

WAMPEE BAY INCIDENT REVIEW

Wampee Bay Fire
Baker County, Florida
June 18, 1988

Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
Florida Division of Forestry
3125 Conner Blvd.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1650

WAMPEE BAY FIRE SHELTER DEPLOYMENT INCIDENT

SUMMARY

On Saturday, June 18, 1988, Olustee Fire Tower (Lake City District) picked up a smoke at 1309 in the vicinity of a previously authorized site prep burn. The Duty Officer suspected a possible break-out, and dispatched a tractor plow unit.

Upon arrival, it was discovered that a timber company site prep burn had escaped into an adjacent, moderately wet, large swampy area known as Wampee Bay. The escaped fire was estimated to be not more than a couple acres at that time. The medium tractor encountered operating difficulty in the swamp and was unable to construct an effective line around the fire. Hand tool use was attempted, but proved to be unsuccessful for the Ranger. The Supervisor was notified and arrived on the scene in the mid-afternoon. A patrol aircraft also sized-up the fire and indicated that a blade tractor was needed. A blade tractor was dispatched and also experienced difficulty in establishing a clean line. With darkness approaching, and minimal fire activity, the creeping fire was left for the night.

On Sunday morning, June 19th, the heavy tractor tried once again to contain the fire in the swamp. In addition, another medium class tractor was dispatched to assist. Fire activity continued to be low intensity and in some of the wetter locations the fire went out on its own. Bogging and mechanical problems plagued the firefighters this day also. The fire was left again Sunday night with plans to return Monday morning, June 20th.

The District Forester and fire supervisor flew the fire the next morning. It continued to be apparent that the LGP heavy tractor was having considerable difficulty in establishing effective control lines.

Early Monday afternoon, the supervisor arrived on the scene. By radio, he monitored the LGP tractor's progress. He also sent in another ranger on foot to serve as a tractor lookout and to assist the operator in any other way that may be needed.

Shortly after that, the LGP tractor bogged down on a return pass in the line created just moments before. At approximately the same time the tractor became stuck, the fire began to build. The flare-up was most likely associated with a pocket or island of predominately drier fuels, and a reported increase in wind speed. Scattered pines began to torch out approximately 50 yards from their position. Attempts to winch the tractor out were unsuccessful.

The primary escape route was cut off by the approaching head fire. Alternative escape routes were discounted due to the extreme mobility problem in the heavy brush and vine entanglements. A wise decision was made to deploy the fire shelter at the tractor bog site.

The shelter was positioned parallel to the blade and inside the frame, forward of the track system. Due to space limitations, one shelter was shared by two rangers. While the moderately hot fire burned over their position, the

firefighters maintained composure under the fire shelter and escaped the burn-over without injury. The tractor received no damage, principally because the available fuel in the immediate vicinity had already been walked down.

The fire was contained on the afternoon of Tuesday, June 21st. It burned approximately 60 acres.

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FINDINGS

1. The fire shelter deployment incident occurred on Monday, June 20, 1988, at approximately 2:35 p.m. The Fire Readiness Level was 3.
2. The firefighters received fire weather information both morning and afternoons for the past two days.
3. The danger station p.m. weather observations (approximately 15 miles from the fire) were: Temperature 85, R.H. 66%, winds northerly @ 6 mph, buildup-high, spread index-moderate.
4. The last rainfall recorded in the Lake City District measured .73 on June 11.
5. The wildfire was a result of an escaped site prep burn being conducted by Rayonier Timber Co.
6. The LGP tractor was working alone on the head of the fire. There were no hand tools or drip fire torch on the tractor.
7. The fuel bed was typical Florida swamp, with pockets/islands of drier sites and a medium scattering of slash pine.
8. There were no communication problems.
9. The sky was cloudy—thunderheads were building nearby.
10. The tractor spun down in the muck, coinciding with the time the fire began to build in intensity.
11. Efforts to winch the tractor out of the bog were unsuccessful.
12. A fire shelter was deployed at the tractor bog site. Due to space limitations, one shelter was shared by two rangers.
13. Hydraulic lines ran directly overhead the location selected for deployment. (see photos)
14. The water protection system was used to protect the tractor. No damage was sustained.
15. The firefighters suffered no injuries, although a second shelter was deployed after the burn-over for additional protection from the heavy smoke.
16. Forest Ranger Larry Chestnut was employed in 1981, and completed Basic Fire Control Training (BFCT) in 1982. Forest Ranger David Harrell was employed in 1985 and completed BFCT in 1986.
17. These same two Rangers experienced close call burn-overs just 10 weeks earlier.
18. Five "Watch Out" situations were present.
19. Four Fire Orders were not properly observed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

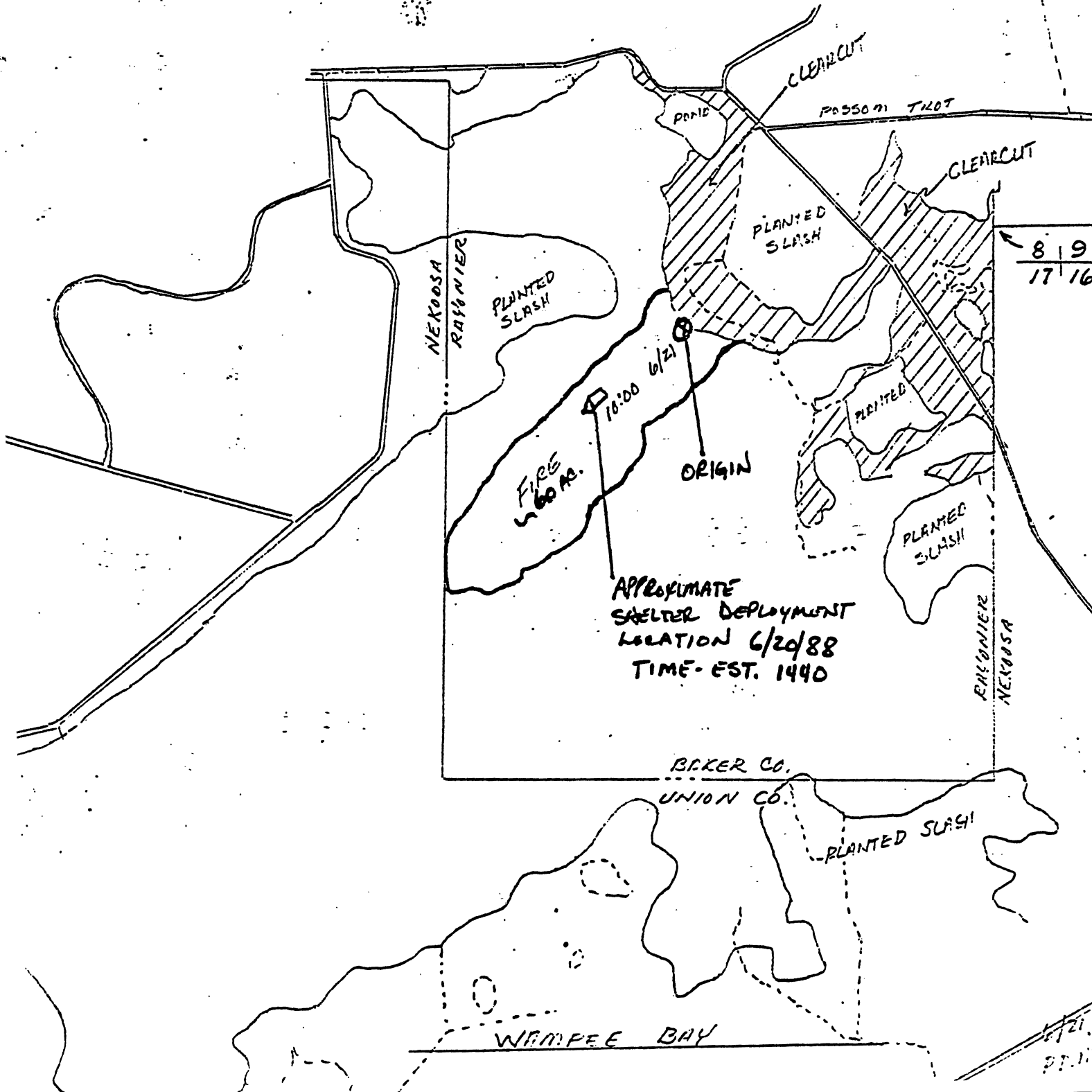
1. Forest Area Supervisors should be provided with belt weather kits. This is necessary so that changes in local weather that adversely affect fire behavior could be more closely monitored in the fire environment.
2. Field units should refrain from the use of single resources on a fire where bogging is known to be a problem. Ideally, tractors working in tandem in swamp fuels facilitates extraction if necessary and provides for a greater safety margin.
3. All first line equipment should be equipped with basic hand tools-- including a drip fire torch.
4. All fire supervisors should place a higher emphasis on the importance of firefighters establishing safety zones and escape routes for any fireline operation.
5. The use of specialty resources, i.e. all-terrain vehicles, bombardiers, or even helicopters should be judiciously requested before fire suppression problems become compounded.
6. Firefighters should be cautioned against deploying fire shelters underneath tractor hydraulic lines, or in the proximity of other flammable equipment components.

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MAP # 2 WAMPÉE BAY FIRE

6/19 - 6/21

1" = 1320'

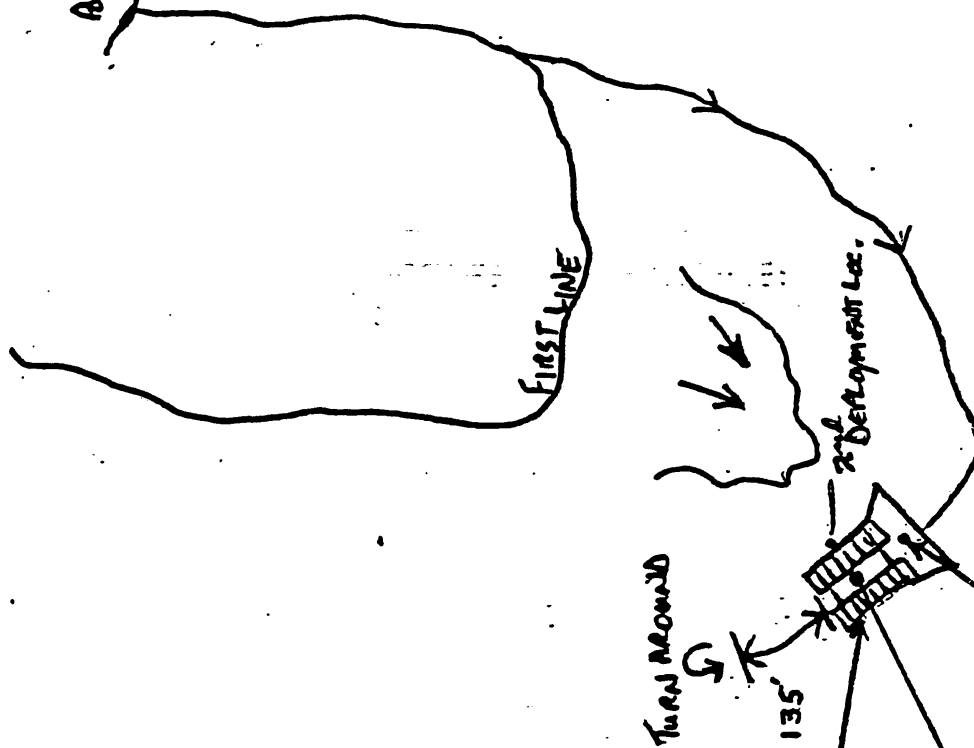


MAP # 3
WAMPEE BAY FIRE
6/19 - 6/21



ESTIMATE P.O.B. TO
TRACTOR LOCATION
~ 1300 FT.

POINT OF
BEGINNING



FIRST LINE

2nd DEPLOYMENT LOC.

TURN AROUND

135'

D-6 L&P
W/ WREN & BLADE

FIRST DEPLOYMENT LOCATION

2 MEN - 1 SHELTER
APPROX. 30 MIN.

Attachment # 1

1" = 1320'

