

The Pioneer Fire on the Boise National Forest started on July 18th, and despite our best efforts it escaped our initial attack. Six weeks later, on August 31st, the fire is 157,000 acres and still spreading to the north. There is about 350 miles of fire perimeter, with 182 miles of completed fireline. Here are the things it's important to understand about our management of this fire:

1. Our initial attack was immediate and aggressive. Here's the narrative statement that reports our initial response on July 18th:

The Pioneer Fire was reported at 1717 hours to Boise Dispatch by the lead plane assigned to the Casner Fire while it was returning to Boise Airport. The initial fire size-up from the lead plane was 1 to 1.5 acres in continuous fuels. No structures in the immediate area of the fire and poor road access. The fire was initial attacked by one air attack, one lead plane, four helicopters, one heavy air tanker, two single engine air tankers, 11 smoke jumpers, Boise Hotshots, Crew 11, Engine 412, one wet patrol unit, and a fire investigator. At 1804 hours dispatch received an update that the fire was increasing in size. The first resource on scene was Boise BLM Helitack at 1810 hours. They immediately ordered a heavy air tanker, two single engine air tankers, two type 2 helicopters, and one type 1 helicopter for the fire. The helitack crew was unable to find a landing site near the fire area. They flew to Idaho City Airstrip to put on a bucket for water drops and returned to the fire. At 1841 hours dispatch received another update that the fire was five acres, growing, burning in timber, torching, and crowning flame lengths. By 1906 hours the fire was reported between 15 and 20 acres, spotting, with uphill runs. The fire was reported to be 30 acres by air attack at 2004 hours. Later, air attack reported the fire 100 acres with group tree torching at 2127 hours. At 2207 hours the type 3 incident commander ordered additional resources to the fire. The order included, one additional type 2 helicopter, four type 1 crews, three type 2 IA crews, five type 4 engines, two water tenders and two dozers for the next day. The cause of the Pioneer Fire is under investigation. The origin of the fire was located on Boise National Forest in Forest Service fire protection at T7N, R6E, section 16.

Reports that heavy air tankers were sitting unordered and unused while the fire was attacked by single engine air tankers are incorrect. We only had access to one of them, the other was on a mandatory day off. (Pilots are required to stand down to rest for safety one day each week during which time critical maintenance is taken care of on those heavily used aircraft.) The initial response was commensurate with the challenges the fire presented at IA, and we launched the heavy air tanker right away.

2. Our objectives for the fire are to protect our values and limit the negative fire effects on natural resources and communities while keeping the public and our people safe. Instructions given to the Type 1 teams regarding the management

of the fire, delivered by our Forest Supervisor, the Regional Forester's Designated Representative, are detailed and specific, but in summary, the direction is not necessarily to put the fire out, (which is an unrealistic expectation given the terrain, access issues, lack of safety zones and extreme fire behavior), but to protect our values and minimize fire's impacts. Specifically, the teams are trying to protect the lives of people, property, infrastructure, and terrestrial and aquatic habitat. The team is to communicate early and often with stakeholders and partners and to manage access in the fire area to keep the public safe.

3. The country is tough, steep, and inaccessible. The Pioneer Fire has been particularly challenging because our fuels conditions are critically dry and ready to burn, and have been for two months now. Much of the area currently impacted by or in the path of the Pioneer Fire have not burned or been treated in many years and so the stands are thick with fuels that support extreme fire behavior. In many areas around this fire there is no safe access or egress for our fire personnel and no openings large enough to be used as safety zones which is a requirement for putting any of our people out on the line. That limits our ability to successfully contain this fire on all sides.
4. Despite these challenges we feel we've been enormously successful. The fire is 58% contained as reported on the morning of August 31st. The containment number rises and falls as we make progress on one side while the perimeter expands on another side. That does not indicate failure but tenacity considering the daily challenges our firefighters are facing.
5. More evidence of our success lies in the communities of Pioneerville, Lowman and Garden Valley. These communities have faced evacuations, warnings, interruptions in their ability to travel the highways that cut through the fire at times and a great deal of smoke and inconvenience and yet they stand whole after weeks of significant fire threats. Our communication with the neighbors in these communities has been constant and we are frequently reminded by the citizens that they appreciate the efforts firefighters have made to keep their homes and communities safe.
6. The most important indicator of success is our solid safety record. Despite the dangerous, extreme fire behavior we have encountered in difficult terrain we have had no fatalities and only relatively minor injuries. It is absolutely imperative in this and any fire that the lives of the public, our firefighters and aviators are recognized and protected as our greatest value and highest priority.
7. This was one fire among many that first week. The fire did start the same week as the BLM's MM14 Fire near Lucky Peak and Hilltop. We also had a lot of other fire activity on the Boise NF and in the SW Idaho dispatch area where all neighbors support one another and work together on initial and extended

attack. Our initial attack resources on the Pioneer fire made every effort to reach and contain the fire the first day but were hampered by extreme fire behavior, poor road access, and lack of safety zones. The day after the Pioneer Fire started, we did share some aviation and equipment resources with the MM14 Fire which was a higher priority with immediate threats to the public, structures and the highway. We don't know if those resources might have made a difference that day on the Pioneer, but our mandate is to send resources to the highest priority where we can protect lives and on that day, MM14 was the highest priority.

8. We are not prolonging this fire to provide employment opportunities. Unfortunately, fire employment opportunities abound given the national fire situation and the competition for firefighting resources on other incidents.
9. If we could put this fire out without compromising the safety of our firefighters and aviators we would do so. We will not put people in harm's way without safety zones in which they can seek refuge from extreme fire behavior, and so as the fire continues to move to the north toward the Deadwood Reservoir and into some more remote terrain our suppression investments will decline significantly commensurate with values at risk from the fire. In the past week as the fire has moved past locations where we might reasonably and safely check its progress, we have scaled back our workforce. There are just half the numbers of firefighters as there were last week; there simply isn't any safe place for them to work and so we are able to redirect firefighters to other incidents where they can make a difference. As the Pioneer Fire bumps into old fire scars, however, we have opportunities in the altered fuels to stop its progress and we will be taking advantage of those opportunities. A projected containment date in October is not giving up - it's simply being realistic about what we can do safely.
10. As for the resource damage associated with his fire, we believe that has been significant although we are of course evaluating the extent of the damage as the fire is still burning. Like most fires we've experienced a range of severity and fire effects with habitat loss, watershed damage and killed trees where the fire was most severe and in other areas relatively mild fire effects that are actually ecologically positive.

People are very concerned about the forest and the effects of the fire, as we are. We are proud of our efforts to manage a very difficult situation without any loss of our most important values, the lives of the firefighters and the people we serve.

August 31, 2016