

New Mexico 2017 Wildland Urban Interface Summit

March 30, 2017



Dog Head Fire/Telling the Integrated Story 2.0 - Strategic Thinking Across Territorial Lines

Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Before the 2016 fire season, the Cibola National Forest committed to holding a series of Life First Engagement sessions with all employees, cooperators, and collaborative partners. These pre-season sessions were designed to communicate the agency goal to ***implement strategies and tactics that commit responders only to operations where and when they can be successful, and under conditions where important values actually at risk are protected with the least exposure necessary while maintaining relationships with the people we serve.*** The Forest and the Mountainair Ranger District also held check in's after the Dog Head Fire.
- Also prior to the 2016 season, Torrance County Emergency Management conducted a Tabletop simulation of a wildland fire and how resources would respond. Most area agencies participated in this exercise that took place just a week prior to the Dog Head Fire.
- Early recovery efforts benefitted from data sharing among the cooperating agencies. Burn severity maps, hydrological information, and debris flow models were shared among agencies and saved time and money by preventing duplicated effort.
- The Dog Head Fire Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team met during the last week of June before the fire was contained to determine immediate burn severity effects to values at risk. The team proposed rapid response treatments to protect health and safety, property, and natural and cultural resources. These treatments included road and infrastructure protection, storm patrols, hazard signs, and invasive weed treatments.
- The Cibola National Forest continues to work with the grazing allotment permittees affected by the Dog Head fire to restore ecosystem function and range improvements. For FY17, Regional Office Tier III funds have been secured to complete archaeological clearances in advance of heavy equipment operations to remove hazard trees which could damage newly reconstructed fence. This was a lesson learned from previous fires on the forest.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

- The Isleta project partners have modified operations to cut, skid and deck materials to the roads instead of leaving downed logs in the woods to make it easier for local communities to retrieve firewood. We have reviewed our process for determining fire restrictions and will ensure our operations are consistent with site-specific conditions.
- In the past, BAER Teams have operated independently, having minimal interaction with other agencies or external partners. The Dog Head Coordinated Rehabilitation Group introduced a collaborative framework which may be unfamiliar to the traditional BAER Team format. The collaborative approach provides opportunity for improved data sharing and coordination between agencies working on public and private lands.
- Similarly, incident command teams are often unaccustomed to working with organized collaborative groups and may take on too strong a role in an effort to coordinate these groups. Collaboratives like the Dog Head Coordinated Rehabilitation Group need to operate in a more integrated manner with the incident command team. Team liaison officers should be provided with collaborative expectations to insure this integrated operation.

Point of Contact for the Mountainair Ranger District Landscape Team - Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District - Dierdre Tarr

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Landscape Team formed May 20, 2015 - Includes representatives from four land grants; Torrance and Lincoln Counties; NM Department of Agriculture; National Park Service; Pueblo of Isleta
- June 13, 2016 - Call from the Forest Service – Fire had started – In-briefing at 8:00 a.m. on June 14th
- June 14, 2016 – Attended in-briefing with Senator Ted Barela; Brenda Smythe, Point of Contact for the Sandia Ranger District Landscape Team. Type 2 Team was to take over the fire at 6:00 p.m. Contacted by the Liaison for the Type 2 Team to meet in the afternoon. Met with Type 2 Team Liaison, Elaine Kohrman, Cibola Forest Supervisor; Jay Turner, District Ranger, Senator Ted Barela; Annette Ortiz, Deputy County Manager to prepare a list of cooperators and their contact information (would be invited to daily meetings for updates on fire; discussed the coordination of public meetings.
- We helped coordinate public meetings.
- We met on a daily basis with Type 2 and Type 1 Fire Teams, Forest Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and concerned local government representatives.
- Due to prior watershed mapping work through NM State Forestry and the GIS Department at NM Highlands University we were able to provide existing treatment maps to the suppression team.
- The Claunch-Pinto SWCD has been working with numerous collaboratives through the Estancia Basin Watershed “CORE” Committee and the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance since 2005. Due to these two existing groups at the request of the Forest Service we were able to convene an initial Dog Head Coordinated Rehab Group within 4 days of the start of the fire.



- The Coordinated Rehabilitation Group members include: The Chilili Land Grant, Pueblo of Isleta, US Forest Service, Torrance County, Bernalillo County, Edgewood SWCD, East Torrance SWCD, Bureau of Indian Affairs, NM State Forestry, NM Homeland Security & Emergency Management Department, NM Environment Department, and Claunch-Pinto SWCD; the offices of Senator Tom Udall, Senator Martin Heinrich, Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham, State Representative Matthew McQueen, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Services Agency, US Geological Survey, US Army Corps of Engineers, USDA Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team, and SWCA Environmental Consultants

Coordinated Rehab Group member's post-fire jurisdictional authorities and/or responsibilities:

- Forest Service has post-fire rehabilitation authority on National Forest System lands only. Recommendation for types of rehab treatments are listed in the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team report.
- Chilili Land Grant is a political subdivision of the state of New Mexico organized under Chapter 49: Land Grants. The Land Grant has the authority to expend and accept state and federal funds to conduct restoration work within its boundary.
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's EWP program allows NRCS to immediately assist private landowners that have been affected by natural disasters through local sponsors.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts statutory authority allows them to assist all land managers and landowners and are eligible to become a sponsor for NRCS's EWP program.
- NM Homeland Security & Emergency Management (NMHSEM) is the lead state agency responsible for coordinating the response and recovery from a disaster. NMHSEM is also the lead state agency that interacts with, and receive funds from, the national Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- NM State Forestry's post-fire statutory responsibility allows for the rehabilitation of suppression tactics on state and private lands only.
- Bernalillo and Torrance Counties have the primary responsibility to ensure public safety from all disasters within their jurisdictional boundary and repair and maintain county infrastructure after the disaster.

The remaining group members have programs and technical expertise that can assist with either private, local, state, tribal or federal rehabilitation efforts.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

- "Better Messaging" is imperative. We delivered pertinent information at the public meetings, but needed to deliver this information at every opportunity. (Ex. Road Blocks; etc) Recommend looking into creating an IMT (maybe a Type 3 kind of organization that might be called a Recovery or Response Team) that can deal with the Rehab/Community Recovery issues. Creating a Recovery/Response Team might help private landowners deal with the frustration they feel when they try to find assistance.
- Sand Bags – Better communication and coordination. Examples: We could give out sand bags, but could not help install them (liability issues)
- Information Packets for affected landowners – Include "After Wildfire Guideline"; Federal Tort Claims Guidelines.
- Information Packets for indirect concerned citizens – Use SWCD websites; County websites; local radio station; newspaper articles
- Pre-season - training on interdisciplinary (example: hydrology reports and the lack of timeliness for completion)
- Develop agreements between Counties/SWCDs and FS that will expedite recovery work.
- Conduct local regional meetings with decision makers to include ICS courses for Recovery Team and Local Government (non-fire people).

Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District

The Dog Head Fire burned in two counties and in two soil & water conservation district (Edgewood and East Torrance). 10,769 acres burned within the Edgewood SWCD boundary, with the majority of those acres within the Chilili Land Grant and Aceves Road area.

Edgewood SWCD is within two Forest Service Ranger Districts (Mountainair and Sandia), and is the Point of Contract for the Sandia Landscape Team and is involved with the Mountainair Landscape Team.

WHAT WORKED WELL

- District Staff attended daily Dog Head Fire In-briefings with US Forest Service, fire teams, NM State Forestry, Isleta Pueblo, Chilili Land Grant, NuStar Pipeline and local government
- Coordinated public meetings
- Coordinated Dog Head Coordinated Rehab Group first 4 days of the fire.
- Fire preparation with Sandia Ranger District for possible fire spreading to the north
- Applied for Emergency Watershed Program funds (EWP)
- Worked with the land grant, pueblo and private sector
- Hired SWCA Environmental Consultants to install weather stations to monitor flood potential
- Brought in non-traditional partners (agencies not usually called upon during fires)



Edgewood SWCD is the administrator and sponsor of NRCS's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program funding for properties/landowners within our District Boundaries



EWP funding received: Aceves Road area - \$143,100, Chilili Land Grant - \$217,870

Edgewood SWCD is responsible for 25% match of \$90,317.50

Edgewood SWCD was awarded \$43,926 in State Disaster Assistance Funding for HESCO Baskets which were used to secure and protect the Bridge in Chilili from flood water.

The Pueblo of Isleta and the Chilili Land Grant, along with the Army Corps of Engineers and HESCO Rep installed the HESCO baskets.

Vulcan Materials Company of Albuquerque donated 769.90 Tons of sand for this project.

Nu-Star Pipeline will provide match-funding for the projects along the pipeline above Chilili Land Grant

Edgewood SWCD Dog Head Fire Restoration Cost-Share program applications were distributed to area residents who did not qualify for EWP funding.

- Programs has a 90/10 match reimbursement
- Maximum reimbursement of \$4500 per landowner within the burned area

- This funding will assist affected landowners with post fire land rehabilitation through practices such as chipping with mulch ground cover, native grass seed, lop & scatter, cross fencing, boundary fence, diversions, erosion control structures, as well as other practices that may be deemed necessary
- 20 applications have been received, and 8 projects have been completed to date
- Edgewood SWCD applied for and received, State Board of Finance funding in the amount of \$150,000 in an Emergency Funds Grant for restoration work and match.

Edgewood SWCD Contracted with SWCA Environmental Consultants for technical assistance.

- Purchased three monitors for weather stations placed in various burn areas to monitor rainfall for flood alerts. Installation was done by SWCA Conservation Consultants.
- SWCA also coordinated with Bernalillo and Torrance County Emergency Office Coordinators (EOC) for flood alarm alerts.
- SWCA continues to coordinate and monitor these systems.

Private funding received by the District for project work in the amount of \$6,000.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

- Still need to work on evacuation protocols
- Evacuations/jurisdiction differences therefore County Officials need to communicate more clearly
- There are overlapping responsibilities/authorities – need to integrate these better
- Territorial issues are still alive and well, but all partners, whether government, private sector, or private individuals need to remember we are in this situation together-and fire has no boundaries.

East Torrance Soil and Water Conservation

WHAT WORKED WELL

East Torrance SWCD is the administrator and sponsor of NRCS's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program funding for properties/landowners within East Torrance District Boundaries.

- EWP funding received: La Para area - \$73,000. EWP program has a required match of 25%. East Torrance SWCD responsible for \$18,091 in match.
- 13 treatment project under EWP completed. Type of treatments funded: contour tree felling, mastication, critical area seeding, earth work, grade stabilization structure diversion, silt fence materials and installation.
- Administers SWCD's Dog Head Fire Restoration Cost-share program.



Isleta Pueblo

WHAT WORKED WELL

- The Type 1 Team worked well with all jurisdictions, Team's understanding of and willingness to listen to all jurisdictions
- Post fire - The Pueblo worked well with Chilili Land Grant (long time neighbors)
- We worked with the NM Baptist Disaster Relief group assisting private landowners with the mitigation of hazards and clean up.
- Provided manpower, equipment and fuel to the Land Grant for the installation of the HESCO baskets
- Fixed or replaced fence between Land Grant and Pueblo
- Provided equipment and labor to grade the roads in the burn area to make it more accessible for relief efforts and provided a backhoe for one of the families to level their property for a re-build.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

- Consolidated information works better if it comes from local sources, so when you send PIOs or FIOs out, make sure they have a trusted, local resident with them.
- Information meetings - We did well for the affected landowners, but according to landowners not directly affected by the fire - we need to do better.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

WHAT WORKED WELL

- The Emergency Watershed Program worked extremely well during this fire.
- Debris Flow: Private landowners who had their lands burn and had the funds to implement their own rehab (did not wait for government assistance) found that masticating burned trees in the valleys and lower slopes helped enormously when the rains came. Sediment movement from flooding was minimal in those areas as opposed to areas not treated. This helped with post-fire flooding impacts, road maintenance and erosion issues.

Conclusion

Working together early and often before fires is critical to build and maintain relationships. These are invaluable for building successful communications and networks of resources and also for relying upon each other in the difficult times. The interagency and collaborative partners approach was essential for a coordinated response across “all lands” to contribute to rehabilitation of lands and recovery of communities.

