

Museum Fire Update – Impact to Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP)
Paul Summerfelt - July 27, 2019

The Museum wildfire, which began Sun July 21st and is currently still burning in the Dry Lake Hills area north of town, is, and has been, a difficult, challenging, and unfortunate event. As promised earlier, I wanted to provide you some information you can share with others, regarding the incident and its impact to FWPP, and hopefully to dispel any rumors you may hear about.

First off, as of now, the cause remains undetermined. Rest assured that Fire Investigators are following all leads. We are confident in their work, respect the process, and await that result just like all of you. I'm uncertain as to timeline, but it should not be too far off.

As you know, City and Coconino National Forest personnel have been working diligently over the past few years to implement planned forest treatments within the FWPP footprint. Project-wide, we are at about 65% completed, but within the Dry Lake Hills (DLH) area, we were at less than 50% at end-of-last week. Specific to DLH:

- **Phase I** consisted of mechanical and hand-thinning at the base of Mt Elden and was completed in 2018.
- **Phase II** consists of work broken-out into five parts. At this time:
 - Various hand-thinning efforts – some completed, some on-going, some planned: Crews from American Conservation Experience (ACE), AZ Conservation Corps (AZCC), City of Flagstaff (City Crew 1), and US Forest Service have been, are, and will be involved in these efforts.
 - The Helicopter contract was approximately 95% complete. All cutting and decking of wood was completed, slash removal from the various landing sites was underway, and other associated clean-up work was on-going at time of fire. Within this effort, seven log-decks were created:
 - *H-1 (30 log truckloads) was sold and removed (last load taken out day of fire),*
 - *H-2 (65 log truckloads, which did not burn) and H-3 (185 log truck loads which did burn) were being offered for sale at the time of the fire. In fact, the bid openings were set for this past Tues. This offering has been cancelled, and H-2 will be re-offered in the near future.*
 - *H-4 (40 log truckloads) was to be offered soon, but it burned.*
 - *H-5 (35 log truckloads) was not burned, but due to location and poor quality of material, was not likely to ever sell. The City and Forest Service were working to move this timber to the City landfill for free firewood, but removal is now delayed due to the condition of the Mt Elden Road. .*
 - *H-6 and H-7 (150 log loads) were not burned. They are located along Schultz Pass Road and will be offered as deck sales later this summer as planned.*
 - *It should be noted that value of these lag decks was/is minimal, near zero, due to size, composition, and condition of the wood. One aspect of FWPP was removal of this low-grade, low-value timber that was choking our forests.*

- The Steep-Slope contract was in-progress, with roughly 45% completed: a large share of the cutting had been completed, while decking of wood was on-going.
 - *Completion of this contract, originally set for late summer/early fall 2019 may now be delayed. Between 275-400 log truckloads of wood are to be decked in a centralized location in the Schultz fire scar along Forest Road 420. This material will either be made available to commercial operators as a deck sale or potentially moved to the City Landfill for free firewood (Behind the scenes, we've been working for several months with Coconino and Apache Counties, as well as various Navajo officials and Hopi Villages to make some/much of this wood available for tribal members.)*
- Contracts for two other operations (Dry Lake Hills Stewardship and Schultz Tank Sale) were expected to be issued this fall.
- **Next Steps:** Obviously, the fire has caused us to reset operations. As we move into the coming weeks, we intend to –
 - Make remaining log decks and slash available for use during rehab work within the Project area, if practicable.
 - Continue with deck sales and log removal. Complete this work by fall/winter 2019.
 - Continue relocating Phase 2 slash piles to the locations identified before the fire and make slash available via free use permit by November, 2019.
 - Evaluate Steep Slope operations and modify the work and contract, as necessary.
 - Reevaluate the Dry Lake Hills offering and modify the contract or reoffer by September, 2019, if feasible.
 - Reevaluate the Schultz Tank offering and issue it by November, 2019, if feasible.

All should understand that the fire itself will continue for several more days, and perhaps longer, before full-containment is reached. Some initial reports indicate that:

- Somewhere between 10-20% of the area burned at high-severity, while upwards of 50% burned at low-moderate severity. These percentages will shift and be refined as we move forward, but for right now, those numbers are very good (far less severe than it first appeared).
 - Here's a link to a short video taken on an overflight of the fire on Thur: there is no narration, but it gives one a sense of the burn pattern and ground conditions:

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPiGwyzpe0RIO3AIAv0vL26ErKTf1SH1tUMY3OylsZFtY1SAp32aR0U3uoN2OAP4Q?key=VVVFVkdNDcUc4WUNjTnBvOUx0ZlBmSnFhOEhGdUd3>
 - Here are a few pictures that help show what has occurred:



Sunday 2:00 pm



Monday – 4:00 am



Fri PM – Ridge south of Brookbank Meadow looking southeast



Sat PM – Looking northwest from near top of Mt Elden Rd
(looking toward Mt Elden drainage and Brookbank Meadow)

- It will be a year or so before we have a solid grasp on tree mortality in the low-moderate burned areas. Some that survived will undoubtedly succumb to insects, stress, etc in the coming months.
- Some treatment areas were impacted – we are working to determine which and to what extent.
- Some reports from those on-the-ground indicate that the work we did complete had some positive effects on fire spread and intensity.
- Some favorite trails have been damaged, critical wildlife habitat has been lost, and the Mt Elden Road will be impacted for some time.

We are thankful that no structures were damaged during the fire, and that out of the nearly 70,000 hours of suppression-related work to-date, there have only been two relatively minor injuries. All those involved in that fight, our partners, deserve a big-thanks.

Looking toward the next days-and-weeks, post fire flooding is very real threat. All should know that both the City and County, along with many unknown and unnamed volunteers, are working tirelessly to mitigate the impacts. Like the firefighters, they deserve our thanks.

In the coming weeks, we will work to assess and refine the impacts of the fire on the Watershed Project, and we'll continue to share those results as they become known. What we can say right now, however, is that it could have been far worse.

Our plan is to re-engage as soon as possible and carry-on. We have areas where work needs to either resume or be completed and others where planned work needs to start. Our objectives remain unchanged.

Finally, we appreciate your support during these trying times.