Incident Management Teams and Wildfire Management

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A wildfire incident is initially managed at the local level (i.e. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Field Office, Forest Service Ranger District). As the fire grows in size and becomes more complex, additional suppression and support resources are mobilized to help manage the suppression efforts. Incidents are categorized into five categories ranging from Type 5 being the least complex incident to Type 1 being the most complex such as the 2011 Wallow Fire.

During fire season (in southeastern Arizona this is generally April through August), the majority of large fires that are reported in the media tend to be managed by either Type 1 or Type 2 Incident Management Teams (IMTs). A commonly reported misconception is that Type 1 Teams are “better” than Type 2 Teams. This is not the case. As a fire (incident) grows in size and more resources are assigned, the incident becomes more complex to manage and support and a larger IMT is required in order to effectively and safely manage the suppression efforts. In short, a Type 1 IMT has a larger staff as compared to a Type 2 or Type 3 IMT.

Team membership includes individuals from a number of different agencies: BLM, National Park Service, Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, State agencies and municipal fire departments. This variety, and each person’s training and experience, are what help IMTs to function effectively and safely. Team members are required to apply and be able to commit their time each year before being selected for a specific position on the Team.

Wildfire crew at GWP Youth Summit
Incident Management Teams are trained and staffed to manage the many operational, safety, planning, logistical, fiscal, and informational issues presented by the incident at hand. No two fires are alike and the challenges are continuously changing as the fire progresses. The number one rule that all IMTs incorporate into the overall fire suppression planning and implementation efforts is for firefighter and public safety.

The first few days on an incident are always the most challenging. Gathering information, formulating plans and selecting the most effective strategies and tactics is critical to building a foundation for success. Achievable objectives need to be identified each day and the developed strategies need to be flexible. Wildfire behavior is not constant, as fire moves across the landscape, it changes in terms of intensity, rate of spread, and direction, therefore, flexibility in the planning and implementation efforts is one of the keys to being able to accomplish the tasks at hand.

However there truly is a method to this apparent madness. Each person is performing their job because they know that the team and the firefighters on the line are depending on them. This is the essence of teamwork in what appears to be a confusing situation. Team effort results in an orderly process, clear communications, efficient planning, and safe, sound tactics and strategies with achievable objectives. Progress is critically evaluated daily and appropriate adjustments are made for the next operational shift.

It is often difficult for the public to understand why, or why not, various suppression actions are being implemented on a large fire. The hazards that need to be mitigated are too numerous to mention; firefighting is a very dangerous occupation and every precaution needs to be taken to keep the firefighters on the line safe. The IMT can take nothing for granted, the cost is too high. Every year firefighters are seriously injured and some even lose their lives. Decisions are based on current and expected fire behavior as well as weather conditions and forecasts. Firefighters are taught to be alert, remain calm, think clearly and act decisively. We fight fire aggressively having provided for safety first.

The IMT format brings organization and overall leadership to wildfire management regardless of the complexity level. IMTs are expected to formulate and support logical, attainable operational plans and clearly communicate that information to the firefighters. They are the ones who willingly go out on the fireline to perform the most difficult and dangerous work assignments required to ultimately get the job done.
### Current Project Updates

**Upper Gila Watershed Riparian Restoration**
...funded by The Walton Family Foundation (WFF)
- Will replace invasive tamarisk with native species to restore natural habitats
- Greenhouse irrigation upgrades in place
- Sites have been scouted and design plans have begun
- The permitting process with USFW has begun

**Clifton Restroom**
...funded by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)
- Is installing restroom facilities in a recreational area just outside of Clifton

**San Francisco River Restroom**
...funded by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)
- Will install a second restroom for recreation on the San Francisco River Greenlee County and reduce the E.coli levels on the river and make river recreation safer for our community

**Eagle Creek Riparian Restoration at Filleman Crossing**
...funded by the Arizona Water Protection Fund (AWPF) and the U.S. Fish and the USFW Partners program
- Will construct a river crossing to stop frequent wash-outs, benefiting both residents and wildlife
- Planning meeting to be set for forward move on construction

**Menges Ranch Water System Maintenance**
...funded by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) and the Arizona Water Protection Fund (AWPF)
- Will replace diesel pumps with solar and add a telemetry system to reduce E.coli in the San Francisco and Gila Rivers

**Youth Pathway**
...from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Great American Outdoors Grant, and USFW Partners program
- To encourage careers in conservation and land management through on-the-ground activities for school age kids high school through college
- Curriculum has been packaged and overall program is currently being packaged and final report written

**Water Conservation**
...funded by Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold, Inc.
- This project is performing home and business water evaluations to help us all save water and money
- Call and set up a free appointment today!

**Water Conservation Fixes**
...funded by United Way
- This project takes the performed home water evaluations to assist users in saving water and money
- To date 4 low income fixes have been completed

**Upper Gila Water Appraisal Study**
...funded by the US Bureau of Reclamation, with the study to be completed by the WRRC
- The WRRC will help us better understand the water demand and supply in our watershed

**WRRC Water Needs Assessment and Planning**
...funded by the BOR Landscape Conservation Cooperative
- The WRRC will help us assess our future water needs and help us to be stainable

**Developing Greenlee County as a Bird Watching Destination**
...funded by Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold, Inc.
- Unused funds have been moved to complete the Duncan Birding path and a new grant has been requested for the next phase of this project

For more info, see www.gilawatershedpartnership.com
September 10th, 7 P.M. – Gila Watershed Partnership Meeting, Scott Cooke, with the BLM will present on Fire Suppression.

Wednesday, Sept 10th, – Hunter’s 21st Birthday!

October 8th, 2014 – Gila Watershed Partnership Meeting, WRRC will present on the results of the Scenario Planning project.

Our partners include:
- Arizona Department of Agriculture
- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
- Arizona Department of Transportation
- Arizona Game and Fish Department
- Arizona Geological Survey
- Arizona State Land Department
- Bureau of Land Management
- City of Safford
- Eastern Arizona College
- Farm Bureau
- Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc.
- Gila Valley Irrigation District
- Gila Valley NRCD
- Graham County
- Graham County Chamber of Commerce
- Greenlee County
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Town of Clifton
- Town of Duncan
- Town of Pima
- Town of Thatcher
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service – Apache-Sitgreaves and Coronado Forests
- University of Arizona Cooperative Extension
- University of Arizona NEMO Project
- And many community members

Get involved in your watershed
For more information, contact Steve Eady at the Gila Watershed Partnership, P.O. 1614, Thatcher 85552, or email gilawatershed@gmail.com Join us on Facebook “Facebook.com/gilawatershedpartnership”

www.gilawatershedpartnership.com