Summary
Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative
Tuesday, May 10, 2024 9:00am – 3:00pm
Three Buttes Field Tour

ATTENDEES (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative Members:

- Andy Geissler, American Forest Resources Council (AFRC)
- Chandra LeGue, Oregon Wild
- Chuck Willer, Coast Range Association
- Fran Recht, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Paul Lulay, Hampton Lumber
- Kirk Shimeall, Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation and Development, CPRCD *(non-voting)*
- *Dani Jochums,* Triangle Associates *(Coordinator, non-voting)*

FOREST SERVICE (USFS):

- Becca Brooke, Forest Supervisor
- Michele Holman, Central Coast District Ranger
- Eric Andersen, Partnership Coordinator, Collaborative Liaison
- Iain Emmons, Central Coast Wildlife Biologist
- Meagan Campbell, USFS
- Matt Smith, Central Coast Botanist
- James Pettett, Central Coast Hydrologist
- Kevin Reese, Interagency Fire Staff Officer
- Alexa Valladolid, Public Information Officer

Notes Key

- Meeting notes do not represent collaborative agreements unless they specifically say so. They are meant to record three basic things: 1) the issue discussed, 2) the major points or questions raised in conversation, and 3) the resolution or next step if there is one. Unless specifically stated, resolutions are only the resolutions of the people present at the meetings.
- Text in red denotes action items.

9:00 – ORIENTATION AT CENTRAL COAST RANGER DISTRICT OFFICE

Michele Holman, Central Coast District Ranger, welcomed field tour participants to the Central Coast District Office. Participants engaged in a round of introductions. Michele then provided an orientation to the key topics that would be covered during the field tour, including operation logistics, strategies, fire camps, fire lines, fire management procedure, and fuels management.

Participants received a tour packet composed of the following materials:

- *3 Buttes Incident Decision (09/08/23)*
- *Agency Administrators' Intent, Three Buttes Fire (08/27/23)*
- *3 Buttes Incident Action Plan (09/10/23)*
- *3 Buttes Indirect Fireline Prescription for Roadside Shaded Fuel Breaks*
- *Three Buttes Fire Suppression Repair Plan (10/30/23)*
- *Images from the Three Buttes Fire Suppression*

Michele oriented participants to the documents in the packet and described what fire management looks like in practice. Each fire has a resources advisor who directs firefighters and associated staff on resource protection during the firefighting process. During the 2023 Three Buttes fire, the resources advisor was James Pettett, Central Coast Ranger District Hydrologist. Every day, an incident action plan (IAP) is distributed with information on that day's operations, maps, medical plans, and other necessary information. Each morning, there is a briefing on the IAP.

Michele spoke to the Indirect Fireline Prescription, which was a strategy that was used a lot at the Three Buttes fire, and details of the Suppression Repair Plan, which included inputting water bars to roads and other changes and improvements made post-fire.

Michele reviewed requirements for obtaining fire qualifications for fire management with USFS. To get qualifications, one must complete classroom work, supervised work on fires, and evaluations on proficiencies. To maintain qualifications, refresher courses are required. Michele is certified as WFA-2, which is a Type 2 forest administrator. She is working on further certification. When teams come in to fight fires, they report to the agency administrator.

When the Three Buttes fire hit, the Rock Creek fire was also active. Detection for the Three Buttes fire was challenging because while it was possible to smell smoke, it was difficult to pinpoint the source.

Q1: How has technology changed response to and detection of fires?
Kevin Reese, Interagency Fire Staff Officer, responded that a lot of detection is done through an infrared satellite system that picks up heat signatures. When a potential fire is detected, a unit is sent in to verify if a fire is active on the ground. Other detection includes planes, such as single-engine planes, twin-engine planes, and military excess planes in case of very large fire areas. Recently, artificial intelligence (AI) has been used more frequently to pinpoint fire and smoke. AI utilizes heat, movement, and smoke as fire indicators and has a 30-mile range. AI is

more commonly used in Eastern Oregon but is being installed in lookout towers around Oregon. Another advancement is having cameras that can be steered remotely.

Q2: How is public outreach conducted in the local communities during fire?
The Siuslaw National Forest uses news releases, social media, and NC Web. Alexa Valladolid, USFS Public Information Officer, spoke to what communications look like around fire. She said that, depending on the size of the fire, one to ten public information officers will work on distributing information. Community outreach will sometimes include going to sites in the community like grocery stores and posting information on boards. If the fire is large, public meetings and briefings are also available. Cooperative meetings with Oregon Department of Transportation, utilities companies, and other partners may also occur. The Three Buttes fire didn't pose a risk to communities, so it was not prioritized for significant public outreach efforts.

Q3: Are fire certifications obtained by fighting fires in other forests?
USFS staff confirmed that fire certifications are obtained by fighting fires in other forests. There is some control over which forests USFS staff are assigned to. If the USFS staff member is a member of the fire militia, they can indicate the distance they are willing to travel. Fire-specific staff cannot do this and are required to go anywhere they are assigned. A multiagency group decides how to staff fires so that each area maintains enough capacity. Michele earned her qualifications working in southeast Oregon, the Umpqua National Forest, and the Willamette National Forest. Often, the Siuslaw National Forest trains new firefighters and then those firefighters work on other forests.

If there was a large fire, additional administrative staff would be transferred to the Siuslaw National Forest in addition to other fire staff.

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) responds to fires on Bureau of Land Management or private land. ODF will join USFS in scoping out a fire if it is close to ODF's jurisdiction and vice versa.

Q4: How does the hierarchy for fire management work?
USFS staff indicated that hierarchy is typically based on jurisdiction.

Participants departed for the first field tour location.

11:00 - STOP AT GRAVEL PIT STAGING AREA

The group reconvened at the Gravel Pit Staging Area, which served as a staging area during the Three Buttes fire, as well as serving as a base camp during the late stages of the fire. USFS staff provided more information on the Three Buttes fire and what the response looked like on the ground.

Figure 1: Gravel piles at the Gravel Pit Staging Area

The Three Buttes fire was caused by a lightning bust and was part of a larger lightning bust in September 2023. It is rare to have lightning-caused fires on the coast due to the coast's humidity, but at the time the humidity in the area was low. It is also rare to have a lightning-caused fire in an old growth area. This provided a learning opportunity for USFS.

Kevin spoke to the steep curve of logistics during a fire response. During the first 24 hours of a fire, the fire fighters must be self-sufficient. Operational planning is key to fire response, including providing equipment, personnel, and food necessary for the response. A lot of USFS staff work on the logistics side of the fire response to keep the base functioning.

Q5: How are costs tracked during fire response?
There is a whole USFS finance section that is fire-specific. A job code is initiated for a fire to which staff charge costs related to food, fuel, land use agreements, personnel fees, and more. During the first 48 hours, the finance section is not completely operational, and estimates are used. After that, the finance section can complete cost projections. WOOFDAS will influence the financial projections. Tracking costs is especially important for human-caused fires or fires close to buildings because the costs may then be associated with an insurance claim.

There is also a planning section that tracks all resources needed for the fire response. Vehicles are all assigned numbers and tracked, and a database is utilized for all resource requests.

Q6: How many people were on the fire staff at its peak?
USFS responded that 200 people were staffing the fire, not including the incident management team.

Q7: Is an Environmental Assessment (EA) or any part of the NEPA process required during fire management?
An EA is not used during fire management. An emergency consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife is conducted after the fire is extinguished to document impacts to habitat conditions. The resources advisor knows the local environment well and advises on minimizing negative impact to the habitat. For example, using aerial retardant spray was avoided on the Three Buttes fire because the Siuslaw has a very dense network of streams.

Q8: What is the formula for cutting a fuel break for an indirect control line?

James Pettett, Central Coast Hydrologist, responded that during the Three Buttes fire, USFS based their fuel break off of the Willamette National Forest's guide for a shaded fuel break. The Willamette National Forest has guidance for clearing 200 feet on either side of the break. On the Three Buttes fire, USFS decided to emulate a plantation and eliminate ladder fuel along the road as this was the best approach for minimizing negative impacts and utilizing the equipment available.

Michele added that this strategy worked because it was a ground fire, not a high-wind fire. The area has 4-6 feet of biomass on the ground, so it was not practical to get down to the mineral. Several hot shot crews, which are the most advanced fire response crews, denied the assignment because they felt the steepness of the terrain and the unburned fuels made it too dangerous to evacuate crew in case of injury.

Q9: What is the plan for fire response in case of a fire close to Yachats, OR?
Michele answered that the same procedure would be utilized, considering values at risk. James added that the highest risk is where there are a lot of people. At Three Buttes, USFS had an indirect fire line around the fire and also reopened bare ground in decommissioned roads. There was also a hand-made line around a portion of the fire and direct lines to bare soil closer to the fire. After the fire, USFS decommissions roads again and reseeds. They did not reseed handlines except where the lines approached streams to reduce erosion. The Three Buttes fire did not have a rapid rate of spread so indirect response was a useful strategy. It should be noted that a fire strategy isn't always consistent in all areas of a fire.

Q10: How much did decommissioned roads affect the fire management strategy?
Kevin answered that even roads that are 3-5 years from last disturbance are helpful in efficient fire response. In vulnerable areas, maintaining roads is a good strategy for potential fire response. Utilizing roads helps fire response be less destructive, even if the response can be disruptive. USFS can't pay to maintain all roads. Decommissioning roads reduces human-caused fire risk. Closing roads but not completely obliterating them allows for the roads to be able to be fairly easily opened in case of emergency. Time is a key element when thinking about road storage. If a road is stored for 20 years, it will not be usable in case of emergency.

Figure 2: Field Tour Participants at Gravel Pit Staging Area

Becca Brooke, Forest Supervisor, added that the Siuslaw National Forest leadership had recently completed a forest wide Potential Control Line (PCL) mapping. She offered to share the Siuslaw's PCL maps with the OCCFC for input.

Action Item: Becca to share the Siuslaw's PCL maps with the OCCFC for input.

Paul Lulay, Hampton, mentioned that he would be interested in having OCCFC advocate for road funding for these PCLs.

Becca said that the Siuslaw National Forest did not have a lot of fuels funds. Their current funding is at its 2022 levels. The Siuslaw National Forest leadership is looking at Oregon State University research to understand more about fire return intervals on the Siuslaw in the past and looking towards the future.

Chuck Willer, Coast Range Association, commented that it would be helpful to understand more about what areas of the Siuslaw National Forest are most likely to see the greatest increase in fires.

The field tour group took a break for lunch.

1:00 - STOP AT HERMAN PEAK REPEATER SITE

Figure 3: Field Tour Participants Walk to Herman Peak Repeater Site

Following a lunch break, the field tour participants walked to the Herman Peak Repeater Site. A USFS staff member who served as an incident report trainee on the fire, provided information on how point protection was used at the Herman Peak Repeater Site since it is a crucial hub for communication for USFS, Oregon Department of Transportation, and law enforcement. A fire line was put around the site to limit fire potential and damage to this key piece of infrastructure.

Michele also spoke to the fuels management efforts of the Central Coast Ranger District. She highlighted a potential for the district to move towards creating conditions for more meadow / coastal prairie environments where they used to be on ridges. This would be dual purpose for ecological and fire benefits. The conversation on implementing this approach is in its initial stages.

Q11: Is there information about the Siuslaw National Forest's history of duff layers burning?
The USFS staff responded that there used to be large stand-replacing fire in the area. Small fires are probably more common than was previously thought. The Three Buttes fire did not burn all the duff layer. How much of the duff layer burned was inconsistent and probably related to factors such as proximity to marshes, burning trees, and other nearby surroundings.

Q12: What lessons did USFS learn from the Three Buttes fire?
USFS staff responded that one of the main lessons was the need to fight for prioritization among other fires happening at the same time. Consistent and concerted efforts for prioritization among other fires in the region should be a goal should a similar fire occur in the future. Another important question for consideration is how biomass should be removed from the site when it is removed as part of fire management. Having pre-suppression planning on this would be helpful. One logistical lesson was to streamline how firefighting teams are brought into the area to help the fire. The Type 3 team from the Great Basin had a steep learning curve since they weren't used to the terrain of the Siuslaw. Florence, OR, also hadn't hosted firefighting teams in 20 years, so operations were clunky.

Figure 4: Field Tour Participants at Herman Peak Repeater Site

Q13: There is a report that shows the Willamette National Forest has the most carbon inside it, but the Siuslaw had the most carbon per acre. How does this relate to fire?

Becca emphasized the need to work with whatever firefighting teams the Siuslaw receives and let them know that the Siuslaw is a unique forest and likely very different than other forests the teams might have worked on. She also emphasized the importance of valuing the input of the resource advisor for the fire.

James highlighted that the Three Buttes fire was very different than the Labor Day fire in 2020. Climate change increases unpredictability of fire movement and the Siuslaw is already a hard environment to make decisions on.

Michele talked more about the fire modelling that USFS did on the Three Buttes fire and how they look at worst case scenarios.

Collaborative members noted that the 2020 fires were a wake-up call for Oregonians on fire in the state, and that getting information to the public is important to help people make informed decisions if they face an evacuation notice. It was also suggested that because the coast has so many tourists and the tourists aren't knowledgeable about potential natural disasters, disaster planning is very difficult in the area.

Alexa said that the Siuslaw National Forest is working on beefing up public information office and working on knowing what community members and organizations to work with to best distribute information for disasters. There is a liaison on fires that is appointed during a fire and who builds a resource list during the fire.

The OCCFC Coordinator asked if it would be helpful to have the OCCFC collaborate with USFS on developing community connections for communications on disasters.

USFS staff indicated that their list of contacts is always growing and they would be open to suggestions. The Coordinator said that she would follow up on working with the USFS on a list of community connections for disaster communications.

Action item: The Coordinator will follow up on working with the USFS on a list of community connections for disaster communications.

The group disbanded to return to Waldport.

3:00 - ADJOURN AT WALDPORT

The field tour participants returned to the Central Coast District Office and thanked USFS staff for their time and work on the field tour.

Figure 5: Group Photo of Field Tour Participants

The field tour was adjourned at 3:00pm

APPENDIX A: ACTION ITEMS & DECISION POINTS

	Action Item	Who	Due by
1	Share the Siuslaw's PCL maps with the OCCFC for input.	Becca Brooke	6/3/24
2	Follow up on working with the USFS on a list of community connections for disaster communications.	Coordinator	6/21/24