

Marbleyard Fire Summary

June 2002, George Washington & Jefferson National Forests

Background:

- Location: James River Face Wilderness, 8900 ac. Popular trail network for day hiking, backpacking, and equestrians, including Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Popular and highly visible geologic feature – the Devil’s Marbleyard; 8-10 acre fully exposed rock/boulder field along Belfast Trail. Nearby communities include Glasgow, Natural Bridge Station, Lynchburg, Lexington. James River is popular with rafters and canoeists. Major roadways include US 501, I-81.
- Fire Size: 2935 acres. 4 divisions; 3 divisions in Wilderness.
- Ignited by Lightning, June 5. Became part of a complex of 3 fires (Chicken 6/5, Kennedy 6/11). Chicken Fire was the initial suppression priority. Type 2 IMT from 6/14 to 6/22. On 6/14, both Chicken (740 ac) and Kennedy (12 ac) were contained. Marbleyard was at 450 acres.
- No allowance for Wildland Fire Use or anything other than full suppression in the George Washington Forest Plan (FLMP) (revised 1993), no approved WFU plan in place.
- WFSA alternative selected: Aggressive suppression to contain fire on west side of Balcony Falls Ridge, east of FR 781, and north of the Belfast Trail.
- Significant Safety Concerns:
 - High amounts of Gypsy Moth (gypmo) mortality – dead/down fuels, snags.
 - Remote, rugged country; 3-4 mile one way hike to fireline.
 - 2 medevacs and several personal injuries.

Significant Impacts:

- Red fire retardant residue on Marbleyard quartzite, well-known and visible landscape feature.
- Motorized Transport and Mechanical Equipment Use: chainsaws, brushcutters, ATVs.
- Helispot construction – 1 acre clearcut.
- 1 mile of steep handline construction.
- Chainsaw snagging in all divisions – cutting on the green side.
- “Improving” of firelines – brushcutting.
- Large scale aerial burnout.

Lessons Learned:

- Get involved in the WFSA development if possible to ensure Wilderness values are adequately considered.
- Keep abreast of plans for the next shift. Attend planning meetings or communicate your concerns to the District Ranger or Incident Commander beforehand.
- Listen, ask questions, seek alternatives, don’t dictate.
- Size up the fire and request help – in most cases you need at least one READ per division.
- Make sure you get Wilderness objectives and key messages into the IAPs (hit MIST often).
- Attend morning briefings and have a message ready.
- Cover your area – be visible.

Marbleyard Fire Rehabilitation Plan, 10 pages, key points:

- Waterbar all handlines greater than 15% grade.
- Rehab handlines by raking disturbed soil and debris into the line.
- Flush cut all tree stumps as low as possible to the ground.
- Scatter bucked pieces and cut brush out of sight of trails.
- Spread dirt on all stumps and visible cut ends.

Marbleyard Fire Progression:

6/5-7: 15 acres	6/14: 1100 ac
6/8: 85 ac	6/15: 1170 ac
6/9: 455 ac	6/16: 1740 ac
6/10: 717 ac	6/17: 2208 ac
6/11: 947 ac	6/18: 2935 ac