

Long Draw / Miller Homestead Fire Review

Vale and Burns Districts

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**Prepared for the Bureau of Land Management
Oregon / Washington State Office**

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LONG DRAW / MILLER HOMESTEAD FIRE REVIEW
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**LONG DRAW / MILLER HOMESTEAD FIRE REVIEW
VALE AND BURNS DISTRICTS
PREPARED FOR THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Long Draw Fire (558,198 acres) and Miller Homestead Fire (160,801 acres) both resulted from lightning strikes from a storm on the afternoon of July 8, 2012. The Long Draw Fire burned primarily within the Vale District (BLM) and the Miller Homestead Fire burned within the Burns District. Although most land involved in the fires is under the jurisdiction of the BLM, both fires included private lands and lands managed by other public agencies. These fires burned for 8-9 days before reaching their final sizes.

“I have never seen fires burn like this before,” - a statement heard over and over throughout the interview process. Many of the pertinent factors influencing fire behavior were at historic or uncharacteristic levels during early July of 2012. Low relative humidity at night, low live fuel moisture, Aroga moth (*Aroga weberstri*) defoliation and mortality in sagebrush, and heavy dry fuel loads all contributed to burning conditions seldom encountered. As a BLM fire ecologist noted, “We have not had fires of this magnitude in this part of the state for over 100 years.”

The fires burned a variety of landscapes and impacted many land values. Many BLM livestock grazing allotments were within the fire perimeters. Grazing permittees impacted by the fires are heavily invested and reliant upon the forage resource for their livelihoods. In addition, significant losses in sage grouse habitat occurred. Many special areas and values were impacted as well, including wild horse herd management areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Wilderness Study Areas, among others.

This report was authorized by the BLM Oregon / Washington State Director. The impacts of the fires were significant. Concerns were also voiced from some involved regarding communication, coordination, and safe operations. The overall goal of the review was to learn from our collective experiences, and apply this knowledge to the future. The review was designed not to be an in-depth operational investigation of individual fire activities, but to take a more strategic look at conditions, approaches, and recommendations at a broader level, with the intent of using the results in pre-season meetings, action plans, and agreements as we collectively face challenges in upcoming fire seasons.

Interviews were conducted based on a set of questions approved by the State Director. Approximately 45 people were contacted personally or by telephone. All of those interviewed were forthcoming with their experiences and perspectives of what happened during fire activities. Many shared longer-term concerns and recommendations for the future. Input from these individuals provides the foundation for this report.

Concerns and recommendations were varied, but many focused on early coordination and communication between agency fire managers and local landowners, permittees, and Rangeland Fire Protection Association volunteers. While circumstances and actions differed between fires, investing in productive and respectful relationships and maintaining open communication lines with local residents and volunteers was seen as critical to future successes.

In addition, there are a variety of interests in the natural resources at risk. Consequently, there are differing perspectives on priorities, strategies and tactics in managing wildland fires. Developing a more common understanding of expectations that consider safe operations and the diversity of values, beliefs, and interests was also identified as crucial in moving forward together in meeting similar challenges in the future.

Along with these concerns, respondents also identified activities and actions that worked well, and shared recommendations for improvements in the future. These are documented throughout the report and in the final sections. There were many lessons learned this past summer. Some relate to “re-setting awareness” of what these fires can do, some re-affirmed the need for close coordination and communication, and others stressed the need for clear expectations from all. In addition, some day-lighted significant differences in expectations in how these fires are fought. There were many perspectives and insights shared through this process. There are many opportunities to put what we have learned to work in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to personally thank all those who participated in providing input and support for this review. Livestock permittees, landowners, community members, county commissioners, and county, state, and federal agency staff were all very helpful and willing to contribute to this effort. Many had experienced personal loss, and are still heavily impacted by the outcomes.

Support for this report came from a number of individuals. BLM Oregon / Washington State Director Jerome Perez authorized the report, and set the tone as a learning experience. Jeff Fedrizzi, Chief of Fire and Aviation, BLM State Office, was instrumental in coordinating the overall support for the project, and in providing oversight and guidance through the process. At the Vale District office, Mark Wilkening provided logistical support and scheduling of staff interviews. Jon Reponen of the Burns District office provided similar services there.

Bob Skinner of Jordan Valley provided significant help in arranging interviews with permittees, landowners, and Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) members associated with the Long Draw Fire. Gordon Foster of Oregon Department of Forestry assisted in meetings and in providing background and insight into the functioning and capabilities of RFPAs. In addition, staff from Senators Merkley and Wyden's offices, as well as staff from Representative Walden's office added their support for conducting the review. Curtis Martin of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association was very supportive as well.

In addition, I would like to thank the BLM District Managers from Vale and Burns for their support and contributions, and in making their staff available for this effort.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the value of the openness and willingness to participate from those involved in this review. The fires personally impacted many. Their perspectives, insights, and recommendations form the basis for critically examining what worked, what could be improved, and what can be learned to help improve outcomes in dealing with these large rangeland fires in the future.

LONG DRAW / MILLER HOMESTEAD FIRE REVIEW
VALE AND BURNS DISTRICTS
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
2012 FIRE SEASON

I. BACKGROUND

During July and August of 2012, wildfires burned across rangelands in southeast Oregon with intensities and size not experienced in recent history. The Long Draw Fire (558,198 acres) and the Miller Homestead Fire (160,801 acres) resulted in impacts to landowners, communities, the landscape, and agencies that are expected to last for years to come. Although the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages most lands affected by the fires and provided the primary suppression actions, landowners, grazing permittees, Rangeland Fire Protection Associations, other agencies, and property owners joined together to contain and control the fires. All of the entities that joined in the effort are dependent upon the land and its resources for some aspect of their livelihood and for the wellbeing of their communities.

The Setting

“I have never seen fires burn like this before,” - a statement heard over and over throughout the interview process. Many of the pertinent factors influencing fire behavior were at historic or uncharacteristic levels during early July of 2012. Low relative humidity at night, low live fuel moisture, Aroga moth (*Aroga weberstri*) defoliation and mortality in sagebrush, and heavy dry fuel loads all contributed to burning conditions seldom encountered. As a BLM fire ecologist noted, “We have not had fires of this magnitude in this part of the state for over 100 years.”

In other parts of the country, fires were active and fire-fighting resources were stretched thin. According to the National Interagency Coordination Center, the Incident Management Situation Report documented 11 large uncontained fires reported by the Eastern and Western Great Basin Coordination Centers on July 7th, the day before these fires started. Nationally, there were 279 new fire starts that day. Across the West, it had been a very active fire season, beginning in the southwest early in the spring, and moving into the inter-mountain west and Great Basin in early summer. In southeast Oregon, there were 19 large fires over 300 acres during the 2012 fire season. The ten-year average for this area is 11.8 large fires (PSA NW12, Northwest Interagency Coordination Center).

Conditions in SE Oregon were changing. According to a report included in the Miller Homestead Fire package developed by Fire Behavior Analyst Francis Mohr, et al, the fuels entered the 2012 season in a “pre-conditioned” situation. Low snow amounts and less than normal spring rains resulted in less than usual re-charge of soil and live fuel moistures. Dead fuels were extremely dry. The moisture content of live vegetation was at the dormancy level by early summer. Daytime temperatures were in the high 90’s and relative humidity readings were as low as single digits during the week preceding these two fire starts.

According to the report and other observations, the primary carriers for these incidents were fairly continuous beds of dry grasses from 2011 and 2012, and low and big sagebrush, interspersed with juniper. Adding to the conditions in certain places was mortality and defoliation in sagebrush from an outbreak of the Aroga moth. Observed flame lengths and heat intensities at the flaming front exceeded the limit for safe direct firefighter and engine tactics.

Complicating these conditions was poor humidity recovery at night, when effective rangeland firefighting often occurs. Fire managers stated that relative humidity is a key factor in fire behavior, directly related to tactics. Normally, humidity of over 35 percent will cause fires to “lie down” and become less intense, allowing more effective and direct actions. It was also noted that it is normal to expect 8-10 hours of humidity readings over 35 percent during the night. On both of these fires, relative humidity was abnormally low during the day. Remote Automated Weather Stations (RAWS) data shows that on several nights while these fires burned, relative humidity only exceeded 35 percent for 2-4 hours.

RAWS data also recorded winds during the more intense burning periods for the first five days of the fires as steady from 5-12 miles per hour, but with gusts, often into the teens and low twenties. Peak gusts were recorded at 36 miles per hour. Winds remained variable throughout the nights and early morning hours. During the first few days, both fires burned with multiple fronts, not all going in the same direction.

Fire managers in Burns stated that their active fire season usually does not start until late July. The Vale District had a fire of several thousand acres as early as April, and the Lakeview District had a similar early event. The Vale District had called for additional resources prior to the fire ignitions under severity funds. The Burns District (Interagency Fire Zone) had not yet done so. On July 8, there were multiple new starts within the Vale and Burns Districts. Adjacent BLM and US Forest Service units also were experiencing new starts. Immediate assistance from neighboring units was not available due to the many new ignitions.

Purpose of this Review

Jerome Perez, BLM Oregon/Washington State Director, requested this review, recognizing the magnitude and impact of the fires, and that there is a high likelihood there will be more in the future. The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and members of Oregon’s Congressional delegation also expressed interest in reviewing the fires.

The goal of this review is to learn from our collective experiences, and apply this knowledge to the future. Through this review, the BLM is examining the Long Draw and Miller Homestead Fires using a learning approach that will help the agency and its valued partners continue to improve overall management of the landscape as similar challenges arise in the future. Of particular interest are areas of communication, cooperation, collaboration, and safe operations. The State Director was interested in gaining insight and perspectives from a wide variety of individuals and organizations involved or impacted by the fires.

This review is not intended to be an in-depth investigation of operational activities on the fires. The review was designed to take a more strategic look at conditions, approaches, and recommendations at a broader level, with the intent of using the results in pre-season meetings, action plans, and agreements as we collectively face challenges in the upcoming fire seasons. Managers and partners may continue to explore lessons learned and seek improvements resulting from this review at the local level.

II. METHODOLOGY

The State Director contacted Jeff Blackwood by phone in late December of 2012, asking about availability to facilitate the review. The Barry Point Fact Finding Review Report was in final draft stages, and the Holloway Fire had several other reviews in progress.

Prior to the holidays, a few telephone calls were made to county commissioners, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and Congressional staff alerting them of the upcoming activities.

To guide the structure of the review, interview questions were developed for approval by the State Director. A briefing paper was developed and shared with many of those interviewed prior to the meetings.

The BLM established points of contact at both their Vale and Burns offices to aid with scheduling and logistics. Bob Skinner of Jordan Valley, active in the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association, was instrumental in notifying and scheduling interested individuals in that area.

Field interviews began on Monday, February 4, 2012, and ended on Friday, February 8, 2012. Additional contacts were made by telephone during the following week. A list of those contacted is attached as Appendix A. Most interviews were conducted individually or by family, and took about an hour. In Burns Junction, 10 grazing permittees and landowners met together, as did 10 members of the Jordan Valley Rangeland Protection Association later that evening in Jordan Valley. Others contacted included county commissioners, BLM fire and management staff, incident commanders, landowners, permittees, the manager for the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, and a representative from the Oregon Department of Forestry. In all, over 45 people were contacted and provided input to this review.

Review Process and Report

Groups and individuals were contacted and interviewed during the week of February 4 2012. Interviews followed a structure of predetermined questions that could be summarized as "what worked, what could be improved, what recommendations do you have for all to be more successful in the future?" The interviewer took extensive notes, and summarized the results in the following section for each fire. The responses to the questions combine themes that emerged, and comments from individuals. Although this review was designed to be generally strategic in nature, most of the responses people gave were more operational, based on their individual experiences. Not all participants wanted to be directly quoted, so no names were used in the report.

In the last section, best management practices and additional recommendations are identified. Themes developed for this section were generated by the author from the more specific input from the interviews, and are intended to focus on dealing with fires yet to come.

During the course of the interviews and discussions, other topics were shared that were outside the scope of this review, but pertinent to long-term improvements in over-all firefighting efforts. These are summarized in Appendix B.

These fires were large and complex. All those interviewed had a part or some involvement in suppression activities and outcomes of the fires. Each had a story or an experience. These stories did not always agree, and beliefs sometimes differed, but all were concerned, sincere, and even passionate in their participation. Most are dependent on the land for some aspect of their livelihood, whether agency personnel, grazing permittees, or landowners. It was more than that, however. As one said, "This is our home, this is who we are. It is far more than the loss of grass and sagebrush. We will see the impacts for many years to come."

III. RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Long Draw Fire – The Long Draw Fire was reported on July 8, 2012 at 18:04, southwest of Burns Junction, Oregon. Within 2 hours, it had burned several thousand acres. By the end of the next day, the fire was about 25,500 acres in size. On July 10th, the fire burned an additional 325,000 acres, growing to 558,052 acres by July 16th.

1. How were you involved with the fires last summer?

A list of those interviewed is attached in Appendix A. People interviewed included representatives from the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association, landowners and grazing permittees, a county commissioner from Malheur County, the Malheur County Sherriff, and fire and management staff from the Vale District office.

2. From your perspective, what worked well?

Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) - The Jordan Valley RFPA was formed in 2008 with support from the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). It is a volunteer organization, with participants donating time and equipment to firefighting efforts. Most interviewed commented on the successful work of the Jordan Valley RFPA in stopping the northern advancement of the fire. An initial attack Incident Commander (IC) stated, "There was good mutual aid from the Jordan Valley RFPA. They worked with us closely the first night, and then worked with our engines on the north end. "The Jordan Valley RFPA was generally noted for its successful work on containing the northern end of the fire. Depending on the location of a fire, about 75 RFPA members readily respond. The RFPA has a variety of equipment, including slip on pumpers, ATV sprayers, graders, dozers, water tenders, and a sophisticated radio communication system. Adding to this strength are two 300-gallon engines and a 1000-gallon engine furnished by ODF for this coming season. A summary of current capacity is included in Appendix F.

RFPA members commented on their internal RFPA communications. They have five repeaters and good coverage. "Our internal RFPA communications work well. GEM Communications told us that we operated at 100 percent duty on a 25 percent duty system for the first few days," said a member. In other words, their use of their internal communications system far exceeded the capacity it was designed for, and it was deemed to be successful.

Also, several RFPA members commented on the proactive approach of Jeff Pendleton's incident management team (IMT) in seeking them out and coordinating with them when the team arrived.

The team had a full time liaison officer who contacted local landowners and permittees to periodically seek advice and update them on conditions and strategies.

Other comments included support and optimism in establishing the Blue Mountain RFPA in the McDermitt area, and the additional firefighting capacity this might bring. This RFPA is in the process of being formed, assisted by ODF. Many potential members participated in some way in the early stages of the fire and / or suppression efforts. One landowner commented that they were also doing this as a measure of self-defense.

The Oregon Department of Forestry has been instrumental in supporting and assisting in the development of a number of RFPAs throughout eastern Oregon under the provisions of ORS 477.315 through 477.325. RFPA members and others were very complimentary of these efforts and the increased firefighting capabilities resulting from this work.

Initial Attack – Some of the permittees and landowners at the Burns Junction meeting commented, “For the most part, the local crews on the ground do OK.” One mentioned the responsiveness of the BLM Burns Junction crew whenever a fire is reported. Others stated that when the local BLM folks contacted them, it was generally positive. One of the RFPA representatives stated “We generally get along well with the local crews. They are responsive and work with us.” The actions on the Danner 1 Fire were given as examples of how local coordination with RFPAs can work well.

Coordination – Local inter-agency coordination and cooperation was generally seen as being good. The County Emergency Services Director works for the Sheriff. Communication between their office and the Vale District was characterized as productive and timely. The Sheriff stated, “We have been working on our relationship for several years. We can communicate on any level we need to.” Other examples of how entities generally worked well together included coordination with Oregon Department of Transportation, Malheur and Humbolt Counties, and Harney Electric Cooperative.

Safety – Although a variety of personnel fought fire over 800,000 acres in the Vale District last summer, no one was hurt. A county commissioner stated that “BLM has a good safety program and some experienced fire managers. Safety is a big concern of mine.”

Other – Comments included:

- “Engine captains are the best around. They are well trained and responsive.”
- “The engine task force we got was great. They come with experience and supervision. With contract engines, however, you get what you get. Often they don’t have experience in these conditions and aren’t ready to go.” The engine task force included 4 light engines, 1 heavy engine, a task force leader and a task force leader trainee.
- “Resource Advisors and Rangeland Management Specialists were sent early to help coordinate with local efforts and permittees.”
- “Green stripping and brown stripping work. They helped to slow fires.”
- Fire managers in the Vale District recognized the critical conditions that were building. A local fire manager stated, “We watched the predictive services and tracked the droughty conditions. We had two engines off-District helping others, but they were rotating back. We

also ordered a 5-engine task force under severity funding. We had asked for an additional water tender, but were not able to get it. The engine task force worked well.”

3. What could be improved?

Communication – There is a strong belief by some permittees and landowners that during the initial attack BLM ICs were somewhat insensitive to the local ranchers’ input and suggestions. One stated that he was told that the BLM crews could handle it, and they could go home. Another stated that on the first and second night, he looked all over for a BLM person in charge and could not find one. One commented, “They didn’t seem to want to bother with us.”

Several permittees stated that cell phone coverage was good in the area and they were able to communicate between themselves, but were not very successful in communicating with BLM personnel. One commented that without good local contacts, new people to the area did not know fire lines, boundaries, or opportunities to catch the fire.

Both BLM fire managers and the Jordan Valley RFP staff expressed concern that they had poor verbal communications between BLM fire managers and the RFPA for the first few days. Communications issues were generally around knowing where resources were deployed after the fire escaped initial attack, and coordinating suppression efforts. One of the ICs believed he was in contact through the BLM engines working with the RFPA, but communications appeared to be sketchy. A BLM fire manager stated “I want my IC to be able to find out who is in charge of an RFPA, and to work closely with them. I would like our units to work side-by-side.” A member of the RFPA stated “We did not have contact with BLM for the first several days. We did not see anyone, nor did we have radio contact with them. They knew we were out there.” The Type 2 IMT IC stated that the team has discussed this issue of local coordination in their debriefs, and is working to be more proactive.

Finally, both fire managers and RFPA representatives stated that more preseason coordination would be beneficial.

Tactics and Use of Assets – Several permittees / landowners stated that they believed BLM had assets such as engines on the Whitehorse road prior to the fire jumping it, and a dozer not used, but available in the early stages of the fire. Several believe that ICs did not use these assets effectively the first few days of the fire. (Authors note: the Whitehorse Road is north of the fire start, and joins Highway 95. See Fire Growth Map, Appendix C for location.) One stated he had about 1000 head of cattle east of Highway 95 after the fire had jumped it, but there were no fire fighters, equipment, or communications with BLM on that side of the road for quite a while.

There were considerable discussions on both fires about the use of backfires as an effective tool. Several RFPA folks stated that back burning is a tool they have used effectively. Others believe that at times, fire managers back off too far thus sacrificing more land than necessary. Most agreed that direct attack and backfiring can be very effective early in the morning and at night when fires become less active. One IC commented that in working with agency administrators, they could often figure out how to give up a few acres to save a lot, even though the tactic may not be completely consistent with local direction such as that provided in resource management plans.

Some were concerned that BLM crews withdrew from the fire the first night to rest crews for the next day, leaving the fire perimeter unsecured. On the other hand, the IC stated that he was working within the work – rest guidelines, and preparing for another busy day ahead, knowing that additional resources would be scarce. All agreed that there was some good work completed on the north and west side of the fire that first night, but the south side was unsecured. The next day, the fire came out of the south side and began its run.

Others stated that when teams came in, their schedules were not always conducive to aggressive direct action. One stated, “The time to really make headway is early in the morning. Teams and crews were still having meetings at 8:00 and not getting in place until it was too late.” Another from the RFPAs stated, “BLM fights fire, we put them out.” These comments refer to effective timing for suppression efforts on fire such as these. As stated on page 2, for several days flame lengths and heat intensities at the flaming front exceeded the limit for safe direct firefighter and engine tactics during the more active daytime burning period. Respondents suggested that under these conditions, firefighting resources should be fully engaged in more direct suppression actions during night and early morning hours when direct actions might be more effective.

Finally, some expectations between landowners, permittees, RFPAs, and the BLM are not the same in how aggressively fires should be fought. Several in the private sector stated strong concerns that the BLM did not fight fires as aggressively as they thought they should. BLM fire managers referred to the policies they are working within. “BLM priorities are life, safety, incident stability, property, and resources in that order. The resources are very important to the RFPAs and others. At times we may not share the same priorities. We need to clarify these, and be able to work together better with them to meet all our needs,” stated a BLM fire manager. Another stated, “Our relations with RFPAs are improving, but there is still a difference in what we both expect. They don’t understand the lessons we have learned, and we are not willing to take some of the risks they are. We have had a history of experience and adaptation to put safety first.” In visiting with the Jordan Valley RFPAs, one member stated, “The last thing we want is to get someone hurt.” While mutually responding to fires, the RFPAs and BLM fire managers work under the Incident Command System, and authorities to make decisions were not at question. That being said, there still appears to be a difference in expectations of how fires are fought at times.

Other Comments

- A fire manager stated, “We have good relations with the Pacific Northwest Coordinating Group (PNWCG) in Portland, but PNWCG may not do as effective a job in modeling Great Basin conditions as experienced by the many large fires this year. I’m not sure the models adequately reflect our rangeland conditions.”
- Several permittees commented on not knowing who was in charge. A Type 4 IC, who was quickly reinforced by a Type 3 organization, responded to the fire. A Type 2 IMT then took control for two shifts before a Type 1 IMT arrived. Some RFPAs members working the north end of the fire stated that their first clear contact with an IC after the first night was when the Type 1 IMT arrived. A chronology of team changes can be found in Appendix E.
- Another commented that it has been several years since we had large fires, and the agency administrators were a little rusty in getting started.
- One commented, “ODOT worked well as an assisting agency, but struggled initially to find our BLM radio frequencies. We should make sure these are pre-programmed in preseason.”

- “Getting air support and other resources in a timely manner is difficult in our area. We are remote and don’t have the high visibility that some other areas have,” stated one person.
- An RFPA member commented that an after action review (AAR) was not done until just before this review. Several suggested that AARs should be inclusive to more than just the agency fire community, and should be conducted closer to the event.

4. What issues or concerns are unresolved, and should be addressed as a result of this review?

Coordination / Communication – There are strong beliefs by most of those interviewed that there needs to be better communication between BLM fire managers and local RFPAs, permittees, and landowners during events such as these. Some examples given included learning about local access, use of waterholes, potential control points, and coordinating removal of cattle. Others stated they needed to know where people were, and what strategies were being developed and implemented. Fire managers expressed similar concerns. Some believe there is an attitude of insensitivity on both sides that contributes to strained relationships. Most commented that relationships are better than they were a few years ago.

Regarding the Jordan Valley RFPA, there appears to be a need to reach resolution on what is required of them when fires go into extended attack on federally managed lands. All that commented on the RFPA recognized the value they have, the good work they do, and relationships are improving. An issue, however, is that of safety standards. One fire manager stated, “Our Red Book is clear to us that in initial attack, we accept a mutual response unit and their qualifications and safety policies. When the jurisdiction is determined, and the fire goes into extended attack, our policy is that the standards become those of the agency of jurisdiction.” Advice from ODF which is the “hosting” state agency supporting the RFPAs suggests a different interpretation, since the RFPAs are in voluntary status and operating under state law. This is currently being discussed with intent to be resolved between ODF and the BLM at the state level. Several interviewed believe this should be clarified and uniformly implemented by this coming season.

Along with the above, discussions with the RFPA included questions about liabilities for the BLM and RFPAs if something goes wrong. There may be differing opinions between BLM and ODF on this issue as well. A fire manager stated “We have differences in training, safety, and personal protective equipment requirements between us and the RFPAs. We work well together and value the RFPAs, but have to work through these differences.”

Several from both the RFPA and BLM mentioned the desire / need to have RFPA representatives included in planning meetings and in-briefings as IMTs transition.

Tactics and Expectations – As stated before, there are some differing expectations between BLM fire managers and private interests in how fires are fought, especially when they go into extended attack. Some examples were previously mentioned.

Some of these differences result from safety approaches, work-rest guidelines and delays in action during multiple team transitions. Federal safety policies are the result of tragedies and experiences such as the 30 Mile and Cramer fatalities, but how some of these policies are implemented do not appear to have strong support from local private interests participating in

this review. While many generally support initial attack tactics and strategies, extended attack and long duration fires are more complicated. Several also noted adverse local public reactions to the appearance at fire camps of a lot of equipment and people. Even though fire personnel were complying with work-rest requirements and shift changes, there can be an appearance of many resources not engaged in firefighting efforts.

A few from the Jordan Valley meeting suggested there should be a more efficient way of getting approval for some tactics, stating that going up through the chain of command is time consuming and can be frustrating. An example was getting clearance for an RFPA member to use a private plane within a Temporary Flight Restriction zone. The mission was to locate crews, assess conditions, and coordinate with air attack and others. The request took 2 ½ hours to process.

Finally, one fire manager stated “We need to be clear that we do fight fire at night when we have the resources. Everyone in the area had fires. We asked for help from the Wallowa-Whitman, Boise BLM, Winnemucca BLM, and Burns BLM. They all had fires, and the bench was empty.”

Other –

- One asked what discretion local BLM managers have to allow equipment in special land use allocations, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and Wilderness Study Areas. It was stated that often a carefully placed dozer line in one of these areas can save the values behind the line, whereas if you have to back off and burn out, you tend to lose the values.
- A permittee stated that it was good to have a rangeland management specialist to communicate with, but sometimes fire managers did not take their advice or were unresponsive to their needs.
- “Permittees are held accountable for protecting the land and key habitat, but fire managers are willing to back off and backfire through key habitat, rather than build direct line,” commented one permittee, also suggesting that fire managers are not accountable for their actions when it comes to protecting the land.
- One suggested that there might be a way of working with Oregon Department of Transportation to disc or otherwise treat roadsides, increasing the width of defensible space. Under these burning conditions, fire jumped state highways fairly easily.
- Permittees, RFPA members and BLM fire managers all commented on the need to do more road maintenance. As one said, “There are lots of desert roads that are in poor shape and not useful for access for back burning. It would be helpful to get more maintenance on these.”

5. From your perspective, were safety considerations adequately addressed during your involvement with the fire? Do you have any recommendations for improvement?

Coordination / Communication – One stated that there was a lack of communication between fire managers and local landowners and permittees regarding where people were and how firefighting resources were being used the first few days. This reportedly resulted in uncoordinated incidents that could have had worse outcomes. One example referenced an instance where crews were backfiring while a permittee was removing cattle in front of the backfire in the vicinity of the Whitehorse Road and Highway 95 near the fire origin (see Appendix D, Vicinity Map). With fast moving fires, coordination with permittees removing cattle is difficult.

Some permittees stated that at times the BLM did not know where this was occurring, and the permittees did not know what fire control strategies were being planned.

BLM fire managers appeared just as concerned. As one stated, “ I’m very concerned when my ICs cannot find private landowners, permittees, and RFPA members or overhead. This can compromise our attack as we want to be sure no one is in front of something like a back burn.” One stated the VLAT (Very Large Air Tanker) was used a couple of times to delay the fire front allowing permittees to remove their cattle.

Safety Decisions -While it was apparent that all involved placed a high value on safety, and there were no injuries or serious incidents with these very dangerous burning conditions, some had additional comments:

- An IC stated, “On the first night, we had the authority to extend shifts. We made the decision to bed people down and prepare for a busy next day, knowing we would not get any further help for a while. This decision was made thinking about longer-term needs, but was unpopular and not well received by some local people.” When this occurred, the fire was unsecured on the south side.
- Another stated, “We have safety policies developed through loss and experience. Many in the public do not support these and would like us to take more risks. We are not willing to revert, compromising safety for protecting resources. We can still fight fire aggressively, but we need to adhere to our policies based on experience.”

6. What other recommendations do you have for the BLM that could bring greater success in upcoming years?

Communication / Coordination – From a landowner – “When a fire gets big, we don’t know who to talk to. There are many people running up and down the road, but we have no idea what they are doing or who is in charge. We would like to have better communication.”

An RFPA member recommended having an RFPA representative in team in-briefings and at key planning meetings. In addition, members suggested having local qualified and knowledgeable people accompany fire fighters not familiar with the area. This would help, they stated, to be able to aggressively use direct attack and burn out at night.

Other Recommendations – Following are comments made by individuals:

- “We need to clarify expectations for working between private landowners and BLM. The landowner has the right to be there and protect their property.”
- “We need to review our work-rest policies and see if we are interpreting them consistently with our neighbors.”
- “When conditions get bad, start backfilling – bringing folks home – and preparing partners.”
- “Maintain roads periodically for access and backfiring in areas of high fire frequency.”
- “Preventative measures such as green and brown stripping work. They cost money up front, and unfortunately, budgets are going down.”

- Some commented on the appearance of large fire camps, especially when shifts are changing and there are engines and equipment in camp. One suggested requesting back up staffing to keep some of the equipment out on the line and engaged in suppression efforts.
- “ODOT has expressed an interest in exploring fuels reduction along rights-of-ways. We should work through their authorities to see how we could do this.”
- “The second night, there were several hundred thousand acres within the fire, and it was advancing on fronts headed for McDermitt and Rome. We recommended invoking the Conflagration Act, but were unsuccessful at the state level. These are unprotected lands. We need to see how we can make this work if needed in the future.”
- “We are still running into procurement problems in getting fire department pre-approved equipment paid for. The system isn’t working well yet.”
- Another noted, “We are behind the technology curve and could benefit from real-time imagery, especially on these fast moving fires.”

7. What else would you like to share that would help improve overall outcomes when these rangeland wildfires happen in the future?

Most people had offered their input in the previous questions. There were a number of concerns that were outside the scope of this review. These are summarized in Appendix B.

Miller Homestead Fire – The Miller Homestead Fire was reported on July 8, 2012, at 16:02 by a local landowner. Its origin was southwest of Frenchglen, Oregon. Within 4 hours, the fire was several thousand acres, making steady gains over the next several days. The fire made its largest run on July 12, burning approximately 89,000 acres. By July 17, 2012, the Miller Homestead Fire had covered 160,759 acres.

1. How were you involved in the incidents this past summer?

As with the Long Draw Fire, a list of those interviewed is attached in Appendix A. These include landowners, grazing permittees, a county commissioner, local residents, Burns District fire and management staff, and the manager of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

2. From your perspective, what worked well?

Local Coordination – Local landowners and permittees were engaged from the initial attack on. A member of the Incident Management Type 3 Team stated, “Local folks worked well with BLM staff during those first few days. There was lots of coordination. BLM crews helped cut fences, open gates and secure cattle.” A landowner and permittee stated, “They worked with me on letting me build direct line that saved important feed from being part of a backfire. They got ideas from me for tying in black line, and it worked.”

Another said that initial attack priorities were set and communicated early with all involved.

Others noted that the Burns District tries to hire local young people for the crews when possible. This helps with knowing people and the land. One stated there is a strong sense that this is their home, and they want to protect it.

County coordination with the IMT and landowners seemed to have worked well. A landowner stated, "Two county graders came in and put lines around some of my property. " County resources were utilized and coordinated with IMT efforts. Fire managers stated the inter-agency dispatch worked well also, being able to shuffle resources around and bring in help from outside. There were a number of fires burning at the time in this part of the state.

Most of those interviewed believe that local coordination with the county, state agencies, and Harney Electric Cooperative worked well. As one stated, "We are proud of our relationships with the local federal agencies. These are important, and help when emergencies arise."

Of particular note, the staff at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge were closely involved with fire activities when the team arrived. Refuge staff cut fences allowing cattle to seek safety, and contracted to cut hay in the area threatened. They then made the hay available to those impacted by the fire, the only cost being that of removal. In addition, the Refuge Manager worked with the Incident Management Team and Agency Administrator Representative throughout the fire activities.

Safety – People stated there was good radio coverage, and cell phones were effective. There were no serious injuries on the fire. A member of the IMT 3 team stated, "Once the fire blew on the second day, we were able to quickly and safely pull all our people and equipment out of harms way, and re-group to go back to work. "

Initial Attack – One landowner stated, "Initial attack was awesome." Several commented on the efforts of the BLM initial attack forces to save houses, structures, and haystacks, along with helping to get cattle out of the way.

Other comments:

- "The crested wheatgrass seedings are effective fire breaks. It is good that some of these will be reseeded."
- "The team had very useful and informative public meetings at Frenchglen."
- "We were able to keep the fire from crossing the highway. If it had, it would have gotten into thousands of acres of cut juniper and the Wilderness. It would have grown to the scale of neighboring large fires."

3. What could be improved?

Communication / Coordination - "Sometimes when the teams come in, there is less communication. They don't listen to us as well as the local BLM fire crews do. Keeping local folks involved can be very helpful. We know where the waterholes and roads are, as well as the cattle," stated one landowner.

Two of the landowners / permittees mentioned some insensitivity by crews that came in with the teams. Examples given were not listening to them, or giving the impression they did not want to communicate with them.

One individual stated that there was a lack of communication with the Frenchglen community when evacuations were being discussed.

Finally, one stated that some comments by fire fighters and contractors fueled the perceptions of large fires being “an industry.” Another stated, “When any firefighter makes a comment about the money they are making to a local citizen, especially those impacted by the fire, it spreads like wildfire bringing up all kinds of unintended interpretations and assumptions about fighting fire.”

Tactics and Use of Assets – The use of contract engines on active rangeland wildfires was discussed at length. Fire managers suggested these assets are often used for patrol and mop up. They surmised that many are not prepared to engage in mobile attack on active rangeland wildfires or in off-road conditions. The Operations Chief on the first Type 3 IMT spent 1 ½ hours conducting a tailgate safety and engagement session with a strike team of contract engines before going to work, losing critical time. Others mentioned contract engine crews refused to engage in black lining around a private property in-holding, including a home and surrounding buildings and facilities, leaving the landowner vulnerable. In retrospect, several fire managers suggested that even though contract engine crews receive training, some are not prepared for these fast moving and often off-road rangeland fire suppression conditions.

Several landowners thought the fire was out, or controlled the first night and were surprised that it escaped the following day.

One landowner who was engaged early questioned the use of backfires the third day along Rock Creek Lane (see Appendix D, Vicinity Map at the southeast corner of the fire). He suggested that fire activity on the lower flats was much less intensive than the front above the rims, and more direct attack could have saved some land. Another suggested that when fire crews backfire along roads and fences, they should spray down “H” braces, corners, and gates when they can. This would save a lot of work in the future. Two landowners suggested there are too many hoops for an on-the-ground crew to go through to take action that is not exactly what their assignment is, yet time is of the essence when actions are needed.

Teams and Transitions – Many were concerned about the rotation of teams in the early stages of the fire. On this fire, an IC 4 led the initial attack. A local Type 3 IMT responded quickly. After several shifts, they were replaced by another Type 3 IMT who, after two shifts, was replaced by a Type 2 IMT. With transitions there is often some down time while people are being briefed and team schedules are being implemented. Critical windows of opportunity can be foregone. One fire manager stated, “We brought the second Type 3 IMT in because we were done – exhausted. The team was only 2 hours away. What we found was by the time they got here, the fire was much too complex for the Type 3 organization.”

Landowners and permittees mentioned that teams new to the area sometimes did not listen well to their advice and suggestions. “We know what we are talking about – we know the roads and the country,” one stated.

A few landowners / permittees suggested that when teams arrive, transitions take valuable time, and team schedules don’t always align with timing for effective suppression. They noted that in these conditions, night and early morning activities are generally effective before 10:00 am. After that time, they noted, fire activity is so strong that suppression efforts are not very effective. Team schedules sometimes did not allow strong engagement until later in the morning, one stated.

Expectations – Many folks were surprised by the intensity and spread of the fire. “I think we all underestimated the rate of spread and intensity. This will prepare us better for next year. If conditions are similar, we will be thinking bigger and ordering sooner,” stated one fire manager.

Others noted that in this geographic area, fires tend to be lower in priority, and back-up resources take longer to get here. Air resources were mentioned in particular.

Several mentioned the need to talk about expectations between the BLM and partners in pre-season meetings. Understanding others’ needs, expectations, and policies before an emergency occurs may reduce frustrations and misunderstanding during the heat of the battle, one commented.

4. What issues or concerns are unresolved, and should be addressed as a result of this review?

One landowner identified the complexity of land management allocations and management restrictions within those land allocations. “By backing off and backfiring rather than building direct line, we lost a lot of sage grouse habitat that will hurt all of us in the future,” he stated. Another asked if local managers are using all their discretion in special areas, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), wilderness or wilderness study areas, when it comes to making decisions on motorized equipment.

Several people suggested that the BLM should re-examine the use of contract engines under these fast moving circumstances.

Several commented on the impact of defoliation and mortality from the Agora moth, suggesting the changing conditions should be further investigated. Some excellent work is occurring at the Agricultural Research Station in Burns, one noted. It appears the contribution to fuel loading will be a bigger issue in the future as defoliation and mortality increase.

Lastly, one commented about frustrations and anxiety all around where there are cows ahead of a fast moving fire. On the one hand, cattle owners want to get their herds out of harms way efficiently; on the other, fire managers need to know where people are and allow time for safe removal. The latter sometimes contributes to public perceptions that federal agencies do not fight fire as aggressively as they could. Cattle represent a significant investment and their livelihood to their owners, and great lengths appear to have been taken to get them to safety in conjunction with fire activities.

An example of this occurred at Lone Tree Lake, a small dry reservoir. Six ranchers and a BLM law enforcement officer stayed with about 200 head of cattle while the fire burned around them. Just prior to the fire front reaching them, they burned out around the small dry reservoir to provide a black line for additional safety for the cattle and themselves. Fire managers were aware of this situation, and a helitack crew gave advice on where and when to ignite backfires.

5. From your perspective, were safety considerations adequately addressed during your involvement with the fire? Do you have any recommendations?

One of the primary concerns was not knowing where the permittees were with their cattle on the north end of the fire. One commented on the value of the resource advisors in contacting the permittees and sharing information both with the team and permittees. Several people commented that having these resource advisors assigned early, and performing liaison services was very positive.

A concern noted by several, including fire managers, was the incident where contract engines failed to engage with the fire while protecting the Dunbar's private lands and facilities, including a house and other structures. This led to the conclusion by some that fire fighters on these engines were not as aggressive as they should be, and not up to the job assigned. The landowner called for an air tanker. The drop was eventually approved and dispatched, but diverted to another location by air attack. Agency initial attack engines were then sent in to provide protection for their land.

An incident that caused concern and confusion was that of a private individual making video recordings and adding personal interpretations, and then posting them on the Internet. One fire manager stated, "We had to account for him in our attack actions, and he was a big distraction during the early parts of the fire. His comments on YouTube were inaccurate and out of context. We had to get law enforcement involved." Another stated that the videos were distracting and offensive to fire fighters who were aware of the postings. The postings were considered to be very divisive and counter-productive to firefighting actions.

Throughout the interviews, several commented on how surprised they were by the fire behavior. Along with this was the acknowledgement that these conditions could develop again. Longer summers and fuels complicated by the Aroga moth defoliation and lack of winter snow could re-create the burning conditions experienced last summer. This has caused several fire managers and others to re-evaluate their assumptions and expectations for the future.

Other comments included the good safety record, working within existing safety policies, and having good communications throughout the fire activity. As one individual noted, "These fires burned with high intensity. These are our kids out there fighting them. Safety is a big issue for me."

6. What other recommendations do you have for the BLM that could bring greater success in upcoming years?

The following were recommendations made by individuals:

- “The community meetings were very good. There were folks that were in the heat of the battle that could not attend them. There should be a way to make sure you reach out to them as well.”
- One manager stated, “We have to have better clarity and transparency in our decisions, making sure folks know what trade-offs are being made.” (Examples given included deferring actions so cattle could be removed, and using backfires instead of direct attack where equipment is restricted.)
- Also stated, “We need to spend some time with education and communication with interest groups and cooperators about today’s conditions and issues and trade-offs.”
- One landowner stated, “Maybe the BLM should develop a culture of incentives and rewards for contractors and others for rapid control and finishing the job. Somehow, we need to touch all players with the need to complete the job efficiently,” noting the use of contract engines for patrol long after suppression efforts wound down.
- Another suggested, “In this new age, we need to be able to respond, react, and engage in the social media. The public postings were very distracting and made firefighters angry. Our FIO duties are rapidly changing.”
- Some cooperators stated that the revolving doors of line officers and key staff make relationship building difficult and consistency in policies challenging. One suggested this sensitivity and emphasis should be a high priority for agency leadership, especially when sending new people to key positions.

7. What else would you like to share that would help improve overall outcomes when these rangeland wildfires happen in the future?

As with the Long Draw fire, most people had shared their thoughts and beliefs in earlier questions. Some of these were outside the scope of this review, but captured in Appendix B.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

In compiling and synthesizing results of the many interviews that form the basis of this report, several recommendations were offered for both fires under Question #6. These will not be fully repeated here, but are included in what should be considered as part of this review. When fires of this nature erupt, situations can be chaotic and confusing. Not all recommendations can be implemented together, and each fire will have its own set of circumstances.

The following includes recommendations for best management practices (BMPs), other recommendations, and practices to continue. These were developed by the author in stepping back and taking a broader look at these complex and challenging fires and incorporating suggestions made by participants.

Best Management Practices

Best management practices are state-of-the-art mitigation measures applied to specific projects or activities to reduce, prevent, or avoid adverse environmental or social impacts. The BLM uses the concept of BMPs to help guide actions. In relationship to this review, there were themes and areas of general agreement between those involved with the two fires that merit acknowledgement, consideration, and use, as appropriate, as the BLM and partners face similar challenging rangeland wildfires in the future. For this reason, the following BMPs are recommended:

- Spend time in the preseason with cooperators and partners discussing expectations, capabilities for people and equipment, methods of contacting each other for coordinating efforts, and needs specific to the cooperator. Develop deeper understanding of needs, authorities, policies, agreements, Annual Operating Plans, and values to help build relationships before emergencies happen.
- When an incident develops that will move into extended attack, assign a liaison whose duties include contacting and coordinating with local landowners and permittees, while having clear lines of communication with fire managers. Focus on communication, especially if permittees are removing cattle endangered by the fire. Where an RFPA is involved, request an RFPA Agency Representative to coordinate with the liaison.
- In preseason discussions and when responding to initial attack, work with local landowners and permittees early to identify risks, opportunities, and options for strategies and tactics, utilizing their knowledge of access, the land, and resources such as waterholes and potential control points.
- If similar severe conditions exist in the future and a fire escapes initial attack, consider ordering resources early, and teams of the appropriate size. Try to minimize multiple team transitions as a fire develops. Coordinate an incident's required Complexity Analysis rating with cooperators and if there is a rating that walks the line between two complexities, order the higher complexity IMT.
- Include cooperator Agency Representatives, such as from RFPAs, in incident planning meetings and in-briefings of new teams. Establish key contacts and communication early between new teams and local cooperators.
- On incidents with cooperators, use an appropriately scaled after action review (AAR) to examine what went well, what could be improved, and what could be learned and used in the future. Include those who were involved or impacted, both internal and external to the agency. Conduct the AAR relatively soon after the event. AARs have long been used within the fire community as an effective way to de-brief and learn from experience. Other methods, such as facilitated learning analysis (FLAs) can be useful as well. The key point is to include those impacted or involved in a timely manner, focusing on a learning approach.

Other Recommendations

- Align team schedules for shift changes and briefings to provide fire-fighting resources on the line during the most effective time for control and suppression actions. If schedules cannot be met, consider more spike camps for firefighting resources to minimize travel time to the incidents. (Author's note - Most of those commenting on this suggested that under burning conditions such as experienced with these two fires, suppression actions after 10 a.m. and

especially in the afternoon, are often not as effective as those in the early morning hours. Sometimes team schedules do not match well with these windows of opportunity.)

- Evaluate training for contract engines and crews to assure they are prepared to engage in mobile attack suppression actions where active fire behavior, rapid fire movement, and off-road actions are expected. If the crew training has not included these kinds of wildfire conditions, re-evaluate the use of these contract resources.
- IMTs, supported by local fire managers and line officers, should emphasize the value and need for close and respectful communications with local residents and permittees when new crews or teams come to assist in suppression efforts. Use of IMT liaison positions and RFPA Agency Representatives will facilitate this need.
- Strive for consistency in implementing policies between BLM Districts, especially when they serve a common public. People impacted by policies and decisions expressed their need for policies to be well coordinated for consistency and predictability.
- Through preseason training and preparation, be ready to engage with social media in this new environment. As experienced, anyone with a camera and Internet access can either support or detract from fire suppression efforts. When distractions occur, safe operations and efficiency can be compromised.
- Clearly define within annual cooperator agreements with cooperators what constitutes a landowner or property owner's rights to defend their land and/or property against wildland fire or the threat of wildland fire.
- Clearly define and agree on expectations and standards for such things as liabilities and safety policies such as personal protective equipment and work – rest guidelines between the BLM, RFPAs, and ODF when fires go into extended attack and longer-term durations. (Author's note - There appears to be agreement on acceptance of standards and policies during initial attack, however questions remain for periods following this. Discussions between ODF and the BLM are occurring at the state level currently, with the desire to have this resolved before this coming fire season).
- Formally clarify cooperative agreements regarding decisions made by cooperators when they arrive before the entity responsible for the land arrives. For instance, when an RFPA gets to a fire before BLM staff arrives and the fire is on BLM managed land, the RFPA should know what discretion it has in making decisions on tactics, strategies, and in ordering resources. Review these agreements and expectations in pre-season meetings.
- With cooperators such as RFPAs, determine what additional information and mechanisms for delivering the information would be useful early in the fire season, and prior to incidents occurring. Some examples mentioned include faxing daily weather, red flag warnings, updating contact lists, and information on growing severity trends.
- There are two new RFPAs forming (Blue Mountain and Frenchglen). Early coordination with these RFPAs will be useful as they develop. Sharing information on standards, training, communication, equipment, and support can increase understanding and cooperation between the entities. These new RFPAs will add strength and depth to firefighting capabilities in the area.
- The Jordan Valley RFPA members mentioned successful coordination on the Danner 1 Fire last summer. Consider reviewing this fire together to see what worked, and why it worked, building on this success.
- See Appendix B. This includes areas where additional concerns, ideas, and opportunities are noted that may go beyond the scope of this review.

Practices To Continue

These fires were complex and challenging, burning under extreme conditions. Yet throughout the interviews, people noted actions or activities that worked well. Many of these are noted in the second question for each fire (#2. From your perspective, what worked well?). There are reasons that things are successful. Important as it is to review areas for improvement, it is also useful to acknowledge what worked well and why, building on these experiences, reinforcing structure, processes, and actions that led to success.

V. CONCLUSION

In conducting this review, I found the participants to be highly skilled, knowledgeable, and dedicated to their livelihoods and professions. The people interviewed were forthcoming with their insights, and sincere in their desire to learn from these experiences. So much depends on a healthy and sustainable landscape. Fire fighters are essential to controlling and putting fires out, but the people I interviewed are impacted and involved long after the smoke is gone. Those who contributed to this report are to be commended for their willingness to share ideas and perspectives, with a desire to move forward.

As previously stated, the intent of the review was to explore what worked, what could be improved, and what can be learned and applied to the future. It was not an in-depth fact finding investigation. That being said, there were many stories and experiences that formed the basis for the recommendations above. Not all agreed, but many expressed a desire to be able to build from this and continue to improve efforts, knowing that people will be tested again in the future.

Years ago, a wise person stated, "Relationships help you get through the hard times. Without good relationships, there are many more hard times." Through the many experiences, perspectives, and stories told about these fires, an over-arching message was one of respect and respectful communication. The many entities involved have a variety of interests, authorities, requirements, and needs. There is also a spectrum of beliefs and values. By understanding and working together with these, productive relationships can build or be reinforced over time. One individual reiterated the value of the time and work they do investing in relationships when there is not an emergency to bring people together. He commented that all too often this investment has not been made, and in the heat of business, we easily overlook the basics of communication, coordination, and respect.

There were many lessons learned this past summer. Some relate to "re-setting awareness" of what these fires can do, some re-affirmed the need for close coordination and communication, and others stressed the need for clear expectations from all. In addition, some day-lighted significant differences in expectations in how these fires are fought. There were many perspectives and insights shared through this process. There are many opportunities to put what we have learned to work in the future.

**LONG DRAW / MILLER HOMESTEAD FIRE REVIEW
APRIL 2013**

APPENDICES

Appendix A – List of People Interviewed

Appendix B – Discussions / Recommendations Beyond the Scope of this Review

Appendix C- Long Draw Progression Map

Appendix D – Long Draw Vicinity Map

Appendix E – Incident Team Chronology

Appendix F – Jordan Valley RFPA Capabilities

Appendix G – Miller Homestead Fire Progression Map

Appendix H – Miller Homestead Vicinity Map

Appendix I – Reciprocal Agreement – Jordan Valley RFPA / BLM

Appendix J – Long Draw After Action Review Notes, 1/23/13

Appendix A
Long Draw / Miller Homestead Fire Review
List of People Interviewed
2/13

Jeff Blackwood contacted the following people during the first two weeks of February. The Fire Review Report was based on information gained through interviews and contacts with these people:

Burns Junction meeting, land owners and grazing permittees, 2/4/13:

- Dusty Wolverton
- Richard Eiguren
- Chris Bengoa
- Dave Stoddard
- Ed Dowell
- Barry Anderson - Tree Top Ranch,
- Tony Wust - Flying "G"
- Harry Stoddard
- Steve Maher - Tree Top Ranch,
- Dale Berrett

Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association, also landowners and grazing permittees, 2/44/13:

- Mike Skinner
- Mike Eiguren
- Josh Mackenzie
- Silas Skinner
- Ralph Fillmore
- Clint Fillmore
- Bob Skinner
- Richard Eiguren Jr.
- Tony Lequerica
- Mark Fillmore

Vale BLM; 541-473-3144

- Bob Narus – District FMO
- Brian Watt – Type 2 IC
- Al Couch – Type 3 IC
- Dave LaChappelle – Vale Duty Officer
- Mark Wilkening_Vale Public Affairs Staff
- Don Gonzales – Vale District Manager

Vale Other:

- Judge Dan Joyce
- Sheriff Wolfe

Burns BLM: 541-573-4400

- Jon Reponen - IA Ops
- Cody McConnell - IC 3
- Ryan Hussey - IC 3 Trainee
- Rick Roy - Agency Administrator Representative
- Cam Swisher - Resource Advisor / liaison
- Ricky Knox - Resource Advisor

Frenchglen:

- Malena Koneck - landowner and owner of Frenchglen store,
- Red, Margaret, and Darcy Dunbar - permittees and landowners,
- Gary Miller - permittee and landowner
- Leon Neushwander - permittee and landowner
- John Whitzel- community resident

Other:

- Tim Bodeen - Refuge Manager, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge,
- Judge Steve Grasty - Harney County Commissioner
- Jeff Pendleton - Type 1 Incident Commander, Long Draw Fire
- Gordon Foster - Oregon Department of Forestry

Appendix B
Long Draw / Miller Homestead Fire Review
April 2013

Discussions / Recommendations Outside the Scope of This Review
Based on Interviews

Consequences of Indirect Attack: Several of those interviewed were concerned that indirect attack actions – primarily backfiring from a distance – had consequences that should be further discussed. Many were concerned about the additional forage burned that they depended on for their livelihood. While many understand and support backfiring as an effective tool, some believe that it is used too much in lieu of direct attack, especially with equipment. As fragile as these rangeland systems are, and as slow as they are to recover, some are concerned that we may not be minimizing acres lost when certain habitats are needed for such species as sage grouse. In addition, several permittees and landowners who depend on the forage for seasonal use, often have few options when the land is burned. On the other hand, the RFPA and others rely heavily on backfiring as a tool to stop a fire or create a black line that eventually stops a fire. They do not want to lose this as a tool. Their concern is that it should be used more at night or early morning, along with direct attack.

From the interviews, there was a general belief from permittees and landowners that more direct attack and back burning should be done at night. They stated a number of times that fighting these rangeland fires during the heat of the day was not very productive.

Consequences of Land Allocations: Several of those interviewed expressed concerns over the patchwork of special land use allocations that restrict firefighting options, such as the use of dozers. When that use is restricted or eliminated, often the only option is to back off and backfire, consuming many more acres. Some suggested this could result in altering sage grouse habitat and burning ACEC's and Wilderness Study Areas where, in certain circumstances, the careful use of equipment might have prevented additional burned areas. This discussion also included questions about how much discretion fire managers and line officers have in using motorized equipment in special areas. Some believe that there is not enough discretion, and values of those special areas are compromised by the inability at times to use carefully planned direct attack and equipment.

Longer Term Economic Impacts: Many interviewed were concerned with the long-term impacts to livelihoods and the economic base for the county. Judge Joyce stated that the livestock industry has an \$80 million annual impact to the county. With the vastness of the fires and recovery time, many ranchers have only three choices: find new forage, buy forage at over \$200. / ton, or reduce their herds. One rancher shared a concern about the watershed that feeds their irrigation needs, and the anticipated high sediments that will impact them for several years. Several mentioned the long term effects of losing key sage grouse habitat as well, envisioning further restrictions to ranchers throughout the west. The burned areas represented a significant number of known leks and sage grouse habitat.

Several permittees expressed worry about the future. They can deal with the future if they know what is coming, but there is a lot of uncertainty about the future of grazing, when they can return, and if they will be allowed to if lawsuits develop.

Grazing Practices and Fuel Loading: Many interviewed suggested that heavy fuel loads contributed to the intensity and difficulties in controlling these fires. They referenced the Trout Creek Mountain area and protections for Lahontan cutthroat trout, lost after all the time and expense in protecting them over the past 20 years. Along with this, there is a belief that grazing seasons are driven too much by dates, rather than growth, and this can lead to increased fuel loading.

Others mentioned the research coming out of places like the ARS office in Burns, indicating that there may be other ways to enhance restoration besides non-use for a period of years.

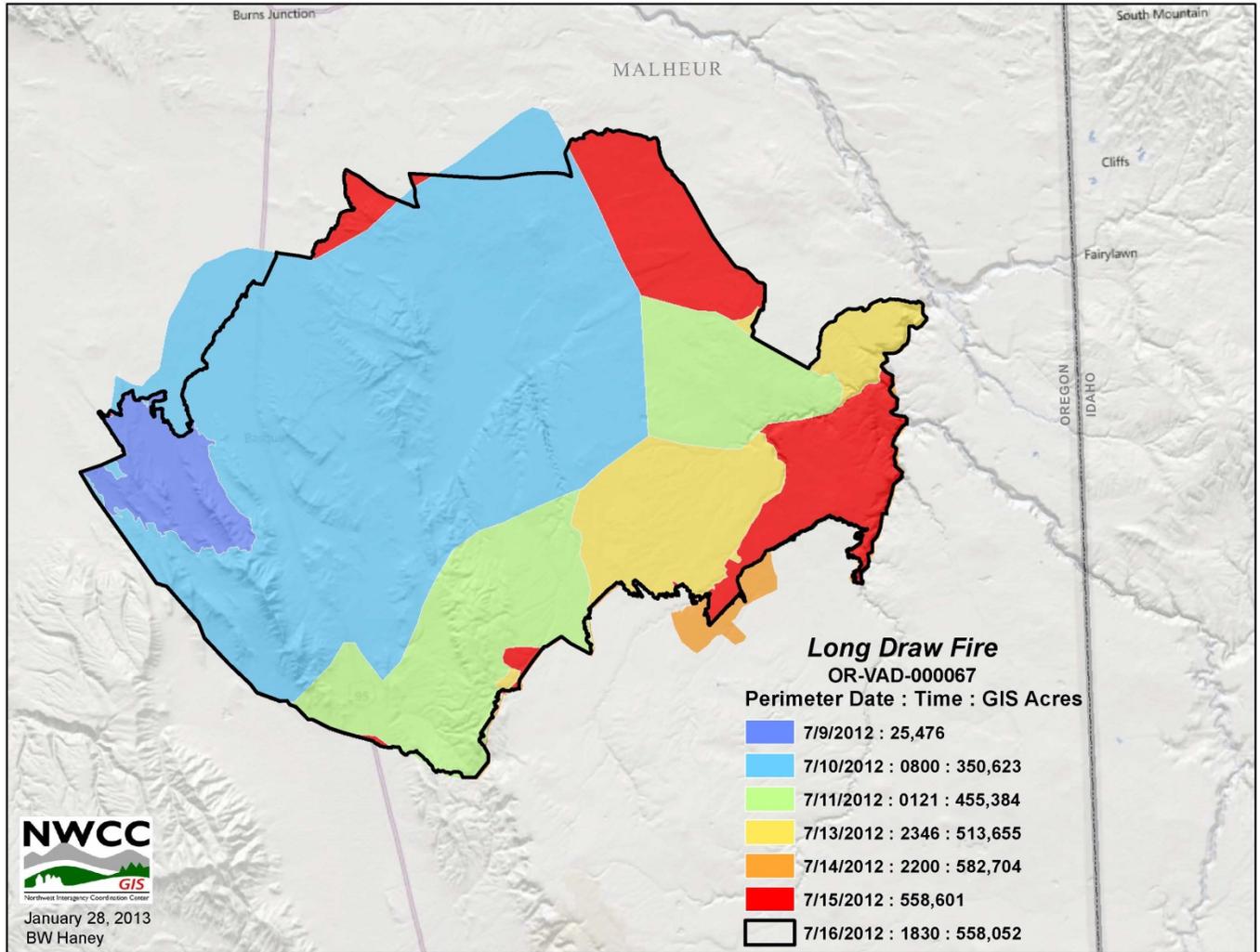
Litigation / Liability Issues: The Jordan Valley RFPAs wanted to know more about specific liability issues. We discussed federal policies, but there appears to still be misunderstanding or non-support for some policies that some permittees and landowners believe to contribute to a lack of aggressiveness at times from federal actions. Oregon Department of Forestry is working with the federal agencies to further clarify liabilities of RFPAs. Of specific interest to the RFPAs is having to meet federal safety standards when they are operating on federal land after initial attack. As an entity sanctioned under the state, do they have flexibility to establish their own safety policies congruent with state OSHA regulations?

The Vale District now works with 8 RFPAs.

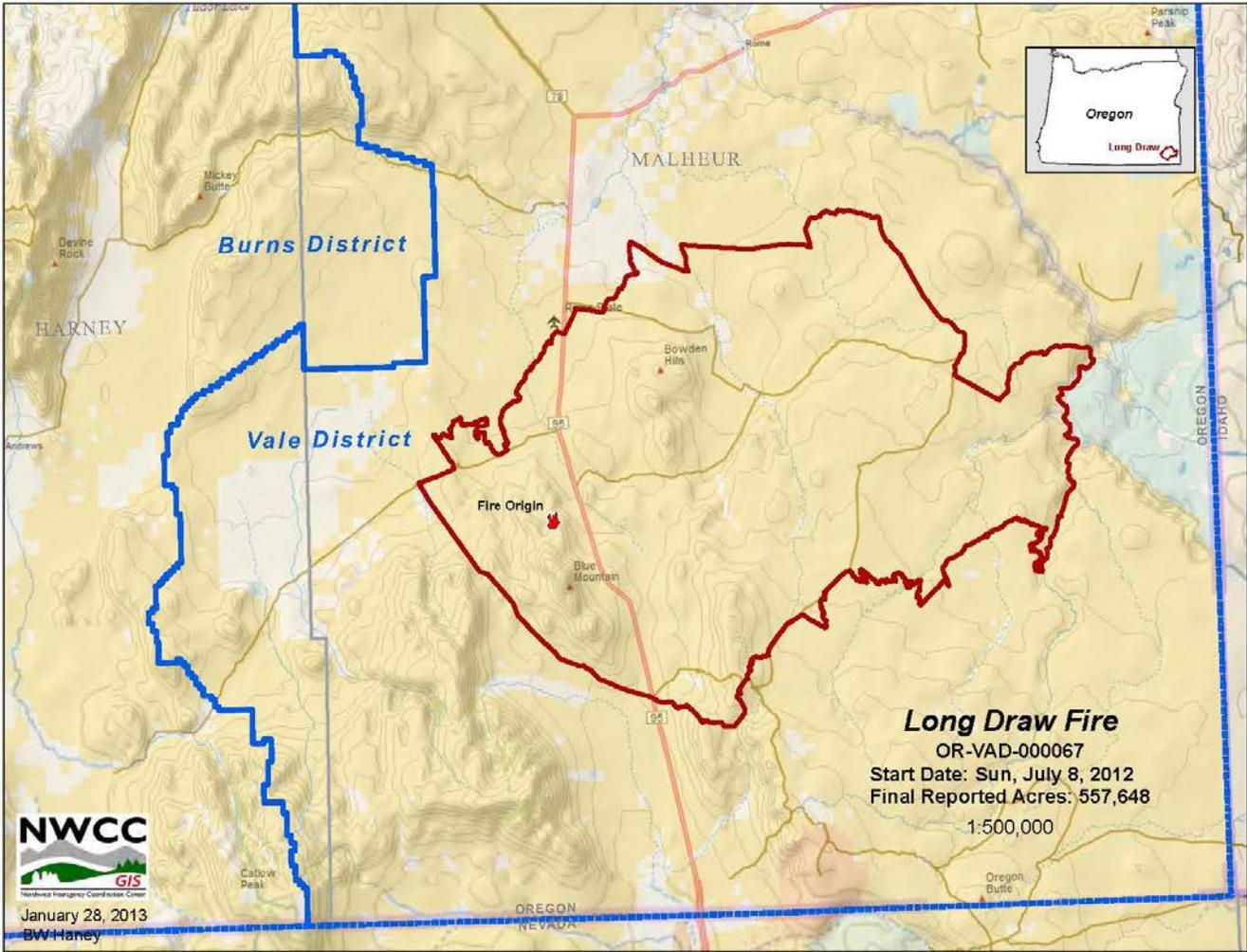
Budgets and Expectations: Average annual temperatures are rising, the fire season is longer now, fuel loads are building, and fires are getting bigger. People expect that when we have a fire, the agencies will bring the resources needed to do the work. With budgets declining, units are sharing resources more and more, with less capability to be as responsive. With the current budget, Vale BLM parked 3 engines this past season, because there was not enough funding to staff them. Expectations continue to rise, but budgets are declining. Vale predicts they will have only a minimal fuels reduction program in a few years, reducing their ability to take preventative actions such as green and brown stripping.

The Great Basin does not have a lot of WUI. Priorities are traditionally lower than in other parts of the region and country. In addition, it takes longer to get resources here. This all contributes to the potential for more, larger fires. Along with this, severity funds are based on a percentage of budgets. As budgets go down, this decreases. During unusual years like this with record setting indices, some question if severity-funding strategies should be adjusted.

Appendix C Long Draw Progression Map



Appendix D Long Draw Vicinity Map



Appendix E

Incident Team Chronology

Long Draw Fire:

- **July 8th, 2012** -18:04 - Incident reported
- 19:13 – Incident Commander Type 4 provides size up – about 2000 acres
- 20:06 – ICT4 orders Type 3 incident commander
- 21:49 – ICT3 on-scene, transition official at 00:49 (7/9/12)
- **July 9th** – 06:36 – ROSS order for Type 2 Incident Management Team
- 11:56 – Transition to different Vale District IMT3 (day shift) (Skaggs)
- 23:33 – Transition to different Vale District IMT3 (night shift) (Crouch)
- In-brief IMT2 (Watts)
- **July 10th** – morning – Transition from ICT3 (night shift) to IMT2 (Watts)
- **July 10th**, the fire made its largest gain of about 325,000 acres
- **July 11th**- late afternoon - IMT2 (Watts) in-briefs IMT1 (Pendleton)
- **July 12th** – 06:00 – Transition from IMT2 (Watts) to IMT1 (Pendleton)
- **July 15th** – Long Draw Fire contained
- **July 17th** – IMT1 (Pendleton) released, fire turned back to Vale District
- **July 30th** – Long Draw Fire controlled

Miller Homestead Fire:

- **July 8th, 2012** – 16:02 - Incident reported by local landowner
- 16:09 Burns District IMT3 (Hussey / McConnell)
- 19:53 – update from Hussey – fire is roughly 3500-4000 acres
- **July 11th** – IMT3 (Hunter) relieves local IMT3
- **July 12th** – fire makes largest gain of about 89,000 acres
- **July 13th** – IMT2 (Watts) relieves IMT3 Hunter)
- **July 26th** – IMT2 (Watts) released, fire turned back to local IMT3 (Richardson)

Appendix F

Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association Composition / Capabilities

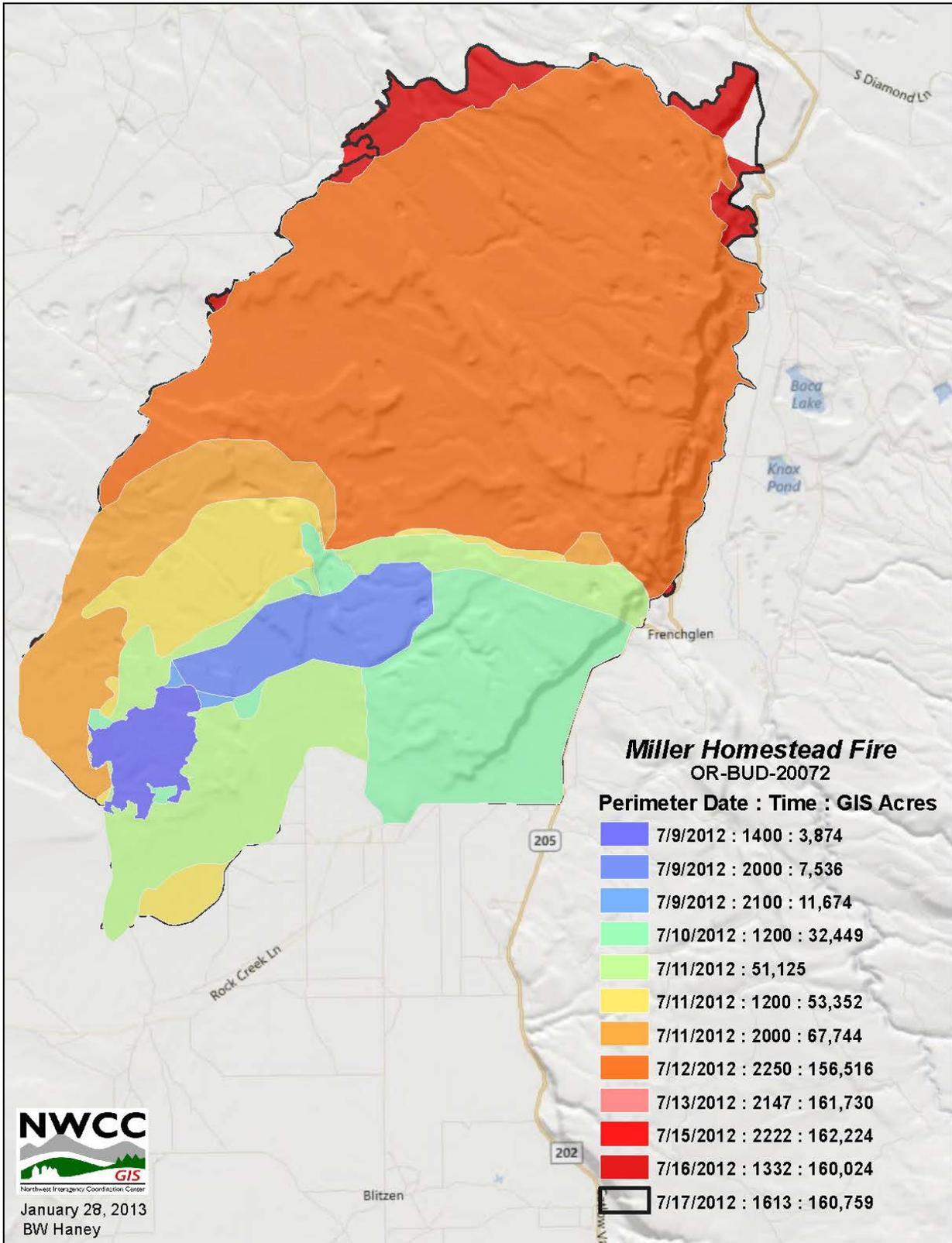
The Jordan Valley RFPA was formed with the support of the Oregon Department of Forestry in 2008. There are about 75 people that potentially respond when the radio call goes out. Actual response depends on location and if there are other fires or the potential for additional fires. Volunteers include a cross-section of the community and include equipment operators and firefighters. Last season, about 30 volunteers strapped on backpacks and responded to a fire in the South Fork of the Owyhee River in very difficult terrain. Assisted by a helicopter, they were successful in suppressing a challenging fire. Most fires are responded to with equipment where access is available.

The RFPA has a sophisticated radio system that ties them together. They stated that each unit has at least one radio and every person on the ground has a portable or is with someone who has one. Most have upgraded at their own expense to state-of-the-art units. The system includes five repeaters. BLM fire managers have utilized the RFPA system for communications with members in the past.

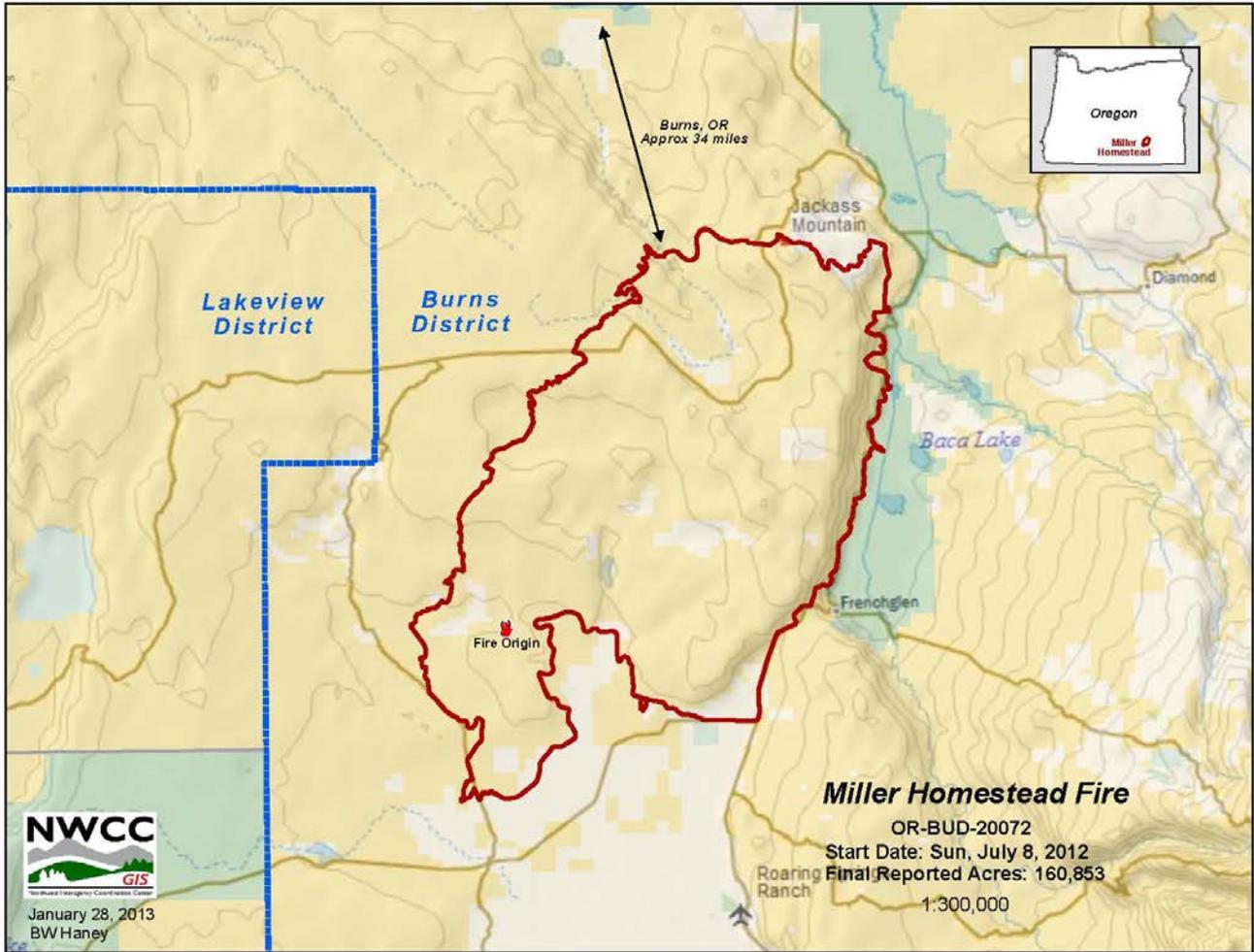
Representatives of the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association identified the following resources for the upcoming season:

- 25 – slip-on 200-gallon spray units, most furnished by ODF. Pickup trucks are privately owned.
- 50 – ATVs with rear – mounted sprayers with 25-gallon capacity and electric pumps.
- 2 – 300-gallon pumpers furnished by ODF. These are complete units, new to the RFPA this season.
- 1 – 1000-gallon pumper furnished by ODF. This is also new for this season.
- 2 – graders
- 2 – dozers
- 8 – tenders
- 5 – repeaters (all private) that are dispersed in the area. Two are on South Mtn. in Idaho; one is on Mahogany Mtn., and two are west of Jordan Valley.
- Many portable radios. Recently many have been upgraded.
- 1 – Cessna 182 aircraft fully equipped with air-to-air and air-to-ground (RFPA) frequencies. GPS map display and “coordinate lock-on” capable. The aircraft is used to help deploy resources and help with efficient response time.

Appendix G Miller Homestead Fire Progression Map



Appendix H Miller Homestead Fire Vicinity Map



Appendix I

Reciprocal Fire Protection Agreement Between Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association and Bureau of Land Management, Vale District

This Reciprocal Fire Protection Agreement, effective June 9th, 2012, between the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association and Vale District, Bureau of Land Management is based on the Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955, PL 84-86 as amended 01/03/05 and the Cooperative Agreement between the Oregon Department of Forestry, State Forester and the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

Recitals:

Whereas, the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association is a non-profit organization of rangeland owners which has been organized pursuant to ORS 477.315 to 477.325 to provide protection to certain lands in Malheur County, Oregon, and

Whereas, the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association has the responsibility for the protection of private and state rangelands within the boundary of the association area and those fires threatening private and state land, by agreement with the Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon Board of Forestry, and

Whereas, the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association is a totally volunteer organization made up of landowners and their employees and is funded only through private donations and state grant funding and is not funded by a tax base. The Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association is not capable financing any fire suppression efforts outside of their volunteer efforts, which include landowner volunteer time, landowner equipment, and Rangeland Fire Protection Association equipment, and

Whereas, the Vale District, Bureau of Land Management, is responsible for the protection of federal lands within the boundary of the District and those threatening the District, and

Whereas, it is in the best interest of both parties to coordinate and cooperate in the fire protection efforts in their respective areas of responsibility.

Article I: Objectives

1. To enhance the coordination and cooperation between the parties named in this agreement.
2. To enhance and maximize the safety of all personnel and equipment involved in fire suppression and prescribed burning efforts.
3. To reduce the initial attack time and suppression costs by using the “closest forces concept”.

Article II: Definitions

1. **Closest Forces Concept** is defined as dispatching the closest fire suppression resources regardless of party affiliation to the incident.
2. **Cooperating Party** means the party assisting the protection/jurisdictional party.
3. **Incident Commander** is the person in-charge of the fire suppression efforts and is usually the most experience fire fighter on-scene.

4. **Initial Attack**, is the control efforts taken by resources which are the first to arrive at an incident.
5. **Extended Attack** is the phase of the incident when Initial Attack capabilities have been exceeded. For the purpose of this agreement it will be defined as the actions taken after the first 24 hour period. It is also the trigger required for the federal agencies to initiate a Supplemental Fire Suppression Agreement.
6. **Multi-Fire Situation**, are two or more fires burning at the same time on land protected by one or more of the cooperating parties.
7. **Reciprocal Fire Protection assistance** is fire protection assistance, extended by either party to this agreement to the lands of the other party as each may be in a position to furnish.
8. **Reinforcements** shall mean those resources in excess of the initial attack resources. Requests for reinforcements will be honored only as the other party may be in a position to furnish.
9. **Size-Up**, is the initial assessment of the fire situation, including fire size, fire behavior, location, potential problems with control, estimate of personnel and equipment to contain.
10. **Protection/Jurisdictional Party**, means the party having the legal responsibility for protection of the lands on which the fire exists.
11. **Threat**, is defined as an imminent possibility that lands or property of the protection/jurisdictional party will be damaged by the fire.
12. **Threatened protection/jurisdiction**, the determination of "threat" is made by the threatened party. This area of threat may change based on the fire danger, fuels, weather conditions, and access. It is the responsibility of the other parties to continue to work together to mitigate the threat.
13. **Initial Action**, actions taken by a protection/jurisdictional party when an uncontrolled fire directly threatens their protection/jurisdictional area, which may be beyond the 24 hour period after the fire starts as described in the Federal "RED BOOK".
14. **Gross Negligence**, for the purpose of this agreement, gross negligence is defined as the willful disregard for human life.

Article III: Procedures

1. Each party will upon receiving a fire report within their respective areas of responsibility, dispatch their closest firefighting resource regardless of protection party, and immediately notify the other party of the location and action taken on the reported fire. If for any reason, a protection party is unable to respond, they will notify the cooperating party.
2. It will be the responsibility of the first firefighting unit to arrive on the fire to provide a size-up of the fire situation and report it to the protection party dispatch center. This information will then be immediately shared with the cooperating party.
3. The responsibility for the direction of the initial attack suppression action will fall to the most experienced supervisor on the first crew to arrive on the fire. This person will remain as Incident Commander until changed by the protection party.
4. Following initial attack by the closest forces, the protection party shall take over the fire unless mutually agreed to by both parties.

Article IV: Command Structure

1. In order to facilitate a coordinated fire suppression effort on a wildfire incident, the Incident Command System (ICS) shall be used.

2. Following initial attack, the Incident Commander (IC) shall be designated by the protection party.
3. When lands under the jurisdiction of another party are threatened or the fire has crossed to lands protected by the other party, the designation of the IC will be a joint decision of the parties involved. These fires will be managed by a consensus of the threatened or protection/jurisdictional parties.
4. If the incident involves multiple jurisdictions, a Unified Command may be considered.
5. Command of the incident may also be delegated from one of the multiple jurisdictional parties to a single Incident Commander to act as their representative in managing the incident.

Article V: Communications

1. This agreement provides for shared communication on Vale District, Bureau of Land Management frequencies in accordance with the following;
 - a. Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association may utilize authorized Vale District radio frequencies during fire suppression operations or other emergency incidents.
 - b. Use of authorized frequencies is restricted to intercommunications between Vale District and all cooperating parties while on a BLM incident or an incident on which BLM is a cooperating party.

Article VI: Liability and Waivers

1. It is mutually agreed that each party to this agreement hereby waives all claims against the other party for compensation for any loss, damage, personal injury, or death occurring under this agreement as a consequence of the performance of this agreement unless gross negligence on any part of any party is determined.
2. It is understood that each party to this agreement will accept each party's standards of operation, training, personal protective equipment within the 24 hour time period stated in the Mutual Aid Operating Plan. After the first 24 hours, Rangeland Fire Protection Resources are required to meet agency operations, training, qualifications, and personal protective standards on federal jurisdictional areas of responsibility, unless otherwise stated in the Supplemental Fire Protection Agreement. The BLM will honor RFPA operations, training, qualifications, and personal protective standards on RFPA jurisdictional areas of responsibility.
3. It is understood that the issue of "threatened protection/jurisdictional area" will be determined by the definition of "threat". If there is a question regarding threat, a consensus will be reached by the federal Duty Officer and an authorized representative of the Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

Article VII: Appropriation Limitations

1. Nothing in this agreement shall be construed as binding either party to expend any sum in excess of their available appropriation.
2. Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association has no funding available for fire suppression costs. All efforts by the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association are of a volunteer nature and is funded only through private donations and state grant funding and is not funded by a tax base.

Appendix J

Long Draw After Action Review Notes

Concerns raised at Long Draw Fire AAR of 1/23/2013:

1. Communications between RFPA and engines fell apart on second day.

2. 2 BLM vehicles driving around without knowledge of fire status.

3. RFPA isn't aware of daily weather and fuel moisture conditions (before or during a fire)

Decision: BLM Fire Staff will work with RFPAs to determine what fire intelligence products the RFPAs would like to receive and the manner they want those products sent. The products will be sent to Silas, Clint, and Jamie. Intelligence items include daily fire weather, staffing, and fuel moisture updates.

4. RFPA willing to send more firefighters if they know BLM is short.

5. Not knowing location of livestock and horsemen can impact firefighting techniques 6. BLM equipment not being double-staffed for continuous operation.

7. Not all RFPA vehicles have radios that receive BLM.

Decision: those RFPA vehicles without BLM frequency will work with BLM on the line vs. working independently. IC will be informed by RFPA rep of RFPAs that are not working adjacent to Vale BLM.

8. Paul Davis has lots of equipment close by but isn't used for firefighting 9. RFPA may have dozers available but fuel expense would be on RFPA.

Decision: Gordon from ODF working on this issue.

10. RFPA feels BLM morning briefings/shift transition appear to be idle time for firefighters.

11. Locals often offer access information that is not accepted.

12. Doug Wiggins has lots of local knowledge and water source information yet isn't seen on fires.

13. Ranchers were not kept informed of fire progress – from start to end of fire.

14. Only have 2 SEATs in Oregon (Lakeview and Ontario) yet felt Burns Junction would be more central for Vale.

15. RFPA has a strong concern with transition from local team to IMT.

Decision: Local Fire Staff will inform RFPAs about IMT transitions and invite RFPA rep to in-briefings. RFPA contact info will be covered in IMT in-briefings, including information about Bob Skinner's aircraft.

16. Blue Mountain repeater went out during fire and no one could speak to another except by line of sight.

17. Skinner had a hard time getting cleared for entering controlled airspace – even when no aircraft were in the controlled space

18. During flights Skinner often broadcasts on BLM frequency without getting a response.

19. RFPA should have representation at operations development meetings as well as daily briefings.

20. Communication with RFPAs will be topic at Incident Commander Refresher.

21. RFPAs should consider requesting Sand Table exercises for transition from initial attack to type 3 incidents.