

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Fire Camp Overrun by Fire

Date: June 8, 2016

Location: Turkey Fire, Gila National Forest

The Turkey Fire was reported on June 5. The fire was located in designated Wilderness. The local District had pre-planned that fires in this area would not be suppressed. On June 7, a three-person crew rode horses into the fire to monitor its growth and plan contingency actions. On June 8, while the crew was assessing protection measures for a cabin in the area, fire moved through their unstaffed camp destroying all camp equipment.

NARRATIVE

Around 1500 on June 7, as the Incident Commander made his decision on where to camp, he considered all of the normal factors, including safety, logistics, and comfort. One of the driving considerations in choosing the camp location was water for the horses as well as, obviously, the Turkey Fire itself.

The fire had hit two large green meadows on its eastern edge. The meadows did not burn. The IC determined that if they camped on the opposite side of these meadows away from the fire, their camp site should be safe.



The Turkey Fire burning on June 6.

“When I saw him [the least experienced crew member] digging line around camp, I should have helped him, not stopped him.”

Incident Commander

The selected camp site was located just off an existing Forest system trail in a small stand of ponderosa pines which provided shade and was close to a creek that provided water for the horses. The camp area had a light layer of needle cast on the ground.



Fire behavior near the crew's camp location.

As the crew went to work setting up camp, the least experienced crewmember began to dig line around camp as a precautionary measure. The IC, who spent 17 years on the local hotshot crew, told him not to bother, explaining that the meadows would hold the fire.

The following morning the crew set out to complete the day's mission to size-up a cabin in the area and create a protection plan in the event fire moved toward it.

The cabin was located along the trail to the west and south of the fire crew's camp. As the crew rode along the trail, they noted that the fire had remained parked at the meadow's edges. The only

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active piece of the fire was located along the fire's western edge. Therefore, the IC believed the fire posed no threat to their camp.

Fire Pulls Off Big Surprise

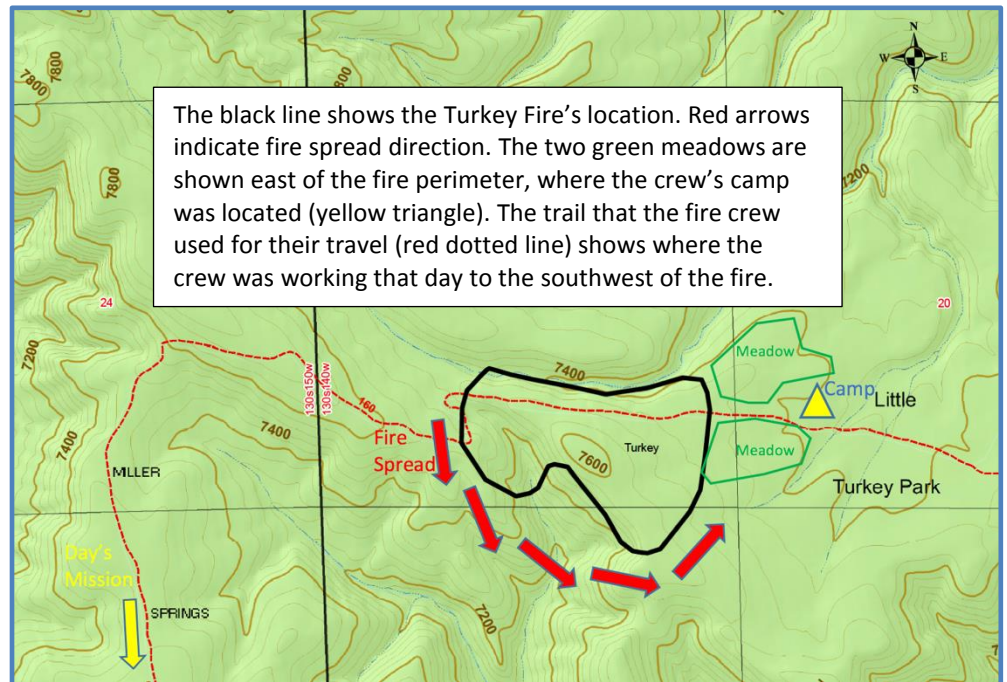
The crew rode down the trail to the cabin and spent the majority of the day designing a detailed protection plan and compiling a list of supplies needed to carry out the plan if the need arose. In mid-afternoon, they headed back up the trail toward camp.

As they approached the fire area they saw that the fire's western edge had remained active and grown. The fire appeared to have backed steadily to the south and then east underneath what had already burned.

The IC was not concerned because he had seen that the meadows had stopped the fire before. He assumed that this same activity would be repeated.

But, as the group rode into camp, everyone's jaw dropped. Everything in their camp had burned.

The IC was correct. The green meadows did not burn. But the fire managed to find a narrow strip of needle cast, maybe six inches wide from an oddly angled tree, that led across the green meadow grass into the camp area.



The Turkey Fire burned into the fire camp area and destroyed everything there.

LESSONS

- ✓ Put line around camp.
- ✓ When choosing camp location, consider being well away from the fire area—even if it's inconvenient.
- ✓ Remember how often we are surprised by what fire can do.

This RLS was submitted by:

Region 3 RLS Team

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