

December 21, 2017

2017 Fire Season After Action Review

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a special session on December 21, 2017, in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Peck, County Administrator Darren Coldwell and Clerk and Recorder Robin Benson. Commissioner Cole was absent.

9:00 AM Present were Jennifer McCully, Wendy Drake, Undersheriff Huff, Dallas Bowe, Heather Benjamin, Brent Teske and Brad Lord.

Brent said the focus of today's meeting is to discuss lessons learned, how to improve and what worked well during the 2017 fire season. Brent said the rebuilding in Eureka started and will be ongoing, there is future logging sales, clean up of slash piles and other follow up still going on.

Darren commented that the finance piece overall went very well. The learning curve is follow up with DNRC and FEMA and the reimbursement of funds spent. There are multiple contracts so we need to consider a policy for those types of contracts. Commissioner Bennett said it would be beneficial to have that all in place beforehand. Brent commented that we should do what we can to get contracts in place this winter so they are complete even if not used again. Commissioner Peck clarified that each contract is different with each agency so they would be general contracts basically laid out. Darren said there were no problems with receiving invoices. Wendy suggested adopting the same forms that FEMA uses. Commissioner Peck said it is critical to have a pre-fire meeting with DNRC, forest service, and other stakeholders early for pre-planning.

Darren said using county employees at the E.O.C. worked very well. Dallas suggested to update the volunteer list in the spring. Commissioner Peck said there may be a need to create a policy for employee volunteers in a declared emergency. Wendy suggested offering Incident Command System (ICS) training to employees.

Brent commended Heather Benjamin and Ernie Anderson for their IT and mapping services. Heather commented that fire maps are spontaneous and is something that is difficult to plan for. Brent commented there are a lot of maps printed to show fire updates. There were a couple of addressing issues that need to be worked out. Commissioner Bennett said those unwilling to change addresses would take the liability off the county without accurate address information. Heather said she would like to have more training ahead of time to help prepare for another fire season. Heather suggested moving the small platter to the EOC so maps can be printed at that location. Heather also encouraged everyone to go to the VOIP System; Voice Over IP, telephone service through the internet. Commissioner Peck said he completely supports the VOIP system.

Brad commented there will always be a gap with county objectives and state and federal agencies. State and federal agency focus is on the wildfire aspect. Brad said his job was to fill that gap. Commissioner Peck said there was a lack of coordination between fire departments; lack of a central coordinated effort. Fire Chiefs should meet to ensure fire efforts are coordinated so when an emergency arises, they all know how to move forward; we need to fix this. Brad said he may be able to help bring that together by establishing a fire co-op. The commissioners thanked Brad for his service during the fire season.

Jennifer said the EOC is the hub for all information to the public. Information and communication strength is in communication between the Sheriff's Department and the EOC. Jennifer said there were inconsistencies with evacuation information so we need to improve how to keep lines of pre-evac and evacuation fluid and accurate. The public was very happy to actually talk with a live person, not a recording. Commissioner Peck said he was impressed with how it all came together.

Brent said another improvement would be maintaining road blocks, providing porta-potties, utilizing the STAR program and consistency with practices and messaging. It would be beneficial to improve managing volunteers with one person to organize volunteers and recruitment. Jennifer would like to see a policy and procedure with information flow.

Robin commented the daily briefing meetings prior to the stakeholder meetings was very beneficial to everyone who attending so we all get the same information about overnight fire movement. Commissioner Bennett agreed those briefings went well due to sticking with a strict agenda. Jennifer suggested having the daily briefings at the EOC or adding VisionNet. Brent said the stakeholder's meetings had good involvement from organizations and agencies with the county; there was great participation. Heather commented to have the utility company included. Brent said he could create a list of stakeholders ahead of time.

Commissioner Bennett and Commissioner Peck agreed they were glad to see the understanding that the EOC is to serve the Sheriff's Department as well as the public. Everyone did a great job and it was impressive the way everyone came together.

Undersheriff Brandon Huff said the sheriff's department lacked manpower and it will take more advantage of the STAR program and mutual aids to allow for options to request help. Brandon said the daily briefings were very helpful. Brandon expressed the need to refine coordination and communication and ensure there are appropriate signage and barricades.

Jennifer suggested a logistics chief at the EOC to ensure needs are met at road blocks and to improve coordination of information between EMA, sheriff's department and the EOC. Brandon said radio communication with the forest service would be very helpful. Darren stated that considering the workload, the sheriff's department did an amazing job.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mike Cole, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Robin A. Benson, Clerk of the Board