Eagle Creek Fire – lessons learned

One emergency - two counties, in the Columbia Gorge

Panel 1 – Hood River

Prepare – Respond – Recover Workshop & Conference
October 9-11, 2018
Riverhouse on the Deschutes
3 panelists – 3 perspectives:

Matt English  
Sheriff, Hood River County

Mariana Ruiz-Temple  
Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal

Barb Ayers  
Emergency Manager, Hood River County

Eagle Creek Fire – lessons learned
Eagle Creek Fire – overview
Hood River County Sheriff Matt English

Started Labor Day weekend, September 2, 2017 - peak tourism season in the Gorge

Teenage boy ignited fireworks during a burn ban

Fire burned 50,000 acres, and burned for 3 months

Declared 100% contained November 30, 2017
Eagle Creek Fire

Became #1 fire in the country
Both sides of the Columbia River
Day 1 - Sept. 2, 2017
Eagle Creek Fire Search and Rescue (SAR)

- Hood River County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Forest Service evacuated hikers
- 3 in the most difficult location airlifted by Oregon National Guard
- Group of 14 hiked out safely
- Large group (approx. 140) sheltered in place and hiked out in the morning. They were located safely away from the fire. Multiple agencies coordinated getting supplies to the group.
Day 2- September 3rd, 2017
Eagle Creek Fire Search and Rescue (SAR)

• The final group hiked to the Wahtum Lake area and was bussed to the reunification site.

• No hikers were unaccounted for

• One hiker was transported non-critically via ambulance for exhaustion and dehydration.
That night - September 3rd

Eagle Creek Fire Evacuation orders issued overnight

City of Cascade Locks
Level 3: approx. 130 homes, 15 businesses
Level 2 and 1: additional 153 structures
Day 3 - September 4th, 2017
Eagle Creek Fire Evacuations expanded in City of Cascade Locks

By morning, the fire had grown to 3,000 acres.

Three Strike Teams on duty to protect structures, with three more teams arriving today.
September 5

Evacuations expanded in Cascade Locks

Fire closes popular Gorge destinations (i.e. Multnomah Lodge) and USFS trails, threatens fish hatchery

Fire hops Columbia River to WA state - Archer Mountain fire.

New evacuation orders in south County near Mount Hood - public lands where campers, hikers, and hunters recreate.
**September 6**

In the early hours, the Eagle Creek Fire merged with the Indian Creek Fire.

Fire officials estimated that, together, over 31,000 acres were actively burning.
September 7th, 2017

Fire marches closer to the more populated areas of Hood River County

Community meeting at the Hood River Valley High School
Fire crews run back-burn operations near Cascade Locks
September 8th, 2017

New evacuations on County’s south side (Dee) and Cascade Locks Level 2 expanded
A week later – September 14

Hood River County evacuation orders now approaching Hood River City limits
EOC opened Joint Information Center (JIC)

Real time Public Info
- Facebook
- Website
- Interactive web map
- Public meetings
- Cops and firefighters carried content
Hood River/Multnomah Counties Interactive Web Map:
enter your address to see what evacuation level you may be under.

Updated information available on hoodriversheriff.com
Hood River Sheriff Facebook and Twitter pages.
25 days after starting, on September 27, the Eagle Creek Fire had burned 48,665 acres and was 46% contained.

Rainfall during previous days had significantly contained the fire.
Eagle Creek Fire – a year later

May 29, 2018 Still smoldering in some areas

October 2018 Historic Columbia River Hwy remains closed from Bridal Veil to Ainsworth State Park
Oregon State Fire Marshall’s Office perspective / lessons learned

Mariana Ruiz-Temple, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal
August 2017 - What else was happening

- August 17th – Nena Springs Fire
- August 17th – Milli Fire
- The Eclipse
- August 20th - Chetco Bar Fire

- Most task forces & strike teams out at one time: 26 (156 apparatus)
- Moved resources from fire to fire
- Extended resources
- Low availability of resources due to weather conditions and deployments
- Use of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact
Eagle Creek Incident Info

- September 2\textsuperscript{nd} – fire started
- September 3\textsuperscript{rd} – conflagration declared
- September 4\textsuperscript{th} – Assumed Command
  - 30 task forces / strike teams total
  - 88 Oregon fire agencies; 6 Washington
  - 390 personnel on 148 apparatus
- Integrated with type 2 IMT
Eagle Creek Incident Info

- 12 miles in 8 hours on September 4\textsuperscript{th}
  - Washington State
- Threats to communities- 10 delegations of authority (Wy-East, Westside, Parkdale, Hood River City, Hood River Co, USFS, Multnomah Co, Cascade Locks, ODFW, Corbett)
- September 17\textsuperscript{th} – all OSFM resources demobilized
- 5230 threatened structures; 1822 people evacuated
- 817 homes triaged
- 4 residences consumed by fire
Eagle Creek Incident Info

Complexity analysis/Values at risk
• Bull run water shed
• Economic impacts
• Transportation closures
• Two counties
• Bonneville power facilities
• Warm Springs fishing sites
• Critical Gorge infrastructure
• The historic Columbia Gorge Lodge located at Multnomah Falls
• USFS brought in a type 1 on Sept 9th
County Emergency Operations Center
Lessons Learned from OSFM

- Engage early on with county EOCs
- Work to include Sheriffs and County Reps into the cooperators meetings early
- Leverage the resources/tools of the Incident Management Team to create consistent messaging and common operating picture between team and EOC.
- Early meeting with EM to understands their needs and how to work with the Incident Management Team
County Emergency Operations Center

- Use of Facebook and consistent messaging

- Understanding the needs and wants of the different counties
  - larger population/media coverage
  - larger agricultural and wildland

- Different levels of need of the Sheriff’s Office
  - Evacuations
  - Check points etc.
Hood River County EOC perspective
Emergency Manager Barb Ayers
It happens when we least expect it

Holiday - peak season.
With 162 hikers on the trail.

2 weeks after Oregon Eclipse
Agencies, businesses just recovering Feb ice storm
And after IEMC course a year in the making
**Eagle Creek Fire County EOC**

3 week activation / 30.5 people per day average

*Mostly volunteers or voluntary*

- Our first large scale EOC response
- Small town, high impact
  - I-84 closed – mass transportation problem
  - Community on edge for a month
  - National visibility
- 1 month incident, 12-18 month impact
- Multi-jurisdictional response - complexity
- Tourism economy impacts – small town
  - “Stay away” PR + trip cancellations due to smoke + 1 month lost tourism + closed trails – 1 year or more
Major EOC activities

- Whole community focus – complimented Unified Command
- Partner info sharing conference calls – 2x/day
  - Averaged 35 partners per meeting – get a high quality speaker phone
  - FreeConferenceCalls.com (not secure) – call from anywhere
- Logistics / contingency plans
- Call Center / Public Information
- Mass care / shelter / health care support
  - Shelter open – 15 days
  - County Health active – smoke and health advisories

THANKS TO RED CROSS, SKAMANIA AND WASCO COUNTIES, ANIMAL VOLUNTEERS AND PORT OF HOOD RIVER FOR SHELTER WORK
Drafted one of first OR evacuation plans

Zones helped.
Sometimes next door neighbors were in different zones
Mutual aid partner helped us put it down on paper
Leverage ESF-8 data, Everbridge and partner data
OHA / ESF 8 data – Vulnerable populations

NEW DATA - Use it!
• Strategic planning tool
• Deputies knocked on doors personally

Other ESF-8 lessons learned:
• Deconflicting shelter plans
  o County and Providence or others
• Many Senior Centers did not have, or know, their evacuation plans
• Public Health pushed smoke safety warnings, boil water info and evacuation tips
**Critical transportation loss - I-84 closure**

Few ways in, out - high traffic corridor  
Plus two aging interstate bridges = choke points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># County staff I-84 commute (20-60 min. daily)</td>
<td>HALF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-84 daily traffic (only east/west access)</td>
<td>11.6 million/Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway 35 / Mt Hood (only south access)</td>
<td>1.1 million/Year</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism / interstate truck traffic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorge visitors USFS</td>
<td>2 million+ / year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt Hood National Forest USFS</td>
<td>5 million /year</td>
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Lessons learned:

Importance of having a rock solid GIS person on staff

One incident – one map, two counties.
Get GIS folks to work together!

Evacuation staging areas – if roads are clogged

Encourage self evacuation – motorhomes and campers
Rapidly changing evacuation notifications + zones = thousands of worried, confused callers

• Set up Joint Information Center
  • Evacuation notices daily – sometimes several times a day
  • Set up outreach systems - Facebook / web / flash alert / trap line / public meetings / partners share same vetted info
  • Interactive online evacuation map

• Call center – thousands of daily calls from residents
  • English/Spanish – real person, in depth info sharing
  • Entry point for new volunteers and EOC staff
  • Before every new evacuation notice, staff up Call Center
  • 3 volunteers per shift x multiple shifts x 18 days
  • Reduced call impact on 911
  • Fielded calls from both sides of river and incident
  • Excel spreadsheet of volunteer/donation offers and feedback
  • Recorded info lines – English and Spanish (if no call pick up)
Lessons learned

Headline RE: Sheriff English

‘In the middle of a catastrophe, he took the time to take care of his citizens’

Take special care of residents affected
• Cascade Locks evacuated more than 2 weeks – deserved special treatment
• Send a dedicated PIO to shelter and gathering places
• Red Cross Shelter allows no contact with evacuees; EOC received hundreds of concerned calls from family members and friends
It’s a long game. Every time we almost got our battle rhythm, a new problem occurred.
We’re in the partnership business.
We are the Whole Community.

Name that Emergency Manager!
Partnerships – we’re in it, together
Asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it’s a sign of strength

Mutual aid – neighbor counties

- **Wasco County** – Sheriff Magill and EM Juston Huffman
- **WA - Skamania** – EM John Carlson

Omnibus agreement - 3 days free EM aid

- **Washington County** (EM Scott Porter + amazing EOC team + series of PIOs)
- **Clatsop County** – (EM Tiffany Brown)
- **Jefferson County** (EM Mark Carman)
  - Put them up in a hotel and feed them

**OEM / Bill Martin**

**Red Cross / field + liaison in EOC**
Eagle Creek Fire County EOC partnership

• Importance of collaboration
  • Ports, Cities, County
  • Intertribe
  • School District
  • Fire agencies, law
  • State: OEM, ODOT, OHA, OSFM, OFW
  • Fed: USFS, USFW, Bonneville Power
  • Local businesses, restaurants and volunteer groups

• Volunteers / infrequent staff:
  • Volunteers wanted to help – needed to help
  • Shadowing opportunities for EOC volunteers and staffs (mutual aid)
  • Day job vs EOC job confusion, especially uniformed staffs
Lessons learned

EOC was disconnected from Fire Camp – send a liaison

Needed a vast expansion of IT and phones
- Blew out County phones and calendar program

EOC: have good food, lots of it – attract field folks in

Leverage business donations for IC, EOC and community needs.
- Restaurants, retail, Walmart, hotel rooms, free Verizon cell phones
Lessons learned

• EOC IAP too long, didn’t guide our actions
  o Need shorter, focused template

• Need a specific plan for policy group / electeds

• What if there had been a long term power outage?

• What’s FMAG? How is it different than Presidential declaration / IDA-PDA?
  o Volunteer hours counts toward cost recovery match

• After the fire - the new norm
  o Unplanned projects, recovery phase, HMGO grant apps. Throw out your work plan.
Now what?

“Columbia Gorge already earned the distinction of the state highest landslide risk…

Eagle Creek fire heightened that threat in some of the most popular Gorge areas… located firmly in the landslide zone” - Dogami
Collaboration - after

Multnomah county, cities, IMT, OEM
Governor’s Office, MCEDD, CGCC
Small Business Center, Travel Oregon

• Weather spotter – Multnomah Co.
• Post fire landslide planning – Multnomah Co.
• Recovery workshops, business outreach
• SBA Loan program (popular here)
Gratitude. 2 weeks after our EOC closed...
Northern California firestorm October 2017

Napa, Sonoma – 9 California counties
12 fires in one month
228,503 acres
Destroyed/damaged buildings: 9,141
44 dead 8 injuries
Partnerships – community – working together
Leveraging our greatest strengths