

**Westover ARB
DECLARED WILDFIRE
REVIEW**



**FINAL REPORT
DATE**

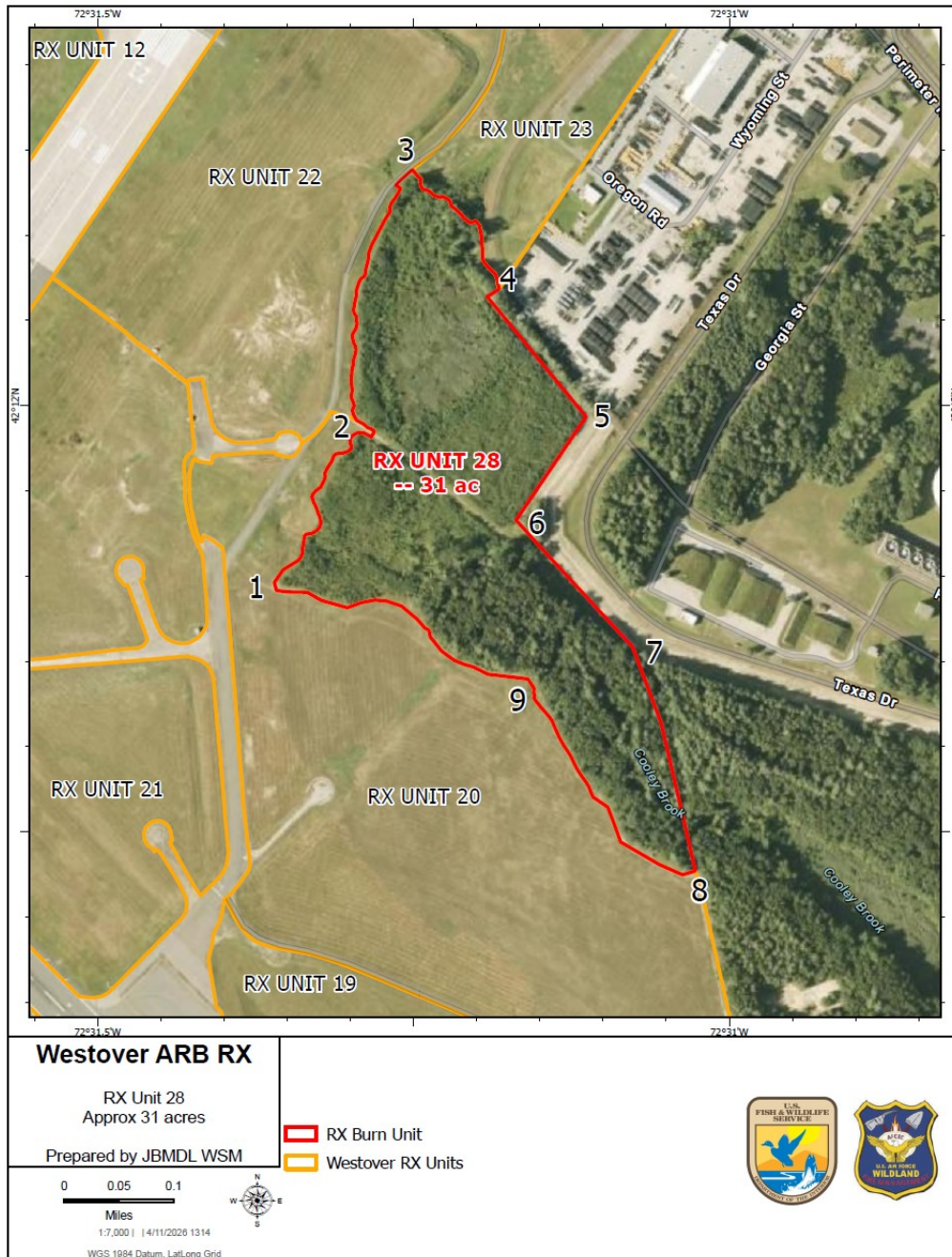
Prepared By: _____ Date: _____
Anthony DiMaggio, Acting Regional AFMO

Reviewed By: _____ Date: _____
Shane McDonald, USAF Program Manager

Approved By: _____ Date: _____
Micah Shular, Wildland Fire Branch Chief

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Wildland Support Module conducted a 31 acre prescribed burn on Westover Air Reserve Base in Chicopee, MA that escaped containment lines and burned one acre of private property that caused significant property loss.



The Review Team consisted of:

Anthony DiMaggio - Assistant Module Leader
Trent Ingram - Regional Assistant Fire Management Officer
Shane McDonald - USAF/WFS Program Manager

Summary Narrative

On the morning of 14 April 2026, the Wildland Fire Program Coordinator and RXB2 identified two potential units for treatment. Notifications were completed, a spot weather forecast was obtained, and the Ignition Authorization signed.

The crew arrived at the first unit and were briefed on the planned operation. The test fire was lit but low unfavorable fire behavior was observed, and it was extinguished. The decision was made to move to the second unit which was comprised of better fuels that were more likely to meet objectives given the current weather conditions.

After the test fire was lit, the RXB2 completed the Go/No Go checklist and deemed fire behavior and conditions favorable to progress with burning the northern 16 acres of Unit 28.

South winds were predominant so the crew started at DP3 on the northern tip of the unit. Ignition progressed SE to DP4 near the installation property boundary. The fire behavior in the hardwood fuels backed slowly with low intensity. Within the middle of the unit a large pocket of phragmites extended towards the fire line at DP4. The RXB2 instructed a crewmember to place a small dot of fire within the phragmites to allow the receptive fuels to back away from the boundary. Within 15 minutes five small spot fires occurred across the unit boundary within 10 feet of the line. Each spot was extinguished at less than 12" in diameter. After a brief pause to contain the spots, ignition was resumed progressing towards DP5 and ultimately to the cut off line between DP2 and DP6.

After ignitions were completed, the crew transitioned to mop-up and began to extinguish smoldering fuels along the boundaries. Approximately an hour later a crewmember identified a spot fire on private property to the northeast of DP4 near a large stack of corrugated plastic pipes. A type 6 engine arrived within a minute however its crew was unable to put out the spot before the stack of pipes were engulfed. The RXB2 quickly notified the Westover ARB Fire and Emergency Services Chief and requested additional resources to respond to the fire on private property.

The wildfire was contained at approximately one acre but consumed a large stack of pipes.

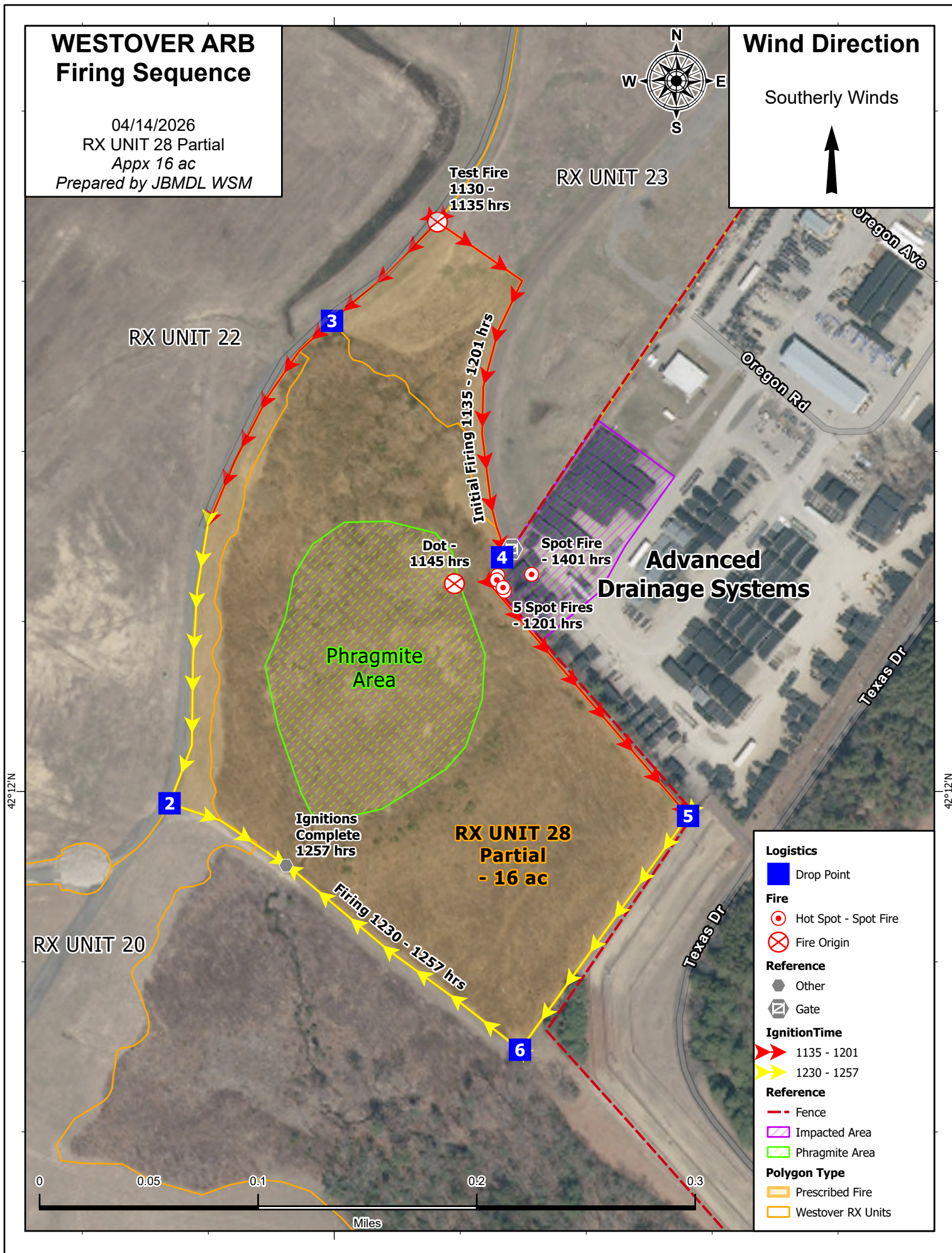
WESTOVER ARB Firing Sequence

04/14/2026
RX UNIT 28 Partial
Appx 16 ac
Prepared by JBMDL WSM



Wind Direction

Southerly Winds



Logistics

Drop Point

Fire

Hot Spot - Spot Fire

Fire Origin

Reference

Other

Gate

IgnitionTime

1135 - 1201

1230 - 1257

Reference

Fence

Impacted Area

Phragmite Area

Polygon Type

Prescribed Fire

Westover RX Units

Primary Findings and Recommendations

Findings

The spot weather forecast and the on-site weather observations were all within prescription limits for temperature and humidity but wind gusts were at the upper limit of acceptable.

For the Westover area, minimum relative humidity this afternoon will range between 40-45 percent. South to southwest winds will increase to 10 to 15 mph with gusts up to 20 mph at times. Temperatures will soar into the low 80s this afternoon, with scattered thunderstorms between 2 PM and 8 PM. A few storms will contain strong to damaging winds, along with brief heavy downpours.

.REST OF TODAY...

Sky/weather.....Mostly sunny. Slight chance of rain showers early in the afternoon. Chance of rain showers late in the afternoon. Chance of thunderstorms late in the afternoon.

CWR.....3 percent increasing to 37 percent.

Max temperature.....Around 82.

Min humidity.....45 percent.

Dewpoint.....57.

Max apparent temp...81.

Surface winds (mph).Light winds becoming southwest 5 to 13 mph early.

Wind (20 ft).....Southwest winds 5 to 13 mph early becoming light, then becoming southwest 5 to 13 mph early. Gusty and erratic winds expected near thunderstorms late in the afternoon.

Mixing height.....5200 ft AGL.

Transport winds.....Southwest 3 to 10 mph increasing to 15 to 23 mph in the afternoon.

Smoke dispersal....Poor (1700 knot-ft) early in the morning increasing to excellent (94500 knot-ft) in the afternoon.

LVORI.....5.

ADI.....1 early in the morning increasing to 65 in the afternoon.

CEILING (KFT).....23 decreasing to 10.

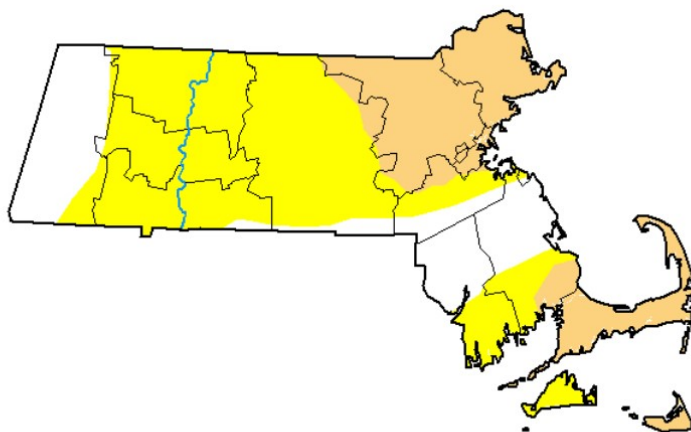
TIME (EDT)	8AM	9AM	10A	11A	12P	1PM	2PM	3PM	4PM	5PM
Sky (%).....	58	30	23	30	27	29	44	50	57	61
Weather cov.....							SCH	CHC	CHC	CHC
Weather type....							RW	RW	RW	RW
Tstm cov.....										CHC
CWR.....	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20	30	40
Temp.....	57	61	66	70	73	77	80	79	80	80
Dewpoint.....	56	57	58	58	58	57	57	58	59	59
RH.....	96	87	75	66	59	50	45	49	49	49
Heat index (F)..	57	61	66	70	73	77	80	79	81	81
20 FT wind dir..	S	S	SW	S	S	S	S	S	S	SW
20 FT wind spd..	2	3	3	5	6	9	12	13	13	13
20 FT wind gust..	6	7	8	9	13	16	20	21	21	21
Surface wnd dir..	S	S	SW	S	S	S	S	S	S	SW
Surface wnd spd..	2	2	3	5	6	9	12	13	13	13
Surface wnd gst..	6	7	8	9	13	16	20	21	21	21
Mix hgt (kft)...	0.6	1.2	2.1	2.7	3.4	4.4	5.2	3.8	4.0	3.1
Transp wind dir..	W	W	W	SW	S	S	SW	SW	SW	SW
Transp wind spd..	3	5	6	7	10	15	21	22	23	22
LVORI.....	8	5	4	3	1	1	1	1	2	2
ADI.....	3	7	15	23	43	43	65	59	1	1
Vrate kt-ft/1K..	2	5	10	16	31	57	95	72	79	58
Ventrage Cat....	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	FR	GD	GD	GD	FR
Ceiling (kft)...	24	24	24	24	23	13	11	10	10	10

The nearest RAWWS station is over 50 miles from the burn site so KBDI, ERC, and BI could not be accurately measured.

The NWS did list central Massachusetts as being abnormally dry but no significant drought conditions were present.

U.S. Drought Monitor Massachusetts

April 14, 2026
(Released Thursday, Apr. 16, 2026)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	22.50	77.50	26.34	0.00	0.00	0.00
Last Week 04-07-2026	18.40	81.60	29.68	0.00	0.00	0.00
3 Months Ago 01-13-2026	13.43	86.57	35.99	4.29	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 01-01-2026	12.56	87.44	35.79	4.29	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year 09-30-2025	0.28	99.72	26.11	2.12	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago 04-15-2025	5.95	94.05	50.51	0.00	0.00	0.00

Intensity:

None	D2 Severe Drought
D0 Abnormally Dry	D3 Extreme Drought
D1 Moderate Drought	D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Brian Fuchs
National Drought Mitigation Center

An analysis of the actions taken leading up to the wildfire declaration for consistency with the prescribed fire plan. This will include whether it was adequate and whether it was followed:

Findings

All pre-burn notifications were completed and the contingency resources were confirmed to be available.

All weather parameters were within prescription and a spot weather forecast was obtained.

All resources were briefed on site and clear leaders intent was given.

The initial five small spot fires on private property according to FWS Fire Management Handbook should have been declared a wildfire and the appropriate actions taken.

Immediately after the RXB2 was notified of the larger spot, notifications to the WFPC/AA and RAFMO occurred.

Contingency resources were dispatched and arrived on scene within minutes.

All actions taken regarding the wildfire declaration were consistent with the prescribed fire plan.

Recommendations

The Prescribed Fire Plan states that in the event of a wildfire declaration the RXB2 "may" notify the FMO/AFMO but it is recommended the plan read that the notification "will" happen.

An analysis of the prescribed fire plan for consistency with policy:

Findings

The plan used for this burn was signed and approved in October 2024 which is within the three year currency however it was in the 2018 template instead of the more current 2021 template that is required.

The technical reviewer for the plan was a subordinate employee of the RXB2.

Recommendations

Update the plan to the latest version of the PMS 484-1.

The AFWFB should establish clear protocols for the technical review of all prescribed fire plans.

An analysis of the prescribed fire plan and associated environmental parameters:

Findings

The acceptable wind direction identified in the plan for Unit 28 puts smoke directly across the installation boundary and on to private property. However highly smoke sensitive assets on base limit additional wind directions from being utilized.

Recommendations

The addition of a RAWs station could aid the RXB2 in monitoring the weather parameters identified in element 7 of the plan.

A review of the approving line officer's qualifications, experience and involvement including adequate program oversight:

Findings

The Wildland Fire Program Coordinator for Westover ARB acts as the Agency Administrator for all prescribed burns. They were on site for the burn and subsequent wildfire declaration.

Recommendations

The USAF does not require any training in order to perform the duties of an AA. Attendance of the Agency Administrator Workshop should be encouraged to all Fire Program Coordinators.

A review of the qualifications and experience of key personnel involved:

Findings

All staff members that were present on the burn were qualified in their positions and were experienced in operations on that installation. The key positions required in element 11 of the plan were filled.

Recommendations

Continue to ensure all employees are qualified and required training has been completed to avoid any unknown expirations.

A summary of causal agents contributing to the wildfire declaration:

Causal factor: Security protocols on USAF installations limited the ability of crews to openly and freely patrol on private property.

Causal factor: Controlled access points in the fence did not allow equipment to quickly engage the spot fire.

Contributing factor: The industrial manufacturing site and presence of heavy equipment pose a hazard to crew members accessing private property.

Recommendations

Knowing that access will be limited to patrol private property it is encouraged to preposition resources in critical holding areas.



Determine the level of awareness and understanding of procedures and guidance of the personnel involved:

Finding

All personnel on scene made proper notifications and followed the chain of command when declaring the incident a wildfire.

Recommendations

Expectations regarding communications pre and post wildfire declaration should be clearly outlined to ensure all agencies (DOW/DOI) are aware of developing incidents.

Establish accountability:

Findings

Verifying off site values during the development of the complexity analysis would help to identify mitigations needed to limit the risk of damage.

Recommendations

Wildland Support Module Leader should ensure that all prescribed fire plans are utilizing the latest version of the PMS 484-1.

Mitigating the extended time needed to access the private property with equipment would help ensure spot fires are contained quickly. These efforts should be discussed during the contingency planning portion of the operational briefing.

Synopsis of Lessons Learned

Implementing prescribed fire on military installations pose unique challenges for implementation. Maintaining base security while burning along boundaries require extensive coordination with military leadership and private land owners.

Fostering relationships with adjacent land owners and facilitating pre-burn discussions about contingency plans can streamline and expedite suppression efforts in the event of an escape.

Quickly requesting contingency resources helped minimize the extent of damage to private property.

Knowing and understanding the limitations involved with off installation response can aid in determining appropriate actions needed to mitigate risks of escape across jurisdictional boundaries.