

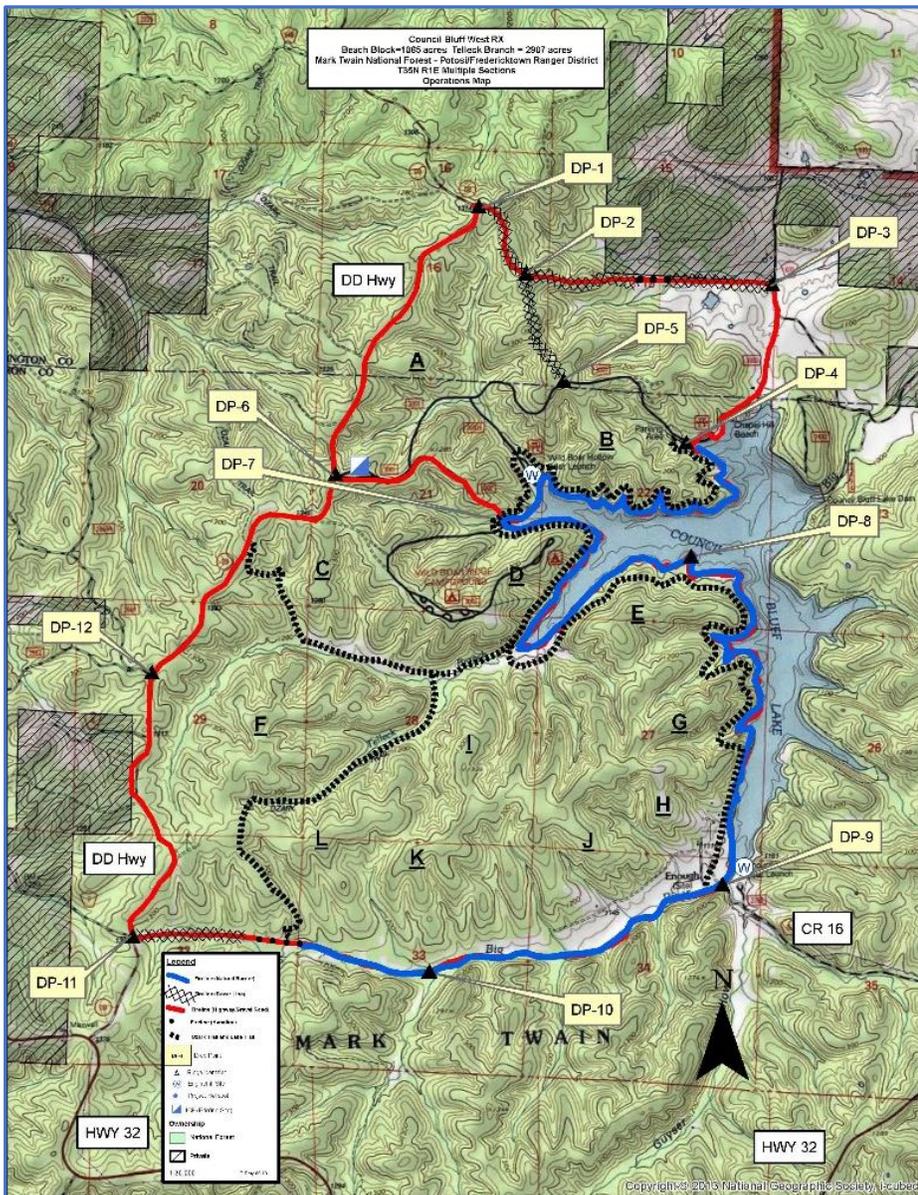
Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Rx on Public Recreation Area Lands

Date: April 3, 2021

Location: Council Bluff Telleck Branch Prescribed Fire, Council Bluff Recreation Area, Mark Twain National Forest, Missouri

Incident Within an Incident: Private Citizen Incursions on a Prescribed Fire



The Council Bluff Telleck Branch Prescribed Fire unit consisted of a 2,907-acre block located inside the Council Bluff Recreation Area. This prescribed fire was the second burn to be completed at the Council Bluff Recreation Area this year. The first, the 1,200-acre Beach Block Prescribed Fire, had been implemented two days earlier.

The Telleck Branch and Beach Block prescribed fires shared a common control line. Council Bluff Lake comprised the eastern control line for both units. In addition, both units have multiple trails, boat launch accesses, and campgrounds (all campgrounds were still closed for the season).

On April 3 at 1100, a test fire was started in the Council Bluff Telleck Branch Prescribed Fire's DIV C. The test fire had positive results. Therefore, all ground firing commenced at 1136. DIV B started ignition on DD Highway at Drop Point 6. DIV A started firing in the Enough Fields area, Drop Point 9. DIV C started ignition and burning around infrastructure in the campground on Ridge D.

First Public Incursion Occurs

Air Attack had flown a recon of the unit between 1100 and 1130. The helicopter had flown a recon of the unit before they began PSD operations at approximately 1340. Aerial operations began at 1350. Five minutes later, the first of two public (private citizen) incursion incidents occurred.

When the helicopter spotted public persons on the D Ridge shoreline, all firing operations were halted. An Incident Within an Incident was declared, an IC was designated, and a search and rescue effort for these people began.

Next, personnel from the local engine crew located these private citizens along the shoreline. However, actual contact was not made as these people fled along the shoreline.

The engine crew followed these shoreline persons until they were clear of the prescribed fire unit. Prior to any further firing, the unit was reconned by both Air Attack and the helicopter. Firing operations then continued and were completed by 1442.

In addition, all but one trailhead had been posted and flagged off. The trailhead that hadn't been posted was located on the other side of the lake. It was posted and closed at 1400.

Second Incursion: Civilian Mountain Biker

At about 1530, it was reported to the Burn Boss by an engine crew member that a civilian with a mountain bike was spotted at the boat ramp being brought in by a private boat whose occupants had been out fishing. The mountain bike subject was asked if they were okay. They stated that they were okay and explained how they were caught inside the unit during the aerial operation, had gone to the lake shore and flagged down the boat. The boat was able to pick the mountain biker up from the shoreline and bring them back to the boat ramp.

It was later learned that the mountain biker had entered the area at approximately 1230 and rode in a clockwise pattern through the previously ignited Beach Block Prescribed Fire area. (Warning and restricted area signs that had been posted for this burn were still up.) The mountain biker eventually entered the active Council Bluff Telleck Branch Prescribed Fire's DIV A inside the Enough Fields area—ending up in the middle of the aerial operation for about an hour and a half.

The prescribed fire personnel were unaware of the mountain biker until the engine crew members talked to him as he was being dropped off by the private boat. The engine crew members happened to be drafting at the boat ramp when the private boat appeared with the mountain biker.

It was determined that the mountain biker would have passed through ground ignitions and posted areas. The route he took is approximately 13 miles long. He was about two miles short of completing the loop.

The mountain biker did not receive a citation. There was only very brief contact between the engine crew and the mountain biker at the boat ramp. No contact information was obtained at the time. The mountain biker left the recreation area in his own vehicle after being dropped off at the boat ramp. The mountain biker contacted the district ranger five days after the incident to relay his experience.

Lessons for Conducting Prescribed Fires in Public Recreation Locations

- ❖ Ensure that all areas are posted and provide up-to-date information. (The direction in which this mountain biker started his loop route had warning signs for the Beach Block Prescribed Fire that occurred two days earlier.)

- ❖ Prior to ignition, double-check all closed areas for the potential presence of private citizens.
- ❖ “Hard-close” entire trail systems. (Definition of “hard close”: To keep the public from entering, agency personnel are stationed at trailheads by sunrise and remain staffed until the completion of the prescribed fire.) To successfully accomplish this preventive action can be a challenge in such a large recreation area with many “illegal” trails. On this incident, having more personnel would have been necessary to accomplish this.

This RLS was submitted by:

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