

Cascade Complex ICP Stay-in-Place Event Discussion Document - August 17, 2007

On Monday August 13, 2007, weather and fire conditions created a situation whereby the North Fork Fire burned around the perimeter of the Cascade Complex Incident Command Post (ICP). The ICP was located in the Knox Ranch area of the Cascade Ranger District, Boise National Forest, twenty-seven miles northeast of Cascade, Idaho. Broyles Great Basin Type I National Incident Management Team (IMT), managing the Cascade Complex fires, successfully implemented an ICP Safety Plan during this event. This narrative explains what occurred before, during, and after this event.

The Cascade Complex ICP was already established at the Knox Ranch location by a previous IMT when the Broyles IMT transitioned in on August 8th. The IMT evaluated the suitability of the ICP location then, and continued to do so during the days leading up to the Stay-in-Place event. The IMT incorporated Stay-in-Place procedures into the ICP Safety Plan because extreme fire behavior observed in the Cascade and Landmark Complexes could easily compromise evacuation routes. The Knox Ranch site was the preferred location for a defensible, stay-in place ICP for the following reasons:

- It provided the most ready access for suppression and logistical forces to fires in the area.
- It provided a more than adequate safety zone for all Incident personnel. The meadow in which ICP was located measures approximately 675 meters long and is 135 meters wide at its narrowest point, (see attached aerial view).
- It was a very defensible area with an established road network, extensive fuel treatments in the area, and numerous wet meadows and riparian areas on the north and south flanks.
- Fine fuel and grasses in the area were sparse and discontinuous after several weeks of ICP activities.
- Relocation would have delayed suppression activities for one or more critical operational periods.

Maintaining the ICP in this location continued to be the best and safest decision given incident operational objectives, and the preplanning efforts for the Stay-in-Place Procedures if the fire did approach the camp. A sprinkler system was put in place adjacent to the ICP early Sunday.

The Cascade Complex ICP Safety Plan, including Stay-in-Place Procedures, was in place and Incident personnel were briefed shortly after the Broyles IMT assumed command. Section Chiefs asked their personnel if they would prefer to be evacuated rather than participate in the Stay-in-Place actions if this event appeared to be imminent. Fourteen individuals indicated they would prefer to be evacuated.

Relocation of the Cascade ICP remained an option, (which was included in the ICP Safety Plan), until fire activity forced the closure of the South Fork Road north of ICP on Saturday, 8/11, and closure of the Warm Lake Road east of ICP on Sunday, 8/12. With 2 of the 3 routes of egress essentially compromised, the Command and General Staff

collectively determined that Stay-in-Place would be the relied-upon option if all egress was cut off by fire activity. This option was selected for the above-cited reasons, as well as the time it would take to relocate the ICP and base camp (1 or 2 operational periods).

In the days preceding the event, IMT Operations personnel working on the North Fork Fire saw an opportunity to go offensive, implementing a burnout operation on the southeast flank of the North Fork fire along the west side of Warm Lake Road to keep fire from the Warm Lake Area. Operations forces thoroughly prepped the area adjacent to the burnout and began igniting Sunday night, 8/12, continued into Monday morning, 8/13, ending at 0500 Monday. A strong inversion set up that night which resulted in relatively inactive fire behavior on Monday morning. This inversion lifted about 1300. The observed relative humidity (RH) dropped from 26% to 9% in less than an hour, finally bottoming out at 5% during the event.

These weather conditions contributed to active fire behavior within a short period of time. A spot fire occurred outside the containment line east of the Warm Lake Road and rapidly exceeded operational force capabilities. The Operations Section Chief then informed the Incident Commander (IC) that fire activity appeared likely to pose a threat to the ICP. The IC immediately notified the Command and General Staff that the Stay-in-Place procedures would be implemented. At 1545 the Communications Section announced the implementation of the Stay-in-Place procedures to all Incident personnel via the camp PA system. Because the spot fire effectively cut off egress from ICP towards Cascade, the fourteen personnel who had expressed their desire to leave camp ultimately had to remain for the duration of the event.

The Stay-in-Place event occurred between approximately 1545 and 1930, a duration of about 4 hours. All personnel, including camp crews, catering and shower staff, and other camp workers were outfitted with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), assembled and briefed as to final procedures, told what to expect when the fire reached camp, and grouped within the interior areas of ICP. Directions and briefing were conducted by the IC and Operations Chief. Water and Gatorade were made available, chairs were set up, and personnel were encouraged to relax and remain calm. The Operations Section brought in firefighting resources, (engines, crews, and air support), from other divisions to assist with ICP protection, and had them in place prior to the event. Approximately 110 camp personnel and 140 line-qualified personnel were at ICP and the surrounding area and participated in the Stay-in-Place at ICP.

During the implementation of the Stay-in-Place plan, three fire pulses impacted the ICP on the west and south sides. These pulses were met with responses from air and ground resources. As embers and fire brands entered the main part of the camp, line-qualified ICP personnel assisted with protection and suppression efforts. When the main thrusts of these fire pulses were at their strongest and the smoke at its heaviest, some individuals became apprehensive, but experienced incident personnel were available to assure them that the Stay-in-Place plan was sound and the safety zone was more than adequate.

The August 13 Stay-in Place event that took place in accordance with to the Cascade Complex ICP Safety Plan was a success story. No injuries occurred during the event, although some minor smoke inhalation and eye irritation problems were reported and treated by the Medical Unit. One Yurt, 5 individual tents, and 7 Porta-Potties were destroyed in the perimeter area adjacent to the strongest pulses. A 30-yard garbage container full of recyclables located in the center of ICP caught fire, destroying the recyclables but not damaging the container. Minor ember damage occurred throughout camp to several tents and other flammable materials.

All ICP personnel immediately regrouped after the fire front passed and reassumed their regular incident assignments. The Operations Section continued operational activities, focusing again on incident objectives of fire fighter and public safety and the protection of structures and improvements in the Warm Lake and surrounding areas.

Dinner, cooking throughout the event, was served beginning at 1930. Line operations on other parts of the incident continued uninterrupted. A Planning meeting was held at 2030 to plan the next two operational periods. An All-ICP staff meeting was held at 2130 to communicate these plans and to allow Section Heads to evaluate the emotional condition of their respective staffs. The IC ordered a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) Team, to be in place the next day to talk to personnel desiring those services. This was filled by George Solverson, Boise National Forest Safety Officer, who subsequently determined, after talking with numerous incident personnel, that a full team was unnecessary.

The Incident Management Team subsequently conducted an After Action Review of this event to improve the ICP Safety Plan and Team performance implementing that plan in the future.

Broyles Great Basin Team ICP for Cascade Complex 2007

