



Southwestern Region
Little Bear Wildfire
Lincoln National Forest
June 18, 2012



The following is a day by day chronology of the first week of the Little Bear Fire. The Little Bear Fire started by lightning on Thursday, June 4. Since the fire was discovered on June 4, firefighters have, and will continue to actively suppress the fire. The management objective for this fire is full suppression.

Monday, June 4, 2012

- The Little Bear Fire was reported at 1530 hrs and a helicopter and crew were immediately dispatched and they sized up the fire from the air at 1/4 acre in size. It was located at the 10,200' elevation in steep rugged terrain. Firefighters were granted verbal approval from the Forest Supervisor to land the helicopter and operate chainsaws within the White Mountain Wilderness. A decision was made to fight the fire aggressively, quickly, and safely with the objective of keeping it small (**full suppression** strategy).
- The helicopter landed and off-loaded two firefighters and equipment. The fire was now at 1/2 acre as they arrived on scene and was burning in dense mixed conifer with low flame lengths. The fire was located on a north-facing slope near the upper 1/3 of the mountain and had received some rain. The crew directly attacked the fire Monday night until it was deemed too dangerous due to falling snags. Firefighters slept away from the fire line at night due to safety concerns.



Tuesday, June 5, 2012

- A 20-person Hotshot crew (Type 1) hiked into the fire and after size-up estimated the fire had grown to between two and four acres. The type 1 crew assumed command and released the helicopter personnel. The **full suppression** strategy was kept. Significant risks were identified by the Hotshot Superintendent who was the Incident Commander (IC) and in charge at this time. These included steep-rocky terrain, large rocks, numerous snags and overhead hazards, and heavy fuels.
- Normal operations continued as hand line construction progressed. Winds were light at 3-5 mph with gusts up to 8 mph from the northwest.



Wednesday & Thursday, June 6 & 7, 2012,

- As shown by the previous photos, building line was both dangerous and tenuous due to the conditions depicted, especially relating to topography and tree-falling involving dangerous snags and other overhead hazards. The crew continued to build fire line on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 6 and June 7, 2012.
- On the afternoon of Wednesday, June 6, a wildfire decision analysis (WFDDS) was completed for the Little Bear Fire. Incident objectives were developed, courses of action and costs analyzed and the decision was made to continue **full suppression**, recognizing that safety was of the utmost importance with the possibility of a tactical change that could result in indirect line location. The probability for success was high as the current weather report did not reflect any major changes.
- On Thursday, June 7, The District Fire Management Officer (DFMO) and the District Ranger (DR) hiked into the fire. The DFMO and DR met with the IC, and walked portions of the fire line. They discussed the strategy and tactics that were being successfully implemented. The DFMO, DR, and IC all agreed on the course of action.
- Helicopter bucket drops were ordered but were ineffective due to the density of the trees and the length of drop (200-300 feet). The helicopter bucket was exchanged, however, due to the high altitude and other air density factors, it was deemed unsafe to attempt to use the new bucket. Sling loads of hoses, numerous blivets (soft-sided containers holding around 75 gallons of water) , and bladder bags were delivered.

Friday, June 8, 2012

- Little Bear was contained by a preliminary line around the fire early Friday afternoon.
- Later, the IC reported high winds (30-40 mph) which were causing significant spotting across the fire line. Two air tankers were ordered and were verbally authorized for use in the Wilderness by the District Ranger. Air tankers and the Hotshot crew were unsuccessful containing the spot fires. Because of this, the IC immediately recommended ordering a Type 3 Incident Management Team (IMT3) around 1330 hrs.
- The IMT3 arrived at 1500 and immediately began integrating into existing operations. Because of the growing complexity, including observed fire behavior, the District Ranger made the decision to order a Type 2 Team (IMT2) at approximately 1830 hrs.
- By the end of the day at least 9 Hotshot crews, 36 engines, 7 water tenders and multiple aircraft were either ordered or assigned in addition to local resources on the fire.
- At 2000 hrs, the District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, and Fire Officials in the Regional Office made the decision to order an IMT1(Reinarz).

Saturday, June 9, 2012

- The fire's estimated size was 8,000 in the morning and 15,000 acres by evening with no containment. There were 2,500 residences threatened and 36 were reported as destroyed. Evacuations were in progress. Highway 48 was closed and structure protection was in place as firefighters attempted to hold the fire along Highway 48 and 37. Temperature during the day reached 90 with a minimum relative humidity of 10% and winds gusting to 30 mph. Extreme fire behavior was observed with running and spotting and spreading in all directions.
- IMT1 members embedded within the IMT3 organization to provide for an orderly and informed transfer of command.

Sunday, June 10, 2012

- IMT1(Reinarz) was in command of Little Bear with an estimated 430 personnel assigned to the incident by day's end with numerous resources on order. Extreme fire behavior created control problems on all flanks of the fire and forecasted winds were a concern. The fire was spotting up to a mile or more. By evening, the fire had increased in size to 26,900 acres with 0% containment.
- Values at risk were identified with numerous communities, subdivisions, cultural, and infrastructure values, including 2,500 threatened homes were documented in the Incident Status Summary (209). Immediate critical resource needs included Hotshot and other hand crews, Type 3 and 6 engines.
- Numerous evacuations were in progress including campgrounds west of Bonito Lake, Villa Madonna subdivision, Enchanted Forest, Nogal Canyon area, Eagle Creek Summer homes, Angus, Sontara, Rancho Ruidoso, Copper Canyon, Loma Grande, and Ski Apache. There were three evacuation centers set up in Ruidoso.

