

Elkhorn Field Trip 7/27/15 @4pm

Participants

Mike West – USFS, Asst. Fire Management Officer

Roger Spragg – Elkhorn HOA President

Jamie Moore – Big Mountain Tree Service

Mike Frost – Whitefish Area Fire Safe Council

Bill Swope – NW Montana Hazardous Fuels

Joe Page – Whitefish Fire Chief

Jeremy Pris – MT DNRC, Fire Supervisor

Greg Dillon – USFS, RMRS, Spatial Fire Analysis

Rick Connell – USFS, Forest Fire Management Officer/Fire Behavior Analyst

Amy McKoon – MT DNRC, (Acting) Fire Prevention Specialist

Agenda

Road right of way fuels reduction to improve evacuation, ingress/egress (All)

Summary in priority order

- Make the primary escape route as defensible and usable as possible because the alternate escape routes are not currently designed to handle two-way traffic. In the event that the primary access is compromised a conflict would most likely occur between emergency responders trying to get in and evacuees trying to get out. Use a combination of strategies outline below to meet this objective.

- Improve alternate escape routes by creating pull outs, reducing fuel along right of way (20'-30' either side would be ideal, anything helps), improving road surface to allow travel by two wheel drive vehicles, clearly identifying with signs/color codes, modifying dead end sign and add a barrier/sign to escape route through Jim Cole's property to the West of Elkhorn.

- Clear vegetation along the inside corner of roads to increase visibility thus reducing the likelihood of a collision between emergency responders and evacuees. This also provides a secondary fuels reduction benefit. Keep in mind that this will require maintenance as visibility will diminish overtime; maintenance cost should be less than the initial treatment.

- Reduce ladder fuels and surface fuels on the downhill side of roads to decrease the amount of direct flame impingement, radiant/convective heat and smoke that may impact emergency responders and evacuees. Prioritize removing conifers over Western Larch and other deciduous vegetation. All of the vegetation does not necessarily need to be removed; the emphasis should be on breaking up the continuity of fuels horizontally and vertically. Removing mountain maple will actually stimulate future growth; this will require maintenance overtime. The lop & scatter method should be considered were appropriate and visual impacts are less of a concern, this will reduce cost due to the fact that pulling vegetation uphill by hand is very labor intensive. Consider completing a test strip for further implementation refinement; however keep in mind that some of the work will be site specific and the end result will most likely be variable. Completing this type of treatment within 20 feet of the road edge will be a good start; keep in mind that steeper slopes combined with heavier surface/ladder fuel loading may require treatment beyond 20 feet to be most effective. Contact Bill Swope with NW Montana Hazardous Fuels or a Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (MT DNRC) Service Forester for implementation/project specific details. The DNRC will need to be involved to treat fuels on state land from Hwy 93 to the Elkhorn gate. This area could be treated by removing small diameter trees (<6" diameter) and surface fuels.

- Mowing grass along the edge of roads after it matures and before it cures is certainly a worthwhile investment. This reduces potential fire behavior and increases safety by reducing the likelihood of contacting hidden objects with a vehicle and reduces the likelihood of a catalytic converter starting a fire.

"If there are ten days of fire activity where I couldn't get in here, the work would reduce that to eight days." Jeremy Pris, Fire Supervisor, MT DNRC.

Cistern capacity & water supply

Summary

- The current cisterns should be clearly identified for emergency responders, the leading edge should be identified and include a barrier so that fire engines will not fall into the tank in the event they drive onto them.

- The current cisterns add value to support initial attack efforts primarily type 6 engines (150-399 gallon water capacity). Previously mentioned fuels reduction efforts rate higher in relative importance versus adding additional cistern capacity. In the event you would like to add additional capacities consult the Whitefish Fire Chief and your insurance companies to right size your future system. Adding additional cistern capacity was not considered to be a high priority.

Road Condition, one way traffic, evacuation plan etc.

Summary

- Keep up with the dust abatement efforts; this increases visibility/safety for emergency responders and evacuees.
- Clearly identify/sign primary evacuation routes and any one way traffic requirements prior to periods of high fire danger. Most individuals under duress or guests will revert to what they know and tend to drive out the same way they drove in. Consider a color code system for the different evacuation routes.
- Work with the Flathead County Office of Emergency Services (OES) to identify lots that have residences or improvements that may need to be protected or evacuated in the event of a wild fire. This reduces confusion and helps emergency responders use their potentially limited time efficiently. Consider providing OES with an evacuation plan that includes a map of your road system and evacuation routes.
- Prioritize how you will contact homeowners in the event of an evacuation and who will initiate it. Build redundancy into your plan due to the fact that there is no one solution. Consider the following: mass texts, phone tree, reverse 911 (Liz Brooks 758-2194), five blasts (Mike Frost), radios, etc.
- Visit the following website for information related to the concept of Ready Set Go: <http://www.wildlandfirersg.org/> and or contact the MT DNRC fire prevention program.

This is a continuation of the efforts made by Mike Frost, Roger Spragg and others in your community who have not only completed their own work, have also supported and encouraged work on adjacent lands. We truly appreciate your engagement and your willingness to be proactive in this important ongoing endeavor. Mike Frost is a champion for Fire wise who is highly regarded and respected by the fire community in the Flathead Valley and beyond for all he does. Thank you all.

