

Final Report of Hwy 1498 Fire Burn Over Kentucky Division of Forestry



THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Date of Report: 8 April 2026
Location: Hwy 1498 Fire
Approx. 3 miles southeast of
Wheelwright, KY, near the Floyd/Knott County Line
Fire Size: Initial fire 3-4 acres, controlled fire 594 acres
Date of Occurrence: 29 March 2026
Time of Occurrence: Approximately 1330 hours
Mission: Wildland Fire Suppression – Initial Attack
Number Injured: Two
Number of Fatalities: None

Narrative:

At 1330 hours on 29 March 2026, a significant fire broke out on Hwy 1498 near Wheelwright, Kentucky, on the Floyd/Knott County line. During the intense firefighting operations, two Kentucky Division of Forestry firefighters were tragically entrapped. The Incident Commander Type 5 and the fire crew, demonstrating exceptional teamwork, assisted the injured firefighters, who bravely walked off the mountain from the burn scene under their own power. After a thorough assessment by the EMTs, it was deemed necessary to request a life-flight helicopter for one of the two firefighters' urgent transport to the burn unit to treat the severe burns covering their body.

Events leading up to the entrapment were as follows:

1119: IC and crew dispatched to the fire

1202: IC and crew arrived on scene

1224-1330

- IC gave size-up, LCES established, and 15 acres on both sides of the gravel road. May need additional crew
- IC stated they were going to head to the top of the ridge to cut two handlines down to the gravel road
- IC stated that the crew had reached the top of the ridge and was going to start the construction line

1331-1400

- IC reported crew members had been burned over
- Need ambulance in the area ASAP
- An 8-line medical plan was given over the radio
- Talking to the office/911 to meet the ambulance
- Ambulance met on Hwy 122, EMT rendering care
- Crewmembers walked under their own power off the mountain from the scene

- **Hwy 1498 Fire Environment:**

- **Fuels:** low to moderate hardwood litter, FB9 with TL4, and FB10.
- **Weather:** 63 degrees, 22% relative humidity, South winds 3 mph with a gust of 11 mph. It had been six days since the last wetting rain (greater than .10”, 13 days since a .25”).
- **Topography:** The burn over occurred approximately mid-slope on a 30-40% grade.
- **Fire Behavior:** The observed behavior with short-range spotting. Jackson Airport RAWS station in Breathitt County - 1-hr fuels were at 8%, 10-hr fuels were at 11%, Keetch-Byram Drought Index was at 243, and Energy Release Component was at 76.

Weather Observations 🕒 Mar 29, 2026 at 11 am			
📏 Air Temperature:	64°F	📏 Dew Point:	24°F
📏 Rel. Humidity:	22%	📏 Winds:	SW at 5 mph
📏 Wind Gust:	11 mph	📏 Solar Rad. Pct.:	67%
📏 Fuel Temperature:	74°F	📏 Fuel Moisture:	6%

Precipitation 🕒 Mar 29, 2026 at 11 am			
📏 Precip. (1-Hr.):	0 in.	📏 Precip. (3-Hr.):	0 in.
📏 Precip. (6-Hr.):	0 in.	📏 Precip. (24-Hr.):	0 in.
📏 Precip. (48-Hr.):	0.02 in.	📏 Precip. (3-Day):	0.02 in.
📏 Precip. (7-Day):	0.24 in.	📏 Precip. (10-Day):	0.24 in.
📏 Precip. (14-Day):	0.90 in.	📏 Precip. (30-Day):	2.20 in.
📏 Precip. (60-Day):	5.15 in.	📏 Precip. (90-Day):	6.02 in.
📏 Days Since ≥ 0.10":	6 days	📏 Days Since ≥ 0.25":	13 days
📏 Days Since ≥ 0.50":	13 days		

Hourly Fire Danger Conditions 🕒 Mar 29, 2026			
📏 Hourly ERC:	67	📏 Hourly SC:	6
📏 Hourly BI:	47	📏 Hourly IC:	17

Hourly Fuel Moisture Conditions 🕒 Mar 29, 2026			
📏 Fine DFM (Shaded):	9%	📏 Fine DFM (Unshaded):	7%
📏 Hourly 1-Hr. FM:	8%	📏 Hourly 10-Hr. FM:	11%
📏 Hourly 100-Hr. FM:	15%	📏 Hourly 1000-Hr. FM:	16%
📏 Hourly Herb. FM:	75%	📏 Hourly Woody FM:	89%

Daily Fire Danger Indices 🕒 Mar 29, 2026 ⚙️ Fuel Model Z			
📏 KBDI:	243	📏 Max. ERC:	76
📏 Max. SC:	9	📏 Max. BI:	59
📏 Max. IC:	28		

Injured Firefighter #1 Account of Events:

Unable to receive an account of events during the review.

Injured Firefighter #2 Account of Events:

“When we started cutting a line, it was just like any other line. We went with an indirect approach due to weather conditions. We were at least 50 or 60 yards away from the fire. The lines were going well on the injured firefighter's side of the ridge. We were a little over halfway down our line when the wind shifted and blew the fire up! It surrounded both injured firefighters, and both had no choice but to go through the fire. All I could hear was the ranger's voice in my head saying, “You have to go through it.” “Run through the fire and get to safety.” The fire was moving too fast to get away from, so both of us started running through the black. I was in front of injured firefighter 1 and found us the spot with the lowest fire, and through it we went. Injured firefighter 1 was trying their best to run through the fire, but the heat was slowing them down! I started hearing HELP! HELP! ME!. As I turned to go back, the fire was too hot for me to get back to them. The fire just overtook us, and we couldn't move fast enough to get away from it. Injured firefighter 1 was screaming for help, so I ran to our ranger and got him ready to take injured firefighter 1 to the hospital. Without the advice being beaten into our heads about getting to the black injured firefighter 1, and I would've been found on that hill! Thanks to great leadership, we about came out breathing!”

Crew Leaders' Account of Event:

“We started our lines indirectly off the point from the fire we started our lines down. We had our lines complete 60% at least, then the fire blew up on the right flank, the side where both injured firefighters were. Then I heard over the radio that we needed to get off the hill. I didn't know what was going on, but I came straight off with the other crewmembers, our remaining emergency firefighters. Another crewmember was at the top with me. After the radio call, we got together and went down the hill. Another crewmember was on the right flank of the fire with the two injured firefighters, but they were at the top, where we were going to burn it out before we got pulled off.”

Incident Commander Account of Event:

“Arriving on scene, fire behavior was minimal. It was backing over the left-hand side of the two-lane at 3.5 acres, at the most. Our plan was to back up and use the gravel road as an anchor whenever our dozer operator arrived on scene, since the dozer and transport were a little behind. As we were gearing up, there was a small breakover on the gravel road that we were anchoring onto that I sprayed out using our engine, so we made the decision to cut handlines tying into the gravel road as an anchor, as well as the dozer line, that would be cutting off the entire left flank of the fire and saving hundreds of acres. Everything was going

as planned, the crew cut the head of the fire, and the lines were 65% complete. I was utilizing the engine and spraying the heel of the fire, pretreating fuels to minimize smoke cover over the two lanes, when there was a sudden shift in wind direction and speed. This shift began to cause some of the most erratic fire behavior I have ever seen. My firefighters were about 50 yards from tying into the gravel road when this shift in fire behavior happened. Injured firefighter 1 came through the fire to my truck with severe burns to their body. I loaded them into my engine and radioed dispatch immediately, telling them that I needed an ambulance to my location now. Realizing the seriousness of his injuries, I began to transport the injured firefighter myself to the nearest hospital/LZ while on the phone with 911 dispatch, updating my location as we passed intersections to meet up with the ambulance. I met up with the ambulance on Route 122, and the paramedics helped me transfer injured firefighter 1 from my engine into the ambulance so that they could receive immediate medical attention. I then led the ambulance to the local hospital, where injured firefighter 1 was life-flighted to a burn unit to be treated for their injuries.”

Summary:

It is the belief of the review team that the two firefighters of the Hwy 1498 fire resulted from the unforeseen interaction of strong wind and complex terrain. This resulted in a rapidly spreading, high-intensity fire, during which two firefighters sustained burns while escaping.

Commendations:

- Dealing with an incident-within-incident - follow the process and complete the 8-line medical plan
- Getting medical treatment to the injured firefighters in a timely manner

Recommendations:

- Develop a simulation exercise of the Hwy 1498 fire for use by KDF branches, local agencies, and partnering agencies.



Fire Started

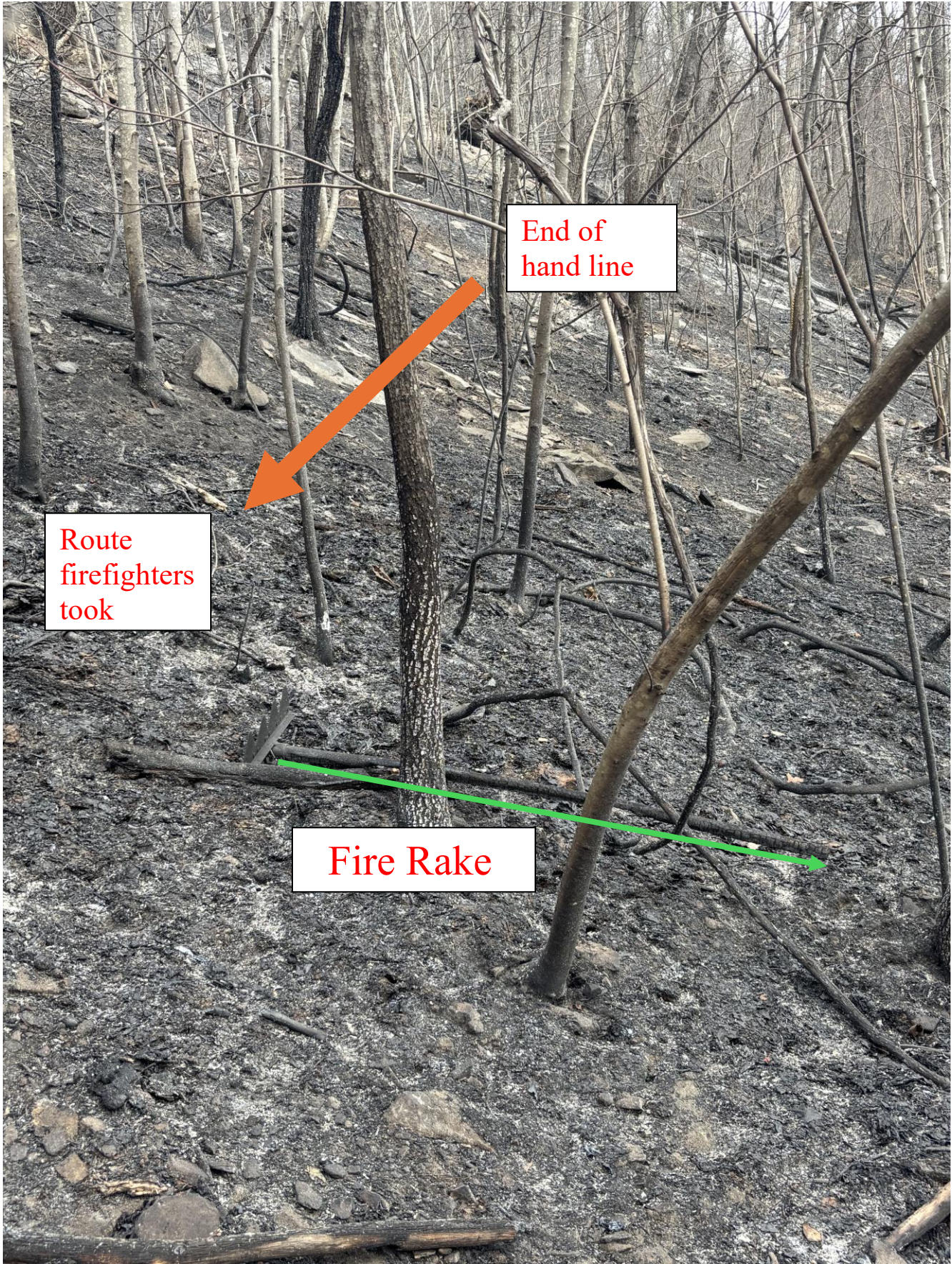






Height of flames
some trees had 20-
30 foot





End of
hand line

Route
firefighters
took

Fire Rake



Safety
Glasses



Where the two
firefighters exited
to gravel road

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