

72 Hour Expanded Report Bowles Creek Bottom Fire

To: Texas Forest Service, Associate Director of the Forest Resource Protection Division,
Mark Stanford

Subject: Expanded (72 Hour) Report

Date: August 21, 2011

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

LOCATION: 11 miles west of Henderson, Texas

DATE OF OCCURRENCE: August 18, 2011

TIME OF OCCURRENCE: Approximately 1650

ACTIVITY: Wildland fire suppression operations- Initial Attack

NUMBER OF INJURIES: 0

NUMBER OF FATALITIES: 0

PROPERTY DAMAGE: A Type 6 Wildland Fire Engine was burned to a total loss

INCIDENT SUMMARY: At approximately 1550, on August, 18, a USFS Type 6 Wildland Fire Engine was assigned to the Bowles Creek Bottom Fire (Texas State Forest Service Incident #384). The engine was directed to support dozer-plow operations along the northern edge of the fire, which was reported to be approximately 15 acres. Fuels in the area consisted of hardwood overstory with surface fuels including recently mowed cattails and brush. With light northerly winds, fire intensity was characterized as low to moderate, with fire predominately backing to the north towards the dozer line.

As dozer line construction progressed, the three person engine crew was engaged in holding operations behind the dozer. As line construction efforts neared the northwestern corner of the fire, a wind shift associated with an active thunderstorm occurred over the fire area. This wind shift caused a significant increase in fire behavior, and motivated the ENGB to reposition his engine. As the engine was backed away from the fire's edge, both of the front wheels settled into the ground and the engine became stuck. The dozer worked quickly to pull the engine out, and after several unsuccessful attempts, a dozer line was built around the engine. As the dozer worked, engine crewmembers attempted to extinguish spot fires beneath the engine, and as these spot fires grew, the pump quit running. After a number of tries to restart the pump, each with no luck, the engine's fire extinguisher was deployed to contain fire burning under the engine's chassis with only

minimal success. At this point, with all engine protection options exhausted, the ENGB elected to depart the area due to extremely heavy smoke, building radiant heat, and increasing spot fire activity in the area surrounding the engine. The engine crew walked a short distance down their escape route to a predetermined safety zone. No crewmembers were injured. The Type 6 Engine burned to a total loss.

Based on the nature of this incident, USFS Region 3 personnel, in cooperation with the Texas State Forest Service, have requested a Lessons Learned Review to capture the learning opportunities associated with this incident. A Review Team has been formed and currently is in Henderson, Texas gathering and documenting lessons learned.

Cc: USFS Region 3 Regional Fire Safety Program Manager, Bequi Livingston
USFS National Safety Program Manager, Larry Sutton

