



## Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

# After Action Reviews Klamath Area Fires, Summer 2014

November 7-14, 2014

In the second week of November, nine meetings were held in Siskiyou County communities that had been affected by the summer wildfires in the Klamath National Forest. These after action reviews were intended to allow community members and agency staff together to:

- reflect upon experiences from the 2014 fires and to share lessons learned;
- use the experiences from the 2014 fires to improve wildfire response, forest resilience and fire adapted communities; and
- continue to build fire-related partnerships in Klamath area communities.

**The Klamath National Forest** organized the meetings, and FLN staff member Mary Huffman assisted by facilitating them. In all, about a hundred people from the area took part in the meetings, representing local fire departments and fire safe councils, CAL FIRE and the county sheriff's office, business owners and residents. About 15 staff from the Klamath National Forest also took

part, with the forest supervisor attending all meetings, along with the forest deputy fire chief, fire planner, and at least one district ranger.

**At each meeting**, participants introduced themselves, then broke into small groups for a World Café exercise. Topics addressed in this way included interagency coordination and communication; field operations and tactics; fire effects and landscape condition; community safety and well-being; and "Please answer my question." The groups then shared two key highlights from their table's conversation with the

larger group. Each meeting then closed with a round-robin of final remarks, or with guided discussion of the question "How can we use what we've learned to make things better in the future?"

**Recurring themes and messages** that local participants expressed to the Forest Service:

- If the Forest Service would log the forest, the fires wouldn't be this bad because there wouldn't be all this fuel.
- Because you're not logging, the roads aren't maintained and fewer



*Right:* A news release distributed locally outlined the goals, locations and dates of the nine after action review community meetings hosted by the Klamath NF.

*Above:* A notice on the county fairground marquee helped get the word out further.



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## News Release

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### Community After Action Reviews for the 2014 Season Klamath Fires

**Yreka, CA** - The Klamath National Forest has scheduled eight community meetings for community discussion regarding the Little Deer, Logs, Whites, and Beaver Fires as well as Happy Camp Complex. The goal of these meetings is to reflect upon experiences from the 2014 fires and share lessons learned; use the experiences from 2014 to improve wildfire response, ecosystem resilience and fire adapted communities; and to continue to build fire-related partnerships in local communities.

Presentations are planned in the following communities:

**November 7th** 5:00-7:00pm **Yreka** at Winema Hall at the Fairgrounds  
**November 10th** 12:00-2:00pm **Klamath River** at the Klamath River Community Center  
**November 10th** 5:00-7:00pm **Macdoel** at the Butte Valley Fire Hall  
**November 11th** 6:00-8:00pm **Seiad** at the Seiad Fire Hall  
**November 12th** 4:00pm-6:00pm **Sawyer's Bar** at the Salmon River Restoration Council  
**November 13th** 12:00-2:00pm **Happy Camp** at the Happy Camp Grange Hall  
**November 13th** 6:00pm-8:00pm **Scott Bar** at the Community Hall  
**November 14th** 2:00-4:00pm **Fort Jones** at the Fort Jones Community Center

people are present in the woods—this makes it harder to find fires right away and to fight them.

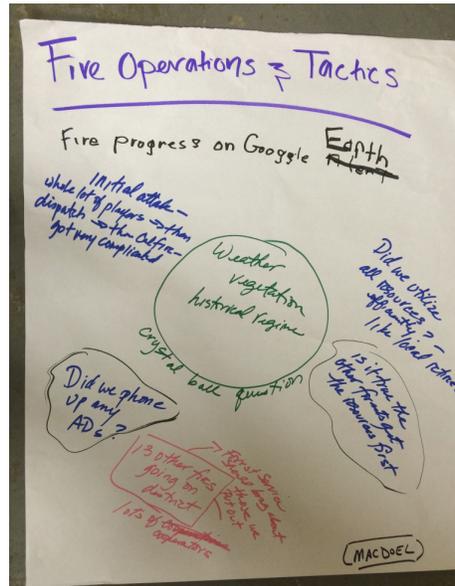
- Salvage logging needs to be done faster. The value of salvaged timber falls dramatically after the first year.
- The Forest Service isn't aggressive enough in initial attack. The system is too cautious and this is what lets fires get big. We wouldn't have this problem if we were aggressive in initial attack.
- You don't engage local knowledge during firefighting. Some of the incident management teams didn't listen to us, and they don't know the area (e.g., they don't know where the houses are).
- We could see the fire coming for days, but nobody came. Why couldn't you send resources to us sooner?
- If we could spend a fraction of the money on fuel management that we do on fire fighting, we would be way ahead.



The Klamath National Forest supervisor and a district ranger exchange ideas with residents of Sawyers Bar and staff from the Salmon River Restoration Council.



The Forest's deputy forest chief discusses firefighting strategy with a local business owner and a local river guide at the meeting in Happy Camp.



Sample page from the meeting in the village of Macdoel, with notes from participants on the topic of fire operations and tactics.

**Key information** shared with the community by the Forest Service:

- During the current forest supervisor's tenure (seven years), the Klamath NF's approach to wildfire has been aggressive initial attack.
- Altogether, the fires burned roughly 200,000 acres on Klamath National Forest lands.
- The firefighting costs totaled roughly \$150 million for the Klamath National Forest.
- When the line of storms came through on August 11, there were about twenty new fire starts. We put as many resources as possible on the line and still it was not enough.
- At one point we had five incident management teams working and 6,000 people working on the fires.
- The proposed Westside Recovery Project includes removing hazard trees from along roads, removing fuels in and around communities, salvage logging for timber value and replanting. Please send your comments on the proposed action.
- The earliest that work could begin on this recovery project, using the exceptions we have requested under NEPA and without litigation, is nine months (as opposed to the typical 2-3 years).
- We can expand the community liaison program and pre-fire planning to improve the use of local

knowledge during firefighting. In some places we need more than one approved community liaison.

**In summary**, the main outcomes from this series of meetings were:

- The USFS and participants exchanged facts and clarified rumors about the firefighting effort.
- Residents shared their frustrations; a few picked up claim forms for damages on private property resulting from firefighting operations.
- Firefighting cooperators (agencies including fire departments and law enforcement) exchanged ideas for improved communication and coordination for future fires.
- Fire Safe Councils were endorsed for citizen action relating to fuel reduction on private property.
- Several communities realized how participation in the Klamath National Forest's community liaison program is a powerful and effective avenue for exchange of local knowledge during firefighting.



An area of known spotted owl habitat on the Klamath National Forest burned in the summer fires. The scorched conifer needles and oak leaves will fall during the winter rains.

All photos: TNC/Mary Huffman

**For more information** about these AAR workshops, contact:

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The Fire Learning Network (FLN) is part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Lynn Decker ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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