176. And it was expected that an additional 10 crews would be released in the next few days.

Firelines in the Fall Creek area and in Collier creek were listed as secure. The small spot fire outside of Sluice Creek had been contained and rapidly mopped up. The fire along the Chetco River slowly crept down to the rivers edge. It did not burn hot and mostly consumed only the underbrush. All other areas continued to be patrolled by a diligent search with the probeye device.

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The quote of the day on October 24th read as follows: "As soon as we can cool the trouble spots down and get a good test of the lines with dry, windy weather we will be closer to containment. Because of our progress, we are looking at further reductions in our firefighting forces. However, we don't want to mislead people because we will have people working on this fire until it is rained out and that'll take a significant rainfall." That statement was issued by Siskiyou Fire Staff Officer Wayne Spencer in light of the predicted dry and windy weather expected in the next few days.
A red flag watch for strong east winds was issued on Sunday, October 25th, and they were predicted to last for the next two days. Even with the weather cooling, and the early morning fog and low clouds, the weather continued to pose threats to the Silver Fire. According to the Palmer Drought Index, a highly developed system of measuring the dryness of the forest and its fuels, indicators on the Siskiyou registered a -3.34 on the west side and a -2.42 on the east side. With regards to precipitation, it was estimated that 13.84 inches of rain would be needed to bring the forest back to normal rainfall on the west side and 5.03 inches on the eastside. On the east side of the Forest, records were broken as to length of days without any measurable precipitation. The summer of 1987 was one of the driest on record for the forestlands of southern Oregon.

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On the 25th of October, the entire Silver Fire was listed at 82 percent total containment. Over on Sluice Creek, the burn-out to the Chetco River was complete. Patrols continued in the event of flare-ups and also in the event of the arrival of the east winds. In the Klondike Creek area some snags continued to burn along the fires edge and one crew, supported by helicopter water drops, continued working the area. They remained spiked out in the small "coyote" camp that they had set up in the vicinity.

In Collier Creek, crews remained in the area monitoring the firelines they installed earlier in the week. There was still some burn-out that needed to be done, but with the expected east winds this activity was cancelled for the day.

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At the Silver Fire Information Center in Brookings, many people continued to call and visit there wanting to know more about the status of the fire. The general thought on most people's minds was when would the rain start. Many folks informed the Staff at the center that their springs and wells had slowed down considerably and many had even totally dried up. Even the City of Brookings had problems with its municipal water supply as the unusual low flow of the Chetco River, coupled with the recent high ocean tides, had given the drinking water a sudden influx of high quantities of salt. Bottled water sales in the area skyrocketed. In the usually moist and very wet coastline, this type of phenomena was extremely rare.

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By end of day on October 25th, the Silver Fire stood at 96,125 acres. Another 68 acres was added overnight, a new record low. It was generally felt that this was the beginning of the end. If it were not for the predicted winds and lack of moisture, things would almost appear to be normal.

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Because of the recent cooling of the weather, and the appearance of some low clouds and fog over the Silver Fire area, all fire fronts displayed low fire intensities except in isolated patches of heavy and down fuels. General fire behavior in those areas was moderate except during the week when the east winds blew in certain areas. But overall, the fire had quieted down and the predicted
fire rate of spread was expected to be low with short flame lengths. Spotting activity was also predicted as having a low potential. Smoke remained trapped in the low-lying valleys in the early mornings but dissipated by late afternoon.

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Generally, the weather during the eight week of the fire began as unseasonably warm and remained quite dry. Humidities ranged rather low but increased by the end of the week. The steady east winds that fanned the fire at the start of the week eventually tapered off to a light flow by the weekend. Coupled with this factor, the fuel moisture content measured via the fuel sticks was slowly rising, attributed directly to the cloudy skies and early morning fog.

Even though east winds were expected throughout the week, the weather finally seemed to be cooperating. It was only hoped that the weather would continue with this recent trend and that the long awaited for and overdue rains would begin to fall on the extensively sere and fire scarred lands of the Siskiyou National Forest. But only time would tell.
THE NINTH WEEK OF THE SILVER FIRE: OCTOBER 26TH TO NOVEMBER 2ND

Hot weather and tinder-dry fuels continued to keep firefighters on the alert during the ninth week of the Silver Fire. Even though the weather was displaying signs of cooling and humidities were rising, warm east winds continued to blow across the arid mountain tops. Red Flag Warnings persisted on October 26th; however, the velocity of the winds were light and did little to affect the general attitude of the Silver Fire.

Statistics on the Silver Fire at the beginning of the week listed the total acreage figure at 96,150 acres. During the night the Silver Fire gained only twenty five acres. This was the smallest acreage reported burned in any 24 hour period since the beginning of the fire. The Silver Fire was then estimated at 82% containment and a reduced force of 870 personnel remained assigned to the incident. A contingency of 24 crews assumed patrol, mop-up, rehabilitation and stand-by duties.

On October 26th, the up to date cost for the suppression of the Silver Fire surpassed the seventeen million dollar mark and was listed at $17,263,633. Of this sum, approximately $2,181,000 in equipment and supplies had been delivered from the Redmond Fire Cache in eastern Oregon. Other major expenditures were comprised of air operation costs and firefighter salaries. Not only was the Silver Fire developing into one of the largest lightning caused fires ever, it was also becoming one of the most costly to battle. Combined with the dollar value of the resources lost, the overall figure was staggering. The estimated total cost of the incident operation was listed at 19 million dollars with over 7.5 million already estimated lost in resource values.

As the fire continued to cool, tired crews were being sent home. Many miles of fire hose were being pulled in various places while hand tools and other equipment were gathered and brought back to camp. Rehabilitation work in the form of soil and stream protection activities progressed. Most of the waterbars on the firelines had been installed and major grass seeding and fertilizing operations were completed outside of the wilderness. Rehabilitation was estimated to be 50% complete and it was hoped that by the time the fire was declared contained, that the firefighters would be able to walk away with most of the general clean-up work accomplished.

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Forest Service field teams were also organized to study the salvage opportunities immediately north of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. It was inevitable that opposition to salvage logging would be shortly forthcoming.

Because much of the tremendous volume of wood killed in the fire did not stand the chance of maintaining its value once the rotting processes began,
especially in the wet, rain-forest type climate of the coastal Siskiyou's, this assessment process was set up on a fast-track basis. Removal of the damaged timber before any insect infestation or major rotting activity occurred was of major concern. It became then, and remains still, the intent of the Forest Service to deal with this situation in a timely fashion. The Siskiyou National Forest then put out a call for detailers and other support personnel that would be needed to assist in these operations. A Silver Fire Recovery Center was set up in Grant's Pass to deal specifically with the fire's after-effects and even now this group endeavors still to formulate a viable management plan.

As the field teams ventured out into the blackened areas, their reconnaissances were directed towards assessing the fire's impacts on many other critical factors such as soils, fisheries, wildlife, residual timber stands and future recreational impacts. A Citizen's Recovery Group was also established whose function was to participate in adding input to the management options being considered for the burnt timber areas.

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In the meantime, while the political heat was being stoked in the management offices of all concerned players, the Silver Fire continued bellowing its smokey pall above the woodlands of southern Oregon.

In the Tincup drainage, the Silver Fire steadily carried on with its slow consumption of this once beautiful drainage. The most significant suppression activity of the day was the laying down of a line of retardant at the mouth of Tincup Creek. This area had been evaluated as the most potentially hazardous spot on the fire's perimeter. The Forest Service did not wish to leave any chances of its escaping to the wind with its omnipresent ability of transporting firebrands across the Chetco River.

Two Hot-shot crews remained in the vicinity of Collier Creek for mop-up duties. They were also placed on alert for possible flare-ups in case the wind was to reactivate the fire in that area.

Over on the westside, in Klondike Creek, helicopter water drops continued to wet down and knock out the hotspots in the few remaining snags that were spewing smoke and fire. The area was closely monitored as the possibility of a wind caused reburn on the south slopes imposed a subtle threat.

On October 27th, the east winds subsided and the temperature dropped. Suppression activities continued in the same manner as the previous day. The retardant line laid down at Tincup Creek held very well and checked the fire from spreading there. Skies on the westside of the forest began to turn gray hinting a chance rain of rain. With intermittent sunshine now darting between the rapidly forming clouds, the spirits of the firefighters soared.

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Overnight, the Silver Fire added another 120 acres to its still unsated appetite. Sixteen engines, 1 bulldozer, 10 helicopters and 7 tenders remained. Demobilization plans were drawn up and many of the crews were ordered to prepare themselves for breaking camp.
Throughout the long duration of the Silver Fire, the fire camps had been home to thousands of firefighters. Now, many of the crews were nearing the end of their duties and were more than ready to return to their respective home stations. In conversation with the Officers at the Information Center, many visiting firefighters had mentioned that they were planning on returning to the Siskiyou National Forest in future seasons to take advantage of its abundant fishing and to hike its challenging wilderness trails—adding also, that the next time they did, they would do so without pulaski, chainsaw or shovel in hand!

October 28th, was a big demobilization day on the Silver Fire. Ten crews were released that day bringing to 20, the total number of crews discharged that week. Also scheduled to leave the fire were the Oregon Air National Guard and the Oregon Army National Guard. The Air Guard had provided vital communication links on the fire and also connected the base camps to the rest of the world. The Army Guard did an outstanding job providing safe and reliable transportation of the troops throughout the fire area.

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The weather continued to be an enigma. October 28th was mostly sunny. Temperatures rose slightly and humidities dropped to about 25 percent. The winds came up but from a different course, mostly out of the north and southwest. An encouraging sign though was that rain—yes, rain—was predicted for Friday, October 30th.

On October 28th, both the Klondike and the Tincup areas had cooled down significantly along the lines but some hot interior burning was evidenced. Short crews were then used to patrol these areas.

One other crew remained in the Collier Creek area on patrol. The only hot spot reported there was in the lower portion of Collier Creek. The threat of it escaping was eliminated as long term retardant was used to secure the fire within the rocky ridge area. The retardant line served its purpose as the line held very well.

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On October 29th, the Silver Fire was listed at 92% containment. Overnight, 250 acres were torched in a burn-out operation on the westside in the Ward’s Gulch area south of Collier Creek and north of the Big Craggies Botanical Area. This brought the total acreage figure on the fire to 96,540 acres. This 250 acre gain was the last ground that the Silver Fire would ever consume.

Of those acres, 51,640 of them were in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. It seemed apparent then that the Silver Fire was not going to reach the 100,000 acre mark as some folks feared; however, it did come awfully close.

Personnel on the fire dropped considerably to 439 with nine organized crews remaining. Seven crews were sent out to the firelines to continue rehabilitation work and road brushing. One crew was assigned to the north end for patrol status, while all of the remaining crews were assigned initial attack standby duties if needed.
Early that morning, the National Guard departed, rolling out in their big transport vehicles, their trailing clouds of dust a symbol of the diminishing Silver Fire Complex.

Plans were also made to transition the National Overhead Team to a short fire team the next day. After 61 days, things were really beginning to slow down.

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On October 30th, 1987, the Silver Fire was listed as 99% contained. There was approximately one mile of line that needed to be assessed before containment would be announced as 100%; but it was coming shortly. Although there had not been any measurable precipitation as of yet on the fire, humidity did reach 100% during the pre-dawn hours and the morning skies were shadowed in misty and cloudy shades of gray. Temperatures dropped into the fifties as cooler weather drifted in. The forecast for the weekend called for possible showers.

Air operations slowed down again because of the local fog conditions and all of the remaining crews were placed on initial attack status. There had been no overnight infrared flight due to the nighttime cloud cover; however, on the ground, all of the noticeable hot and smokey areas on the fire looked pretty good.

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The short fire overhead team replaced the National Overhead Team on October 30th. Deputy I.C. Don Reynolds assumed control as Incident Commander. Roy Montgomery said he felt comfortable with the fire and the finishing out work that needed to be done. In his farewell address, he thanked the troops for maintaining their high morale throughout the incident. He also commented on the excellent safety record during the fire.

Several roads on the fire were then reopened in non-sensitive areas and some logging operations were permitted to resume. The Fire Precaution Class stood at Level II on the forest. Campfires, of course, were still restricted. The fire area was not opened to the general public, and on the the firelines, things really slowed down.

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Well, Halloween was a happy day on the Silver Fire. The many pumpkins donated to the firecamps by the local citizens were carved and lit. Their flickering faces and toothless grins reflected the fact that as of 4 p.m. on October 31st, the Silver Fire was announced as 100% contained!

At 96,540 acres, the longest running show in southern Oregon was expelling its final breath. Firefighters were delighted, this Halloween had given them a special treat. After sixty-three days of tricky weather and major sweat and toil, the Silver Beast was confined to its cage of mineral soil and retardant ribbons. For many, the worst of the battle was over. The lines were drawn, installed, and held in place, for now it was only a matter of waiting for rain.

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Although the Silver Fire was declared contained this did not mean that it was under control. What containment means is that confidence has been reached by those members responsible for the suppression of the fire, to a degree of surety, in which they feel the firelines have been tested by the prevailing weather conditions for a long enough period of time without any further fear of the fire escaping the firelines.

Even though the Silver Fire was contained it would not be declared controlled until soaking rains would begin to fall and all danger of the fire escaping or reburning was eliminated. Forest managers continued to monitor the fire area during the passing days and upcoming weeks. Since there had only been a small trace of rain in fire camp, the overhead team and all other concerned parties were not willing to let their guards down.

Due to the fact that warm, dry weather was predicted for the upcoming week, it was posted that if blazes should reoccur, that firefighters would be recalled back to the infamous Silver Fire.

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In the town of Brookings, at 5 p.m. on October 31st, the Silver Fire Information Center was officially closed. During its period of operation it had been the center of many local activities and witnessed many people pass through its doors to inquire about the fire. For many, it was sad to see it shut down, but for the tired firefighters, they were more than pleased when they reflected why.

By the close of day on October 31st, 247 personnel remained on the fire. That evening a small celebration took place at Gardner Camp. The relief that containment brought released the best from the troops that remained. Camaraderie was the order of the evening. Winners of the pumpkin carving contest were announced, and a mock wedding was held with the I.C. as the minister in charge. Everyone knew that the worst was over, but even in their light heartedness, the happy but well tried troops never lost sight of the remaining work that needed to get done.

Five helicopters, five engines, one water tender and one dozer remained committed to the fire. Five suppression crews remained. Their duties were to complete all of the project work assigned and prepare to dismantle the Gardner Camp when the time was right. Of course, that time would be when the rain would start to fall.

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The first day of November greeted the firefighters at the Gardner Camp with a slight moisture falling on their tents. Overnight the temperature dipped to a brisk 44 degrees. At Quail Prairie Lookout .74 hundredths of an inch of rain were recorded. The relative humidity also remained at 100% throughout the night. Fuel stick measurements jumped to 26 indicating good moisture recovery. The winds were light and variable, and mostly out of the west and southwest. Overall, things looked very promising.
Over the fire area low clouds and patchy fog persisted. The western edge of the fire received the most precipitation, about eight tenths, whereas the east flank only received approximately a quarter of an inch. This trend was expected to last until November 5th, when it was estimated that control of the fire would be announced.

On November 2nd, the final day of the ninth week, the cool wet sky dissipated and the temperature rose a little. Ironically the wind shifted and began blowing steady from the northeast at a windspeed between nine and fourteen miles an hour. The cloud cover lifted over most of the fire area but did linger on some of the major ridgetops. It also remained thick at the Illinois Valley Airport where the remaining helicopters were being staged. They were unable to fly because of the low ceiling.

And so, on this day, November 2nd, with 131 people remaining on the fire, there were still some doubts running through the minds of the overhead in charge. Would this stubborn and long drawn out affair continue, or was the Silver Fire ever going to burn out? Fire managers shook their heads. They hoped for the best and attempted to avoid thinking of the worst.

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The one factor that did remain the high point of the entire Silver Fire Incident was simply the fact that no one got killed.

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The most astonishing thing that happened during the ninth week of the fire was the announcement of total containment. This was the turning point. It seemed inevitable that soon the fire would go out and business would resume as normal, but the weather persisted with its puzzling patterns. Just when it appeared that the skies were going to open up and shower down the much needed precipitation, the trend would turn around and revert back to its dry and menacing ways.

At the beginning of the week temperatures were still warm ranging in the sixties. Fuel sticks had risen a little but also indicated that the forest fuels were still on the dry side. East winds continued to appear on the Silver's firelines imposing a threatening posture. Humidities though, remained relatively low.

Towards the middle of the week a cooling trend began. Humidities picked up and the fuel stick readings gradually increased. The wind pattern shifted bringing in a moist maritime air flow. The skies paled, casting shadows that removed the direct heat of the sun on some of the areas of the fire and traces of moisture began to be felt as rain laden clouds ventured further inland.

By week's end some measurable precipitation did fall which helped put a damper on the overall fire activity. The fire had been completely lined and all of the dangerous fuel areas inside its perimeter had been diligently burned out. Everyone in southern Oregon was waiting for the rain. Even with the shortened summer due to the smoke and heavy ash, a healthy rain was anticipated and heartily desired.
But like the last flickering flames of the Silver Fire, the weather too, was displaying its fickle nature. November had arrived at last and still the weather forecast indicated further warming and drying.
THE FINAL DAYS OF THE SILVER FIRE: NOVEMBER 3RD TO CONTROL

November 3rd, was the beginning of the end. The morning sky was gray and overcast. There was a slight odor of moisture in the air. The temperature was cool; it felt like autumn. The morning briefing was short and concise. There was little more that needed to be said.

The remaining personnel were all veterans now, the Silver Fire had seen to that. A careful review of the day shift plans and a step-by-step analysis of the remaining tasks were evaluated. Duties were assigned and orders were issued. The meeting did not take long. By now, most folks were well versed in their jobs and the agenda for the day called for monitoring the fire and preparing for demobilization.

During the previous week the fire had received some measurable precipitation, moreso though, on the westside of the forest. The weather forecast continued to fluctuate, one day predicting rain and the next, warming and drying. All in all, the Silver Fire was contained. If it was to flare up, it was doubtful that it would engage in any major run. But due to the fact that this fire had displayed such unpredictable and erratic behaviour in the past, fire managers still retained earnest concerns and watched it very carefully.

During the current week, a warm, dry airmass had settled over the fire area. The airmass was expected to maintain warm temperatures over the coastal headlands but weaken as it moved inland. Onshore winds were predicted for the next few days, and for the weekend the predicted outlook was uniquely noted in the Fire Weather Forecast as: "By Saturday (Nov. 7), there will be a moderate positive vorticity advection, due to a full latitude, negatively tilted, diffluent long wave, upper level trough." Translated by meteorologist Mike Brooks, this meant "showers".

The Fire Behaviour Forecast issued by Behaviour Officer Francis Mohr, predicted a low fire activity level over the entire incident area. Potentially hazardous areas were listed as the ridgelines which were subject to the influence of the upper level winds; however, aerial reconnaissance showed these areas to be very cool. The only visible smoke at the higher elevations was in the Gold Basin territory on the southeast perimeter of the fire. It was also burning well inside the fireline.

The Fire Behaviour Forecast also revealed that there was a slight trace of smoke on the ridgeline of Ward's Gulch. It was rising from the base of a snag situated in the rocky, outcropped ridges of the Big Craggles area. A helicopter crew with a water bucket was dispatched to cool it down and knock the fire out.
In Collier Creek, fire activity was not expected to be a threat due to the low elevation and sheltered aspect of that drainage. It was also noted that the fire was primarily of the smoldering type, burning in riparian vegetation and composed mostly of moss and downed punky material.

The predicted rate of spread for any remaining major fire activity was listed as slight. The threat of spotfires occurring was also predicted to be very low, with open flame, crowning and torching-out virtually non-existent. It appeared then that the Silver Fire had lost its fury; and now slowly it was dying.

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On the local scene, in the rural coastal communities of southern Oregon, normality appeared to be resuming - somewhat. On November 4th, slash burning operations began on private forestland outside of the Chetco Ranger District. Even though the weather had cooled, the reappearance of ominous smoke columns rising over the community of Brookings was incredulous, and to some, very disheartening.

Many local residents called the recently demobilized Forest Service Information Officer, at his home in Brookings, to protest and complain about the acrid driftsmoke lingering about them. Many of them were outraged and threatened to call higher authorities and register formal complaints. It was then explained that this was not the Silver Fire reburning, but was in fact, the local industry burning their logging slash on state protected lands. Things really seemed normal then. Smoke hung heavily in the air for two days before it cleared. And in the meantime, tired firefighters from the Gardner Fire Camp prepared to go home.

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Three organized crews remained on the fire. Two of them, the Zig Zag Hot-shots and the Union IHIC, were preparing to demobilize from their second tour of duty on the Silver Fire. The previous day, the Wolf Creek firefighters and other camp crews assembled their gear and departed, ending their second tour. The only remaining crew from out of the Region that remained at the Gardner Camp was the Bitterroot IHIC. They too were released on November 5th. In all, a total of eight crews did double duty on the Silver Fire. They were all Category 1 crews from either Region 6 and Region 1. A few of the vacant spots on these Hot-shot crews were also filled by some of the smokejumpers that originally jumped the fire.

Demobilization of the entire Gardner Camp was scheduled for November 5th with all remaining personnel and equipment reassigned to The Illinois Valley Airport. Forest Headquarters at Grants' Pass continued to be the main center of information and strategy development.

Final crew actions called for completing the rehabilitation of the wilderness helispots, picking up debris from the staging areas, rolling up the many miles of unstrung hose, gathering tools and packing up the Gardner Camp. If the need to suppress flare-ups was warranted, all of the crews were available on a three minute call back basis.
The Silver Fire Incident was rapidly approaching its inevitable end. Along the 113 miles of fireline surrounding its perimeter, what remained to get done was the restoration of the land to as natural an appearance as possible. Considering the fire's impact and all of the events of the past nine weeks, there was little left to do that was humanly possible. The rest was left to time and the natural healing processes.

For many firefighters the hard work was over. The desire to return home, hopefully in time for Thanksgiving, was more appealing than remaining under the dampened tarps of the canvas tents in fire camp. As such is the case in times like this, when final work phases near completion and boredom begins to set in, that reliable substitute, camaraderie, inevitably surfaces in the milieu of the camp.

In the final days of the Silver Fire, jubilant souls erected Christmas trees, pleasantly highlighting the fire's notable duration. Decorated with ornaments garnered from supply, and strung with lights powered by the constant flow of the undying generators, the Gardner Camp glowed; its twinkling reflections a tribute to the joy of an arduous task put to bed. The pensive times in which many had felt that the fire would burn long into the winter, were finally over. And in the end, as in the case of the Silver Fire, creativity prevailed.

On November 5th, final chores were completed. The radio repeater and equipment installed atop Pearsoll Peak were sling loaded and removed by helicopter. The Bitterroot crew was sent out to finalize rehab work and install waterbars at various helispots. Bucket work by the helicopters was performed on an "as needed" basis and other flying duties entailed mostly reconnaissance work and transporting crews. By early afternoon, all of the firefighters were back in camp, stowing their gear and checking out of Gardner Camp.

In the last two days all of the operations booths erected in fire camp, commonly referred to as the 'hamburger stands', were dismantled. The materials were stacked and loaded for removal. The foot paths were graded and sawdust was spread, the remaining trash was hauled away and the impacts to the Gardner Ranch were mitigated.

Down at the helispot adjacent to the river, the last helicopter slowly lifted off the Chetco Riverbar, whined its jet engines and headed up the canyon. Over the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and the waning Silver Fire it flew; its assigned destination, the old smokejumper base.

After the take-down of the Gardner Camp, Jim Sullivan assumed the duties of Incident Commander. He was left to govern a small force of helitack personnel and their equipment stationed out of the Illinois Valley Airport. Their assignments consisted of reconnaissance and monitoring the entire fire.
During their flight on November 7th, very few smokes were spotted. Most of the remaining smokes were rising out of stumps and downed logs deep within the heart of the blackened forest. Burning snags that posed any threats were eliminated through the use of aerial water applications. Overall, the fire was spent.

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Then it happened - on Sunday, November 8, 1987, a steady rain began to fall. It started in the late afternoon on the western edge of the Siskiyou National Forest. It had blown in from over the southwest ocean waters, in the typical fashion that the winter storms followed. At first it began as a gentle drizzle never letting up. Twenty minutes later its steady rhythm resounded louder on the rooftops of the neighborhood homes. A wetting rain had finally arrived. It unleashed sighs and deepfelt relief, evoking praises from the lips of many; the steady streams of falling water were ample cause for giving thanks.

Welcome moisture splattered upon the forest floor. Slowly the sweet fluid settled into the deeply dried duff. The silver gray appearance of the sun burnt fuels was suddenly turned a darkened hue. And the rain continued to fall.

The remaining smokes slowly sizzled, their steaming wisps, ephemeral symbols of a dying phenomena. The rain continued, steady and sure - but never destructive nor piercingly hard. As ferocious as the fire had been, raging in fury and dictating its will, the first autumn rains gently fell, gracefully soothing the parched arid hills.

For several hours the sky maintained a relentless pace of benign precipitation. It was evidently clear that this was the end for the unsated appetite of the once roaring beast was now imbibing its just deserts. And rightly so, for water, that vitally needed and precious fluid, was everywhere.

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At 1600 hours, on the foggy, wet and cold, gray afternoon of November 9th, 1987, after 72 days of contest and worry, the Silver Fire was officially declared under control.

A seasonal flair was in the air.
CONCLUSION

After attaining control of the Silver Fire, gone were the many worries that are normally associated with suppression efforts, remaining though were the numerous management concerns about what to do next with the burnt over lands.

The Siskiyou National Forest, in total, lost 110,247 acres to wildfire during 1987. An additional 17,805 acres were burned on adjacent BLM, private and state lands bringing the total fire acreage burned in the Siskiyou Mountains to 128,252 acres. Of that total, the Silver Fire declared 96,540 for its own. The General Forestland area affected by the Silver Fire was 44,900 acres. The remaining 51,640 acres burned entirely within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. About 20 percent of the fire was intensely burned, 30 percent moderately burned and 50 percent lightly burned or unburned.

The General Forest area, the burnt over land north of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, remains the focus of rehabilitation studies and salvage logging opportunities. It is also the center of national attention with regards to its future management objectives and plans.

The area burned in the wilderness will be left to heal as nature dictates. This area remains open to those interested in viewing the fire’s aftereffects and studying the land healing processes involved.

When the Silver Fire first began on August 30th it was an individual event occurring during a multiple fire situation on the west coast. The spectacular lightning storm touched off over two hundred fires in northern California and southern Oregon. In Oregon alone, 24 fires developed extremely fast. Many of them posed immediate threats to human life and private property. The Silver Fire was low on the priority list at first, as it burned remotely away from human lives and property.

As responses were made to other fires, the Silver Fire was advanced on the priority list. However, there were critical factors working against the Silver Fire by then. One factor was that after the first two days of burning, the entire Silver Creek and surrounding drainages were socked in with smoke. Visibility was zero. This prevented any aerial suppression or reconnaissance. A second critical factor was the inaccessibility of the area. And an important third element was the total amount of resources and personnel committed to the other fires.

Even with the initial attack smokejumpers, there was still not enough personnel to handle the fire when it was first attacked. The effort was valiant but futile. Retardant was needed, but it was unavailable. Additional personnel would have helped but there was no way of getting them in; nor was it safe to do so. Smokejumper resources were tapped to the maximum, and the weather and fire conditions were just not favorable for direct attack. The Silver Fire had conflagration flowing in its veins with campaign status written as its destiny.

The Silver Complex Fire burned for 72 days. It was one of the longest running fires in the history of recorded wildfire. It spanned a duration of
four months, from August until November. In started on August 30th, was
contained November 4th, controlled on November 9th and monitored well into
December until substantial rainfall fell.

The long duration of the fire makes it unique. It also reflects on
evolving fire management policies and strategies. In the past, and under
similar conditions, normally a fire of this nature would have been hit with all
available resources with the focused objective of keeping the size of the fire
to an absolute minimum. No costs were spared. It was simply a matter of
aggressive firefighting and total resource commitment. But this philosophy
also has its shortfalls. In many ways it can be wasteful of time and energy,
especially under blow-up conditions such as those experienced during the Silver
Fire. And in this case, immediate direct attack represented a compromise of
some vitally important safety aspects, a factor that lately has been paramount
on the minds of many fire managers. One of the basic rules of fighting wildfire
is to do so aggressively but provide for safety first, and in the case of the
Silver Fire that is how it was done. Testimony to this is the fact that there
were zero fatalities on the fire and that the accident frequency was minimal.

Recent Fire Management studies also prove that at times the most effective
way to fight fire is to let the fire dictate its own practical and safety
conscious boundaries. Well in this case, neither of these philosophies was
practical mainly due to the severity of the total big picture of the west coast
fire crisis. Even with the mobilization of 22,000 firefighting personnel, there
was just no way to get even a small fraction of them safely into the arena of
the Silver Fire.

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The Silver Fire was a total natural event. It goes on record as the largest
fire in the history of the Siskiyou National Forest from any ignition source.
Nationally it was one of the largest fires this century listing lightning as the
only cause. There have been many other large fires throughout history, but
records indicate that most of the major conflagrations had either multiple
causes or were man-caused. Ironically, in 1881, an estimated 1,000,000 acres
were consumed on the Michigan Fire due to a lightning storm experienced on
August 31st; however, the initial causes were recorded as logging and settler
fires with lightning contributing to some of those burnt acres. 1/ 

Many of the large historical fires were generally a series of individual
fires that later merged. Almost all of the major conflagrations grew to
enormous size because of dry weather and pre-existing drought conditions. Winds
and erratic behaviour subsequently caused the major blow-ups. Under these
conditions, these large fires usually blew out rapidly. A good example of this
was the 311,000 acre Tillamook Fire in Oregon during 1933. Within a twenty-four
hour burning period, on August 24-25, 270,000 acres of its total area violently
exploded and then died out. The first Tillamook Burn lasted only 12 days. One
other notable large historical fire was the Adirondack Fire in New York in 1903,
it burned from multiple causes for 50 days and slowly consumed 637,000 acres. 2/

1/ Brown and Davis, *Forest Fire: Control and Use* (New York: McGraw-Hill,
2/ Ibid.
After containment, the question of "just how big is the Silver Fire", was raised. The total area encompassed by the 113 miles of constructed fireline was approximately 150.5 square miles or roughly 9 percent of the total area of the Siskiyou National Forest. Converted into general terms, this area is equivalent to the surface areas of the cities of Portland, San Francisco, Grant's Pass, Cave Junction, Brookings-Harbor, and Gold Beach. It should be noted though, that not all of the area was intensely burned.

Intensities of the burn are illustrated and defined in an extensive mapping survey of the fire by Cornell, Gross, Tusco, Greenup, Gripp and Polzin. Their definitions of burn intensities are as follows: Unburned areas: those areas with canopy intact, with the duff and litter unburned; Low intensity burn areas: those areas with green canopies and blackened forest floors; Medium intensity areas: those areas with a mixture of green and brown canopies, with some trees killed and some left green. These areas also have 90% of the duff and litter consumed with some plantations lightly burned with green saplings remaining; and lastly, High intensity areas: those areas that are mostly 90% black, with the trees killed and the leaves stripped. These areas also contain plantations that were killed with their leaves completely stripped.

Their in-depth study of the Silver Fire area illustrated that the nature of the burn was rather diverse. During the blow-out episodes much of the fire intensity was extreme, consuming the ridgetops and leaving extensive areas of charred old-growth timber in several areas of the North Zone, especially in the Chinaman Hat, Silver, Indigo and Bald Mountain Recovery areas. Down in the creek bottoms, along some slopes of the Chetco and Illinois Rivers, the fire crept slowly, giving the appearance of a slight underburn. Other parts of the Illinois River Drainage burned with moderate intensities, with about a four mile stretch of high intensity burn along the mid-slopes to the high ridges on the east face of South Bend Mountain. Two of the largest areas of high intensity burning occurred in the Big Craggies Botanical Area and along the high peak areas of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness in the southern portion of the fire.

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Estimated expenditures as of January 15, 1988, for the Silver Fire attained the $19,000,000 mark, with an estimated per acre cost of $190.00.

The Redmond Fire Cache delivered 389,693 pounds of equipment and supplies to the fire valued at $2,181,000. Retardant costs from fixed-wing aircraft came to $284,567.00. Retardant costs from helicopters amounted to $147,450.00. Water drops from helicopters came to an additional $161,057.00.

In total, 439,763 gallons of retardant were dropped at a total cost of $432,017. The total cost for all aerial drops came to $593,064 for a total of 842,406 gallons of liquid dropped on the Silver Fire.

Ten different fixed-wing aircraft flew 94 missions entailing 88 hours and 42 minutes of flight time. No accidents or injuries occurred. Retardant costs from these aircraft averaged $1.29 per gallon.

Helicopters flew 698 hours in assorted missions between Oct. 11th and Oct. 28th. They delivered 3,507 passengers and 226,839 pounds of cargo. Costs for
aerial drops were $0.63 per gallon for retardant and $0.40 per gallon for water.

The ground support organization drove over 75,000 miles in green fleet and rental vehicles to deliver the firecache requests and other needed orders. There were only two minor vehicle accidents in this phase of the operation.

Examples of some of the kinds of equipment delivered to the Silver Fire were:

- 2326 pulaskis
- 1362 shovels
- 130 McLeods
- 126 Chainsaw kits
- 2538 Fireshirts
- 6686 Firepants
- 5981 Pairs of gloves
- 1985 Cloth sleeping bags
- 106 Mark III Pump kits
- 244,000 feet of 1 1/2" hose (46 miles)
- 204,200 feet of 1" hose (39 miles)
- 12,950 feet of garden hose (2.5 miles)

These figures did not include equipment brought on by individual crews, district crews, and the Siskiyou Forest Cache.

Of course, with all that equipment, someone needed to run it. Approximately 4,000 individuals were involved either directly on the lines fighting the fire or employed in the back-up, support and overhead divisions of the fire. There were a total of 135 crews utilized, 127 of which were there for one tour and 8 crews which stayed on for two tours. The number of actual crewmen assigned to the fire totaled 2,775. An additional 670 Army troops attended the fire, and another 50 National Guardsmen were there. At maximum, there were 240 individual overhead personnel on the fire, and a variable number of catering personnel which fluctuated between 40 and 100 people. Aviation personnel fluctuated between 25 and 50 at various times. Numerous private individuals were also recruited and hired. Most of these folks consisted of loggers, fellers, cat-skinner drivers, and one Fire Information Officer.

The maximum number of personnel assigned to the fire on any given day was 1797 on September 11th.

The endurance award for the maximum number of days spent on fireline duty goes to veteran woodsman Lonnie Woosley for his remarkable 52 days spent out on the line. Perhaps the greatest acknowledgment that he received was for his innovative hose and pump-lays that were installed under his direction that secured the protection of the Tolman Ranch. Good job Lonnie!

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The safety record on the Silver Fire was astonishing. The number one factor that stands out well is the fact that there were no fatalities during the fire. Also notable was the accident frequency rate of 1 reportable accident for every 8,000 man-hours worked. Over 5,000 hours of chainsaw use in line construction and rehabilitation work was accomplished without any accidents. The majority of
non-reportable accidents consisted of coughs, colds, blisters, tired feet and ankles. There were also numerous cases of poison oak and bee stings. All in all, it was a very safe fire and the safety officers should feel proud of the job they accomplished.

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Interest in information about the Silver Fire received national attention. At the Silver Fire Information Center in Brookings, Oregon, thousands of inquiries were registered, quite remarkable for a town with a population of only 3,300.

Phone calls were received from as far south as San Diego, with information requested from as far east as Washington, D.C. Much public interest was also generated in Gold Beach, Cave Junction, Agness and the other outlying communities. Many, many people came out of the woods to find out exactly what was going on and the Fire Information Center let them know. It was a highly successful operation.

At the Supervisor's Office in Grants Pass, Public Affairs Officer Warren Olney and his dedicated staff worked many long hours securing the facts and figures needed to keep the public informed of the Silver Fire's activities. This presented no easy task as numerous phone calls, letters and visits from community and national leaders arrived at his office non-stop throughout the duration of the fire.

On top of this, the public information office was also heavily engrossed with a tremendous deluge of public inquiry also being generated by the recent release of the newly proposed Siskiyou Forest Plan and its Draft Environmental Impact Statement. A fair share of the heat from the Silver Fire was absorbed by the information office at the Supervisor's Office and their efforts in disseminating facts, and squelching the numerous fire rumors that sporadically "flared up", was commendable.

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The interpretations of why there ever was a Silver Fire go on and on. Some say it was the greatest thing that could ever happen to the Siskiyou National Forest at this juncture in time. Others claim that the Forest was long overdue for a fire of this magnitude. While others adhere to the simple fact that the fire event was an Act of God. But the reality is that the Silver Fire did its thing. It was an unplanned natural event, and perhaps justly so, it will help in the resolvement of some of the humanly dictated controversial forest issues.

But the important thing now is that the end results of the fire, in conjunction with the continuing recovery efforts, are now outlining the basis for future management directions and land use planning objectives for major post-wildfire economic and conservation issues.

As usual, the Siskiyou National Forest continues to remain in the forefront of national forest management, leadership, education and stewardship of the public domain. The Silver Fire incident was just another example of how the Forest Service dutifully serves the public and provides distinctly sound stewardship of its lands.
One more thing - hats off to the yellow-shirts for their outstanding work!