

## Slaughter Fire Accident Report

The Slaughter Gulch Fire located roughly 3 miles northeast of Silt, Colorado resulted in a Burning Mountains Fire Protection District (BMFPD) Engine burn over. Moderate damage occurred to the engine. No firefighter injuries occurred.

On July 23, 2005 around 6:30 p.m. a lightning caused fire on BLM land was reported in Slaughter Gulch Canyon, a narrow steep road outside the town of Silt. Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management resources responded along with local cooperators, jurisdiction was undetermined at this time. UCR Helitack from Rifle was first on scene and took immediate action to protect structures with bucket drops (Bell 206 L-4 N1811). The helitack foreman took command as IC and started walking down Slaughter Gulch Road to size up the fire and meet incoming resources coming up canyon from Silt.

The IC met BMFPD Captain with Rescue 830, Tender 830, Brush Truck 821 and Brush Truck 810 to discuss a plan of attack. The agreed upon strategy was for BM Captain to take his resources to the tail of the fire up canyon to establish an anchor point, triage structures, and provide assistance to helicopter N1811 who was currently doing bucket work by the structures.

BMFPD Brush Truck 810 a 250 Gallon Type 6 engine was told by their Captain to pull off the single lane dirt Slaughter Gulch Road and wait for BLM engines. Brush Engine 810 pulled off the road into the sagebrush and cheat grass as shown in the picture. The fire was moving 5 to 10 chains per/hr. with 4' flame lengths on the opposite side of the road moving down canyon and away from the road. BLM Engine 605 with a chase vehicle pulled in front of Brush 810, their chase vehicle was behind Brush 810. The vehicles were located 30 yards from the right flank of the fire, with solid black further up the road.

Engine 605, Brush 810 and Chase crew got out of their vehicles and put on PPE, i.e.: fire packs, fire shelters etc.etc... The engine boss on 605 made a quick plan to start wetting vegetation (big sage 4' tall) along the roadside up canyon towards the right flank. This plan would keep the fire from jumping the road and heading upslope to a subdivision situated SW above Slaughter Gulch. The engine crew just started working with booster hose to wet down the vegetation when a micro burst (estimated 25mph) hit the fire area. The right flank was redirected into a (estimated 10'-15') flaming front directly towards the road and engine crews. 605 engine boss ordered both engine crews to get moving right now! Engine 605 which was the first engine in line on the road went forward to the safe black 30 yards ahead, 605 chase backed down the road and Brush 810 crew members ran down the road with 605 chase.

The radiant heat ignited the vegetation on the SW side (across) the road where Brush 810 was parked resulting in the damage shown in the photo. The engine crews were not able to return in time to protect Brush 810 due to 15' flame lengths combined with intense heat. Five minutes later a heavy down pour from the thunder cell that caused the high winds dosed the fire slowing additional fire spread. No injuries were sustained by the engine crews. Engine damaged was estimated at 7,000.00 dollars by review team.

The Slaughter Gulch IC was less than 30 seconds away coming down the Slaughter Gulch Road and meeting with Engine 605 when the burn over took place. It was estimated by 605 engine boss that less than 2 minutes transpired between initially talking with Brush 810 until the fire over took them.

## **FINDINGS:**

Brush 810 pulled off the road in light flashy fuels with unburned fuels between them and the fire. Parking in a direction/location to expedite a safe retreat to a safety zone must always be considered prior to leaving engines parked.

Engine 605 should have started their initial wet line operations 30 yards up the road with a solid black anchor point adjacent to their engine. Additionally 605 should have advised Brush 810 to relocate their engine into a better position for tactical applications and escape.

Mountain Big Sagebrush combined with Cheat Grass can exhibit quick runs with very intense heat. Grass fuel loadings in Colorado are very high similar to most other western states. Situational awareness of fuels, topography and thunder cell proximity to fire was lacking.

Structure protection was a contributing factor by diverting BMFPD Captain and two other resources. This strategy left a less experienced engine crew working on an active flank with unburned fuels between them and the main fire.

Several "Watch Out" situations were present or could have been anticipated:

- Unburned fuel between you and the fire.
- Winds increasing and changing direction.
- Constructing line without safe anchor point.

The following Standard Fire Orders were not followed:

- Base all actions on current and expected behavior of the fire.
- Identify escape routes and make them known.
- Fight fire aggressively, having provided for safety first.

The E and S of LCES were not discussed during the initial briefing.

“Back to the Basics” is a theme that is heard over and over again. This situation is an example of where basic fire tactics such as “anchor and flank” and “one foot in the black” would have prevented this accident.

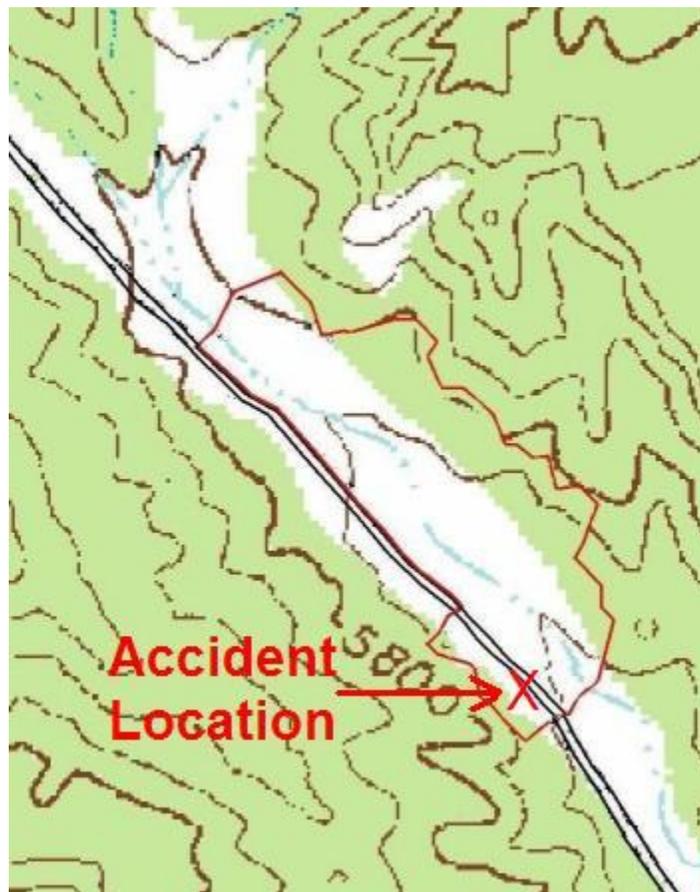
Investigation Team Members:

Chris Farinetti, UCR AFMO

Tim Foley, Zone FMO, FBAN

Bob Leighty, USFS FMO

Vince Urbina, Colorado State FS



Map of the fire perimeter



Photo of the fire with accident site identified.  
(note the structures above the fire)



Brush 810

The main fire approached from across the road causing personnel to evacuate the scene.