

STATE OF FLORIDA



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & CONSUMER SERVICES

DOYLE CONNER, COMMISSIONER * 3125 CONNER BLVD. TALLAHASSEE 32301

Division of Forestry
Route 1, Box 20F
Bunnell, FL 32010

April 26, 1985

TO: Chief, Fire Control .

FROM: Mike Kuypers, District Forester *ML*

SUBJECT: Fire tent incident, St. Marks Pond Fire
(my conversation w/ J.P. Greene, same subject)

Please find attached district safety officer Miller's report on the deployment of a fire tent on the above fire.

If further information is needed, please advise.

April 22, 1985

TO: Mike Kuypers, District Forester D-10

FROM: Garrie Miller, District Safety Officer

SUBJECT: Incident, St. Marks Pond Fire

The following report is the result of the investigation into the use of a forest fire shelter on the suppression effort, St. Marks Pond fire on March 31, 1985.

The following persons were involved in the investigation of the incident.

Garrie Miller, Safety Officer coordinated investigation and finalized results.

Gordon Buckles, Forest Investigator, consulted on fire cause and fire behavior.

William Hodges, Forest Area Supervisor, in charge of fire during incident.

Tommy Thomas, Ranger, incident victim and only witness to actual events.

INCIDENT SYNOPSIS

At 1530hrs. EST on March 31, 1985, Ranger Tommy Thomas began plowing on approximately a 400 acre fire. Moving South he found the head fire had been suppressed by a barrier of clear cut pine recently control burned. Thomas then decided to attempt to hold the left flank of the fire along a grassy road bed. Thomas skimmed a line west along the road shoulder about 400 yards. He then noticed the wind shifting and the fire crossing the road ahead and behind him. The fire moved rapidly north on to him forcing him to leave the tractor and protect himself in a small pond with the fire tent.

Interview with Ranger Thomas

In interviewing Ranger Thomas about the incident, his story as to fire behavior at the time and chain of events parallel both the physical evidence and his supervisor's statement.

- Ranger Thomas felt that a retreat into heavy rough would have been impossible. The fire was spotting badly and no chance of out running it seemed possible.

Thomas saw the low fuel area and used it in combination with his fire shelter. He said that as the fire passed over, temperatures became high in the tent but cooled rapidly. After just a short period Ranger Thomas was able to begin fire fighting again. He reported no injury to himself or the equipment.

Statement Supervisor Hodges

[see attached sheets.]

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The burn patterns indicated a very hot fire on the left flank. Some crowning had taken place on the flank. Burn indicated a Southwest wind. Reported weather conditions were spread 30, Buildup 38, Winds Southwest 14 gusting higher, Humidity 39%.

CONCLUSION

Ranger Thomas made a timely decision in using the fire tent for protection. The rapid wind shifts lead to a situation which could have ended in tragedy, fortunately Ranger Thomas remained calm and used his training to overcome the situation. It should be noted here that refresher training on the use of the fire shelter took place just two days prior to the incident. If anything can be learned from this incident is the importance of an ongoing fire behavior and fire safety training program. /

April 24, 1985

The following is a summary of conditions and events, as I know them, surrounding the use of a fire shelter by Ranger Tommy L. Thomas on March 31, 1985, at the St. Marks Pond fire.

The fire was discovered at 1340 hours and exhibited extremely rapid spread and build up. Recorded Danger Station readings were as follows: Temp. -86, Humidity -39%, Wind -SW @ 13, Buildup -38 high, Spread -30 very high. Actual conditions observed at the fire are estimated to be: Wind WSW @ 20-25 with higher gusts, Humidity - about 25-30%.

Ranger Thomas had approached the fire from the North side and was plowing on the left flank near where the head had hit a cleared area. Help for Thomas had not yet arrived. This flank of the fire was burning very hot with numerous spot fires occurring. Thomas was plowing along side a grassed over graded road which the fire had paralleled in a young pine plantation. While Thomas was plowing along the grade, a sudden wind shift from the South caused this flank to become a head fire. The fire crossed the road on both sides of Thomas before he had time to get around either end. Fire spread at this time was extremely rapid.

The only escape route for Thomas would have been to the North. The area North consisted of a moderately dense mature pine stand with continuous medium to heavy palmetto/gallberry underbrush. A small hole of water was right next to Thomas. He opted to get in the water with the fire shelter over him. The fire passed over Thomas with no injury to him. In my opinion, he made the right decision in a bad situation, since had he tried to outrun the fire in the heavy rough, I believe the fire would have caught up with him. The tractor was left on the road and sustained no damage.


W. F. Hodges, Forest Area Supervisor



- A.R.

4 YR 17 GARDEN

0002 145

20 YR PLANTATION
PALMETTO / GALLBERY
heavy rough.

GRASS JURY ROAD

TRACTOR

CLEAR CUT

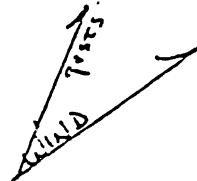
US 1

6 YR PLANTATION
PALMETTO / GALLBERY

--- TRACTOR MOVEMENT

X - LOCATION OF FIRE TENT

- FIRE AT TIME OF
FIRE -



INDIVIDUAL FIRE REPORT

FLORIDA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY

White copy to Tallahassee
Pink copy to District
Yellow copy to Investigator

Prepared By W. F. Hodges

Approved By 82

1 LOCATION

District 10 County 55 Fire Number 0267
Section 08 Township North 1/South 2 Range East 3/West 4

2 DISCOVERY CODE

5502

3 TYPE OWNERSHIP

2 1 State 2 Private 3 Federal

4 ACRES BURNED

Enter to nearest 10th of an acre. Example: One and one-half acre fire would be 00001.5

Commercial Forest 00400.0 Non-Commercial Forest 0.0
Non-Forest 00300.0 Limited Action Acres 0.0 Total Acres Burned 00700.0

5 IGNITION

Form of Ignition Heat 65 Degree of Certainty About Ignition Heat 3
Equipment Involved in Ignition 098.0 Ignition Factor 11
Type Material First Ignited 02

1. Certain
2. Reasonably Certain
3. Most Probable
4. Undetermined

6 FUEL

1 1 Palmetto/Gallberry 3 Blowy Leaf 5 Muck 7 Other
2 Grass 4 Dense Pine 6 Swamp

7 FIRE DANGER

Wind Speed 13 Wind Direction 6
Build-Up Index 038 Spread Index 030

1 North 4 Southeast 7 West
2 Northeast 5 South 8 Northwest
3 East 6 Southwest 9 Calm

8 TIME OF FIRE

Month/Day/Year of Start 033185 Example: Feb. 1, 1980 would be 020180
Day of Week 1 1 Sunday, 2 Monday, 3 Tuesday, 4 Wednesday, 5 Thursday, 6 Friday, 7 Saturday
Military Time
Started 1330 Discovered 1340 Reported 1343
Ranger Departed 1345 Arrived 1421 Controlled 0800 4-1-85
Month/Day/Year of Mop-Up 040685 Mop-Up Time 1100

9 ASSISTED BY

1 2 3 4 0 None 2 Fire Department 4 Other Volunteer
1 Landowner 3 Other DOF Crew

10 ESTIMATED SUPPRESSION COST

DOF 13 Other Agency 07

11 ESTIMATED OBJECT VALUES

Saved 00 Damaged 00

12 LAW ENFORCEMENT

NUB No.

Landowner Craig Maguire Address 809 Coastal Hwy St. Augustine, Fla.

Person Responsible for Fire Unknown Address

Category of Person 4 Activity Involved 99 Age 0 Sex 3 Motive 01

Witnesses, Evidence, Remarks Believe fire was set to improve hunting in the area.

Fire included a 300 acre peat pond. Fire was named "St Marks"