



NEWS RELEASE

Central Idaho Dispatch
Salmon - Challis National Forest,
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~~Public and firefighter safety is the highest priority in fighting all wildland fires.~~

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Two Local Fires Show Range of Fire Suppression Efforts

Local land management agencies are in the thick of the fire season here in the Salmon, Challis and Mackay areas. Recent lightning resulted in about 10 new fires ranging in size from one tenth to 200 acres. Rain that came with the lightning that ignited these fires helped firefighters control them quickly. Only one fire is uncontained as of the time of this release, however, fire and weather conditions are combining to create a high potential for new fires and rapid fire growth.

“Two of this week’s fires are of interest because they demonstrate the full range of fire suppression efforts being taken this year by the Forest Service and the BLM locally and nationally,” said Salmon-Challis National Forest Supervisor Bill Wood. “Both agencies are applying the appropriate management response in varying fire situations.”

The Bohannon Fire, on BLM land just east of Salmon in the higher elevations of the Beaverhead Range, is being managed using a confine/contain strategy after the fire escaped initial efforts to control it. BLM Field Office Manager Steve Hartmann said, “My primary concern with this fire is the safety of firefighters and our public.” He noted the fire is burning in extremely steep and rugged terrain. “The low commodity values of the area do not justify a large expenditure of money to suppress this fire, and resource values at risk are also low,” Hartmann concluded. “In addition to taking only those actions needed to protect life and property, a team of fire specialists will assist me in the development of a confinement strategy for the fire.”

The Basin Fire, now contained, was started by someone in a dispersed campsite near Stanley, late in the day July 10 on the Challis Yankee Fork District. It grew to 150 acres in spite of a rapid response by ground and aerial resources from the Salmon-Challis and the Sawtooth National Forests. Crews worked throughout the night to contain the fire. District Ranger Tom Montoya said, “The fire burned adjacent to the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, the Salmon River and Highway 75 and there are cabins and two Forest Service campgrounds nearby.” A high voltage power line also runs through the fire area. “We have high recreation values, high private property values, and high values in infrastructure that needed to be protected. But, firefighter and public safety is our first objective.” The initial strategy for this fire was direct attack and perimeter control. “We

had nearly 100 fire fighters working on the fire - Type I and II hand crews, two helicopters, and three engines.” The fire was contained on the evening of July 11.

These two fires illustrate the ways both the BLM and Forest Service are managing fires. “There has been some talk that both agencies would not be fighting fires this summer because of the lack of funding. This is not the case,” Supervisor Wood said. “Both agencies will take initial action to control and extinguish new fires so long as firefighters can do so safely.” He noted that past records indicate this initial action will be successful over 95% of the time.

“When initial control efforts fail, or when it is not safe for firefighters to work the fire, both agencies will develop a plan to protect firefighter and public safety, and to protect private property and other values at risk,” Hartmann added. Those actions include consideration of firefighter and public safety, checking or slowing the spread of the fire, constructing fireline and burning out where high risk indicates a need, wrapping buildings and installing water handling equipment to protect structures and other such measures.

Factors that influence the appropriate management response to a fire include firefighter and public safety, fire cause, current and predicted weather, current and potential fire behavior, values to be protected from or benefiting by fire, management priority and cost effectiveness. Looking longer term, fire managers must also weigh the possible ecological affects of managing the fire such as rehabilitation needs, smoke event frequency, duration and intensity and fire effects on soils, vegetation and wildlife. The response to any fire is determined by fire managers and the local agency administrator.

Fighting wildland fires has become increasingly expensive so the plans developed to manage wildland fires must assess the potential cost of managing fires versus the value of the resources to be protected. Wood said, “The bottom line is neither agency is willing to jeopardize firefighters or expend large amounts of money to protect relatively low value resources.”