



**File Code:** 5140

**Date:** January 23, 2012

**Route To:**

**Subject:** Lower Sheep Landscape Prescribed Burn Wildfire Conversion Review

**To:** Regional Forester, R6

On September 29, 2011, the Walla Walla District of the Umatilla National Forest began ignition on the Lower Sheep Landscape prescribed burn project. On October 3, the prescribed burn was converted to a wildfire. In accordance with FSM 5140.3, I initiated a review of the wildfire conversion. The review was conducted in three phases. First, personnel involved with the prescribed burn conducted an after action review of the implementation of the burn. Second, a team was assembled to address the escaped prescribed fire review elements contained in the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide. Third, a facilitated learning review was conducted during a Forest Leadership Team meeting with an expanded audience.

The review team that was assembled included fuels management expertise from the Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur and the Umatilla National Forests. In addition, Bill Aney, from the Regional Office, was also a member of the team. The conclusions of the review are:

- The prescribed burn was conducted in accordance with policy and the prescribed fire plan.
- Sound risk management processes were used to guide strategic and tactical decision making throughout the project implementation.
- Actions leading up to and during the wildfire conversion were consistent with the decisions made.
- The desire to avoid a wildfire conversion and the decision to convert did not lead to unnecessary risk and exposure to firefighters based on the values at risk, the current and predicted fire behavior and weather, and the terrain.
- The key causal factor of the escape was the fire outside of the planned burn block that continued to spread for more than one burning period following escape, requiring the declaration of an escaped fire. Ahead of a predicted precipitation event, the decision was made not to put personnel on the ground to secure the slop-over due to the steep terrain in which the fire was burning. As the arrival of the precipitation event was delayed, the strategy and tactics were consistent, however, the one burning period timeframe had passed and policy required the declaration of the escaped fire.

The learning review, facilitated by Bill Aney, occurred during the December meeting of the Umatilla Forest Leadership Team. Fire and other resource specialists and staff, representatives from Oregon Department of Forestry and neighbor forests were also in attendance. Presentations about what was planned, what actually happened and a summary of the review conclusions were made. The group discussed the conclusions and other related subjects around the planning of



projects like the Lower Sheep prescribed burn. Below are some follow-up items that we will do as a result of what we learned:

1. To better guide the Forest in planning prescribed fire treatments in the highest priority areas, we will continue our work to complete a forest-wide landscape wildfire strategy to help us design and prioritize vegetation management projects that will better prepare the Forest for future wildfires and restoration work.
2. The timeframe from the start of planning to implementation for this project was over seven years with several key personnel changes. Continue work to improve our planning process to be more efficient so projects are implemented in a shorter time period where possible.
3. Work to better recognize, during implementation planning, where a need exists to amend existing NEPA documents to better design prescribed fire project perimeters that are more conducive to containment of prescribed fire based on terrain and anticipated fire behavior. This is especially important on older projects where key personnel have changed over time.
4. Explore and utilize, where appropriate, authorities provided by the Wyden Amendment and others to improve coordination of prescribed fire projects with adjacent private landowners.
5. Considering that most vegetation management projects are planned on easier and more accessible terrain, recognize that prescribed fire is a tool that can be successfully used to meet resource objectives in the more difficult and remote terrain under certain conditions.

If there are any questions or additional follow-up required, please let us know.

*/s/ Kevin Martin*  
KEVIN MARTIN  
Forest Supervisor

cc: David Summer  
pdl r6 umatilla rangers  
pdl r6 umatilla fmo  
William Aney