



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Lewis and Clark
National Forest
Rocky Mountain
Ranger District

1102 Main Ave. NW
P. O. Box 340
Choteau, MT 59422
406 466-5341
FAX 406 466 2237

File Code: 1230/5140

Date: ~~July 18~~ August 3, 2007

Route To:

Subject: Delegation of Authority – Ahorn Fire Incident

To: Jeff Whitney's Southwest Incident Management Team Type 1

Delegation

I hereby delegate to you the authority for management of the Ahorn Fire Incident on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District (RMRD), Lewis and Clark National Forest (LCF). This delegation of authority will commence at 2200, Saturday, August 4, 2007. The fire is currently under jurisdiction of the USDA Forest Service. The Ahorn Fire is currently well established in the East Chinese Wall Fire Management Area; within the Fire Exclusion Area; and in the non-wilderness.

The fire was initial attacked on Wednesday, July 11. The fire was evaluated under Stage I WFIP as a candidate WFU event. According to the Lightning Detection Map, lightning occurred in the area on June 28. Although the fire was determined to be a natural ignition the decision was made to suppress the new fire start due to its close proximity to the Fire Exclusion Area (within approximately 1/3 mile).

The Ahorn Incident is currently delegated to Wally Bennett's Northern Rockies Incident Management Team Type 1 who took control of the incident on July 18, 2007. Bennett's team was extended seven days, while having responsibility for both the Ahorn and Meriwether Fires.

Event/Incident Summaries

The Ahorn Fire was discovered and reported by the Prairie Reef Lookout at 1450 on Wednesday, July 11, 2007. The reported smoke was confirmed at approximately 1600 on July 11. At that time, the fire was producing continuous grey smoke and was about 2 acres in size, primarily exhibiting single and group tree torching and surface fire in the 1000 hour fuels. The fire's perimeter grew to about 25 acres by 1730.

Resources ordered included a Type 2 restricted helicopter for bucket work, an air-tanker for retardant, and smokejumpers. Retardant from an air-tanker and water-drops from the helicopter were effective in containing the fire's northeast flank on a ridgeline. However, unusual east winds and rolling material have caused short-range spotting and growth across and down slope towards the southwest. The fire remained active into late evening, approximately 2330.

The immediate trail area was swept and public contacts made to redirect the public from entering the Ahorn Basin drainage. A Trail Closure Special Order LC_07_D1_03 was placed into effect on July 13, 2007. Posting of the trail closure was completed and coordinated with the Flathead National Forest for access from the FNF. The most recent closure that is currently in effect is an area closure related to the Skyland, Fool Creek and Ahorn Fires. This Special Order



LC_07_D1_14 closes the District from its northernmost boundary, south to Observation Point in the Scapegoat Wilderness.

Initial operations related to the fire's activity were directed toward line construction for fire containment, public safety and structure protection of the Indian Point Cabin in the West Fork of the South Fork Sun River drainage. The Indian Point Administrative site is located less than a mile from the mouth of Ahorn Creek. Structure protection was installed at Indian Point.

Initial attack was only partly successful in containing the north flank. Extended attack resulted in about 60% containment with direct line construction. On July 15, the fire perimeter increased in area from 500 acres to 4000 acres in a 3 hour period. The fire became well established within about 2 to 3 miles of the South Fork Sun River trailhead at the end of the Benchmark Road. The fire perimeter has continued to advance and spread in all directions and now poses an additional threat to the Sun Canyon area and Beaver-Willow drainage. The fire is currently at 40,000 acres.

~~The immediate trail area has been swept and public contacts started to re-direct the public from entering the Ahorn Basin drainage. A Trail Closure Special Order LC_07_D1_03 was placed into effect immediately on July 13, 2007. Posting of the trail closure has begun and will be coordinated with the Flathead National Forest for access from the FNF.~~

~~Initial operations related to the fire's activity have been directed toward line construction for fire containment, public safety and structure protection of the Indian Point Cabin in the West Fork of the South Fork Sun River drainage. The Indian Point Administrative site is located less than a mile from the mouth of Ahorn Creek. Structure protection will be installed at Indian Point.~~

~~Initial attack was only partly successful in containing the north flank. Extended attack resulted in about 60% containment with direct line construction. On July 15, the fire perimeter increased in area from 500 acres to 4000 acres in a 3 hour period. The fire is currently well established within about 2 to 3 miles of the South Fork Sun River Trailhead at the end of the Benchmark Road. The fire is currently between 7000 to 8000 acres.~~

Contingency actions were identified in the wilderness and non-wilderness east of the fire area. In the wilderness, the priority infrastructures that required structure protection included the West Fork Sun River, South Fork Sun River, and lower North Fork Sun River Suspension Pack Bridges, ~~and the~~ Pretty Prairie, Indian Point and Cabin Creek Administrative Cabins. In the non-wilderness, both administrative and private facilities have received evaluation for and implementation of ~~potential~~ structure protection: In the Benchmark area this includes two administrative sites, three developed campgrounds, one picnic area, one historic cabin rental, three developed trailheads, two packer corral facilities, two resorts and forty eight recreation residence cabins located on National Forest lands. In the Willow Creek area on private land this includes two private ranches, eleven summer homes, one Girl Scout camp and a herder cabin owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In addition, there is a Forest Service Administrative site located in this area. In the Sun River area there are forty four recreation residence cabins, one resort, one cabin owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, one packer corral and one outfitter's staging facility located on National Forest lands. The Greenfield Irrigation District owns a complex of buildings located near the Gibson Dam facility on withdrawn lands. On private inholdings in this area there are two resorts, one lodge and twenty five residences.

An Emergency Plan (E-Plan) for the Rocky Mountain Front has been developed and coordinated with local resources. The plan addresses the location and condition of structures on National Forest System lands and within six miles east of the forest boundary. The document should be referenced and utilized in addressing or completing any necessary structure protection plans; or coordination with local sheriffs for pre-evacuation or evacuation purposes.

Concerns

Concerns are primarily related to the potentially long duration of the fire incident and potential to move east into the non-wilderness into gentle, undulating terrain with limited fuel breaks leading to the National Forest and private land boundary.

The South Fork Sun River trailhead and Mortimer trailhead serves as the most used trailheads for ingress and egress to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex throughout the summer and fall months. The public and commercial outfitters are will experience significant impacts since the fire has become established in the Bend make and Sun Canyon as the become established in the Bend make and Sun Canyon

In addition, the entire South Fork Sun River and North Fork Sun River has actively been stocked with Fluvial Arctic Grayling for several years, by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, in an effort to restore the grayling population in the State of Montana, according to the species conservation plan.

Responsibility

You have full authority and responsibility for managing activities associated with the Ahorn Fire Incident, within the framework of law, policy, and direction provided in Fire Policy. Your primary responsibility is to plan, organize, direct and coordinate your assigned and ordered resources for efficient and effective management of the Ahorn Fire. I expect your team to work cooperatively with Bennett's Larson's Team during the transition of the fire assignment. I expect the team to continue developing a Long Term Implementation Plan to address concerns and challenges that the Ahorn Fire may continue to present during the remainder of fire season.

Larson's Team agreed to continue working on completing the Long Term Implementation Plan for the Ahorn Fire, along with your input as needed
Munoz, as the Agency Administrator for the Lewis and Clark National Forest. In addition, I am designating Ian Bardwell as Resource Advisor for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District throughout the incident. Ian Bardwell may use and designate additional technical specialists (THSP) to assist in his resource advisor role as needed. He will coordinate their inclusion in the daily IAP during your strategy and planning sessions.

You are accountable to the Forest Supervisor. I am designating the District Ranger, Michael Munoz, as the Agency Administrator for the Lewis and Clark National Forest. In addition, I am designating Ian Bardwell as Resource Advisor for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District throughout the incident. Ian Bardwell may use and designate additional technical specialists (THSP) to assist in his resource advisor role as needed. He will coordinate their inclusion in the daily IAP during your strategy and planning sessions.

An E-Plan has been established for communities on the RMF. You and your team must familiarize yourselves with the E-Plan should the fire extend outside the Bob Marshall Wilderness Boundary. Please review the E-Plan to provide critical feedback on any potential control strategies, structure risk analysis, and pre-evacuation and evacuation coordination.

~~If necessary, You~~ are expected to coordinate with Lewis and Clark, and Teton Counties in developing and finalizing activities associated with the implementation of the E-Plan. ~~Larson's Team has already begun~~ Coordination of evacuation efforts with the Lewis and Clark and Teton County Sheriff has already begun.

Coordination is actively occurring with grazing permittees with allotments in the Benchmark and Willow Creek areas. A protocol has been established for the safe removal of livestock. You will be responsible for continuing this coordination with your team members, the Resource Advisor and the permittees. ~~Additional coordination may be required if the fire approaches Teton County.~~

Financial limitations will be consistent with the best approach to achieving objectives identified for the Ahorn Fire Incident, in due consideration of values at risk. Specific direction for the Ahorn Fire Incident includes the following management and environmental concerns as listed:

1. **a. Safety of fire personnel and the public is the highest priority in planning and implementing wildland fire use and appropriate management response strategy and tactics. Follow the 10 Standard Fire Orders, mitigate the 18 Watch Out Situations and maintain LCES at all times. Assess situational awareness and exposure to risks before engaging in field operations.**
 - b. Specifically consider Fire Order #10, as the orders were originally written, "Fight fire aggressively, having provided for safety first." This order is simply the rules of engagement and disengagement. Make sure all personnel know how they will engage and when they will disengage for their given assignment and situation.**
2. **All fire actions should be compatible with wilderness values and objectives. Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics (MIST) should be utilized where appropriate and always in regards to fire personnel safety. Critical natural resource habitat should be given appropriate consideration in planning and implementation of strategy and tactics.**
3. **a. Primitive tools are preferred for all operations where they do not compromise the safety of fire management resources, the general public, or the historic/administrative sites (e.g. resources being utilized inserted, or released from the wilderness should be hiking or packed out versus flying). Mechanized equipment use (e.g. pumps, saws, aircraft landings, sling loads, water drops, retardant, fire line explosives) needs consulted on and approved by the District Ranger, Designated Acting Ranger or Designated Resource Advisor. Any requests to use soil disturbing mechanized equipment within wilderness, such as a dozer, will require Regional Forester approval.**
 - b. All actual mechanized use within the wilderness needs to be documented by date, type of activity and location. The team must provide this documentation to the Resource Advisor. The information is used for annual wilderness reports.**
 - c. All personnel have the authority to take action with mechanized equipment and/or transportation related to life threatening or imminent personal safety situations. All tracking protocol is to be followed.**

- 4. You are assigned responsibility to ensure all personnel assigned to the incident comply with the Food Storage Special Order, LC00-18, in effect for the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE). Critical grizzly bear habitat and use areas exist throughout the fire area on the RMRD. Management actions and incident support facilities must consider the presence of bears and the need to minimize contacts with humans. Failure of an individual or crew to comply with the Special Order will result in dismissal from the fire incident and potentially further disciplinary action, including issuance of citations to the individual(s).**
- 5. Your assigned personnel need to become familiar with the Emergency Plan (E-Plan) for the Rocky Mountain Front for use of the plan to coordinate any potential pre-evacuation and evacuation procedures with county authorities.**
- 6. Your team is delegated the responsibility for any new fire starts on the southern half of the RMRD. This responsibility includes both wilderness and non-wilderness portions of the RMRD. Your area of responsibility begins at Spotted Bear Pass on the Continental Divide, along Moose Creek to the North Fork Sun River and then north along the North Fork Sun River to Headquarters Creek, following Headquarters Creek to Headquarters Pass, then following Trail # 165 to South Fork Teton Road east to the Forest boundary.**
 - The District Ranger or Acting Ranger will remain responsible for approval of the Go/No Go decision regarding new starts in the wilderness.**
 - In the wilderness, I want your team to emphasize the use of primitive tools for all Initial Attack efforts where the situation allows while maintaining safety of fire personnel.**
 - All requests for mechanized authorizations must be approved by the District Ranger, Acting District Ranger, and/or the Designated Resource Advisor.**
 - Additional resource requests to assist in initial attack and extended attack efforts will be coordinated through the Interagency Dispatch Center in Great Falls, Montana.**
 - The District will continue to be responsible for fixed-wing air patrol flights. We may request resources from your team to conduct patrol flights of the District.**
- 7. Individual fires, either wildland fire use or suppression events, may be assigned to the Team for management.**
- 8. Precautions must be taken to prevent the introduction and subsequent spread of noxious weeds. This includes the pre-treatment and post-treatment of vehicles and helicopters used to support the incident.**
- 9. Precautions must be taken to prevent the introduction and subsequent spread of aquatic nuisance species or pathogens. This includes pre-treatment and post-treatment of buckets, snorkels, and other apparatus utilized for water delivery operations during the incident.**

- 10. Continue to keep public and government representatives informed of fire behavior and management actions. Public information meetings, fact sheets, press releases and news media relations for the incident will be coordinated between you, the team's fire information officer, the District Ranger(s) or acting District Ranger(s) and the team assigned to the Fool Creek Incident. The District has established an in-depth protocol to keep people informed and squelch the spread of misinformation. We expect your team to continue the high level of public and media engagement in fire information we have established.**
- 11. You are expected to effectively manage fire incident tactics commensurate with objectives developed in the WFSA and Long Term Implementation Plan. We expect you to consult daily with the line officer representative on revalidation of the WFSA and Long Term Implementation Plan. Utilize the management action points (MAP) identified within the fire management area. I request that the incident team work with the Resource Advisor in implementing the specific management action(s) when a MAP is approached or met. The Long Term Implementation Plan should be dynamic and utilize the daily validation to ensure that updates or other actions are not needed, or that appropriate revision is provided if needed.**
- 12. You are delegated responsibility for the timely update, completion and submittal of the ICS-209, to the Great Falls Interagency Dispatch Center.**
- 13. We authorize you to take every opportunity to provide trainee assignments throughout all levels of positions to your incident command team, including the opportunity for existing, qualified wildland fire personnel, to promote exposure and experience in developing and implementing Long Term Implementation Plans.**
- 14. Cost containment of management action for all fires is high priority. All decisions and their implementation will consider lower cost alternatives that still meet resource management and fire management objectives. If more costly alternatives are selected, a rationale for that decision must be documented for the incident. Use Appendix D of the AMR to document your cost decisions.**
 - a. Attach the Appendix D cost factor matrix, with decisions documented, with the daily review of the WFSA.**
 - b. Document specific decisions in relation to the cost factors in the daily IC summary.**
 - c. Document in the 209 the significant issues for values at risk/cost factors (blocks 28 & 29).**
 - d. Talk with your Agency Representative(s) daily to validate the WFSA review and cost factor decisions.**
 - e. Make rationale for decisions crystal clear to minimize interpretations.**
 - f. Utilize the Long Range Plan and the actions included in the management actions at appropriate locations to guide decisions.**

15. **I request that you maintain very close coordination with the Team managing the Fool Creek Incident. Specifically, coordination of any TFR's, management actions, public information, trail/area closures and initial attack are critical. Sharing and coordination of aviation resources remains necessary between the teams assigned to the Ahorn and Fool Creek Incidents.**

I am honored and privileged to have your assistance in addressing the Ahorn Fire Incident. Please share with me how we may contribute to your safe and successful assignment. This delegation of authority is effective at 2200, Saturday, August 4, 2007.

LESLEY W. THOMPSON
Forest Supervisor

Accepted: JEFF WHITNEY ~~WALLY~~
~~BENNETT~~

cc: Allen Rowley, Michael Munoz, Brad
McBratney, Gail Thurston