

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Southwest Oregon District

2015 Annual Report



AT THE END OF 2015, THREE OF US SAID GOOD-BYE to an organization, a career, and a group of trusted colleagues. Rick Dryer, Assistant District Forester in Grants Pass, Greg Alexander, Assistant District Forester in Medford and myself have reached the end of our role at ODF and turn over responsibilities to a new group of managers and leaders. We have great confidence in those taking our place and happy to hand over an institution that has stood the test of time and will be equally effective for them.



Fire Season 2015 had all the earmarks of another disastrous summer, but despite three consecutive years of drought and project fires all over the northwest, Southwest Oregon District was able to get by with no large fires. Only 3 fires exceeded 40 acres: Rosebud (46 acres) on June 9, Krauss Lane (53) on August 8, and Highway 66 (56 acres) on October 31 (after fire season).

The success of this year was probably due to several things (1) long weeks of restrictions limiting the public activities that historically start fires, (2) nearly equally long Industrial Closures, (3) strong attention to the risk and appropriate self-regulation, (4) unusually low amounts of lightning during the heat of the summer, (5) and probably good luck with few starts on the many tough days. We still responded to a normal amount of fires 111 percent of average. Many fires were dangerously close to escaping initial attack and would have without effective aggressive suppression action.

Let me add a final thought on the Oregon model: The "complete and coordinated system" as emphasized in the Oregon Revised Statutes is the archetypal system without equal in fire protection structures. It leverages the best of all the components and depends on relationships among all the various partners to be efficient and effective. (Imagine the inefficiency and cost if it were just a state agency and responsibility!) It has been my pleasure to be in the middle of this concept and watch it played out day after day. It's been an



honor to participate with each one and see the very best of success. Thanks for making my career so meaningful!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Thorpe".

Dan Thorpe
SWO District Forester
(Retired)

District Foresters' Comments

By Dan Thorpe & Dave Larson

IT IS AN HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO BE SELECTED AS your District Forester. I first began my career in forestry in 1990 working for the Douglas Forest Protective Association on the hand crew at the ripe old age of 16! As the neighbor to the north I was always impressed with SWO ability to fight fire and the level of professionalism the employees demonstrated. During my college years majoring in Fire Science / EMT, I continued working seasonally for DFPA until promoting to Permanent Forest Officer and later becoming South Protection Supervisor in 2005. In 2012 I was again promoted to the DFPA North Unit Forester until becoming District Forester for SWO district.



The District has been quite busy as we get moving forward into 2016. Three key positions have been filled with DF Larson, ADF Winslow and ADF McCarty and we hit the ground running. Our first task was to develop short term priorities that included getting out and meeting the landowners, partners and cooperators; build and maintain

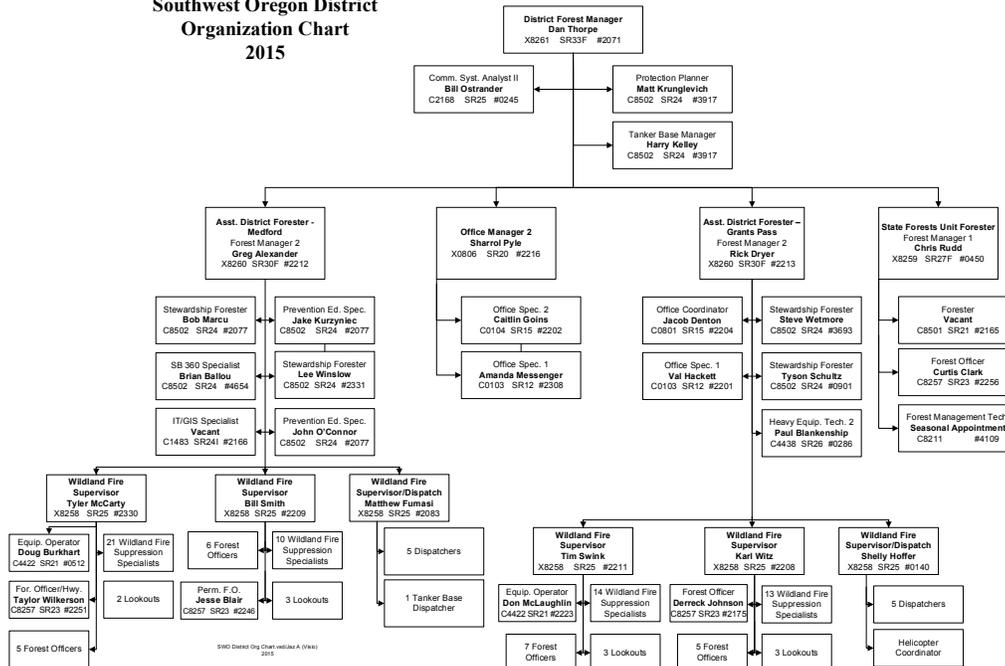
relationships; put together FY17 budget and Annual Operating Plan and hire for current vacancies with goal to have all positions filled by March 1 (NRS-1 State Lands, South Protection Supervisor, NRS-2 Stewardship Forester Medford, COM2 Grants Pass, IT/GIS State Lands); and begin recruitment for seasonal hiring.

Looking back at 2015 the District continued to provide assistance to woodland owners and forest operators to help them achieve their objectives within the bounds of the Oregon Forest Practices Act. District personnel also provided land management activities on 18,000 acres including harvesting, reforestation and stand management, producing income for the counties and the Common School Fund.

In closing, I greatly appreciate the communication and teamwork our employees maintain with each other and our various cooperators. Our work is more effective, efficient, and enjoyable because of how we work with one another. I look forward to what 2016 will bring us.

Dave Larson
SWO District Forester

Southwest Oregon District
Organization Chart
2015



Southwest Oregon District • 5286 Table Rock Rd. • Central Point, OR 97502 • (541) 664-3328

After another drier-than-normal winter and with drought conditions in much of the state, the Southwest Oregon District was poised for a long and active fire season.

The first fire of note was a 10-acre blaze that broke out May 27 on Granite Hill, north of Grants Pass. Pile burning was determined to be the cause and firefighters from ODF's Grants Pass Unit, Grants Pass Fire-Rescue and Rural-Metro Fire Department soon had the fire contained and mopped up.

Wet thunderstorms swept across Josephine County's forestlands on May 31 and drier storms in early June sparked small fires in several parts of the district.

Fire season was declared on June 5.

A 7-acre fire in the Abbott Prairie area north of Lost Creek Reservoir gave Medford Unit firefighters their first taste of smoke for the season. Smaller fires were found in the Foots Creek, Galls Creek, Birdseye Creek, Wards Creek, Cheney Creek and Horsehead Creek drainages, and in the Fish Hatchery Road area. The largest fire on the district was the 40-acre Rosebud Fire in the Soda Mountain Wilderness.

At the same time, crews on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest were fighting the Buckskin and Red Dog fires, along with a handful of other small lightning-caused fires. The Buckskin Fire, burning in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness 10 miles southwest of Cave Junction, slowly grew during most of the month of June and covered more than 5,300 acres; the Red Dog Fire was quickly contained at 12 acres.

After the flurry of fire activity in early June, which brought many of the district's seasonal

Fire Protection

By Brian Ballou

firefighters back to work earlier than normal, fire activity on both ODF's Grants Pass and Medford units slowed significantly through the rest of June and into July. However, hot and dry weather persisted and the fire danger climbed to "High" by June 13 and Industrial Fire Precaution Level II was imposed July 1.

A series of target shooting-related fires kept ODF Medford Unit engines busy near the end of June. All of the fires broke out on a county-operated shooting range on Kershaw Road in the White City area. An information campaign about preventing fires linked to target shooting was focused on the range, bringing an end to the fires.

Widespread lightning hit the district July 5 and continued through July 9. Small fires were discovered from the Cave Junction area in southwest Josephine County to the upper Evans Creek drainage in northwest Jackson County to the Soda Mountain Wilderness in southeastern Jackson County. None of the fires was larger than ¼-acre.

On July 28, the Southwest Oregon District raised the fire danger level to "Extreme" and Industrial Fire Precaution Level III took effect August 1. More lightning in late July and early August kept lookouts and engine crews on the prowl, but few new fires were discovered on ODF-protected lands.

A new fire of significance, the Stouts Creek Fire, broke out July 30 in southern Douglas County and affected Jackson and Josephine counties for several weeks. The fire eventually

burned more than 26,000 acres and flooded downwind communities with heavy smoke, prompting public health alerts and confounding fire detection efforts on the Southwest Oregon District. The smoke was so heavy that the Medford Airtanker Base, which was sending retardant bombers to the Stouts Creek Fire and other blazes, had to hand off retardant bomber duties to the Redmond Airtanker Base.

Fortunately, the skies were clear enough on August 8 to use helicopters and retardant bombers on the 50-acre Krauss Lane Fire, which broke out south of Cave Junction and quickly threatened private and BLM forestlands, as well as dozens of residences. ODF crews were joined in the firefight by numerous structural fire protection engines from across southwest Oregon. No homes burned, though many had been evacuated, and the fire was contained by nightfall.

Meanwhile, on nearby national forest lands, the National Creek Complex was slowly growing in the north end of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and the Collier Butte Fire was doing the same thing on the forest's western edge. Both fires had been caused by lightning in early August. An incident management team had been assigned to each fire, and the National Creek Complex, which was also burning on the northwest corner of Crater Lake National Park, was affecting highway traffic and numerous recreation areas.

With the fire danger level stuck at "Extreme," both the Oregon Department of Forestry

and the U.S. Forest Service tightened fire prevention restrictions on both the public and industrial operations. The Southwest Oregon District had imposed a complete shutdown on the public use of power driven machinery on August 1. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department instituted a shutdown of its own on campfires in most of the state's parks. County campgrounds in Jackson and Josephine counties also imposed bans on campfires. The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest put Industrial Fire Precaution Level IV into effect on August 22.

Light rain across southwest Oregon at the end of August allowed the Southwest Oregon District to ease its restrictions on the public use of power driven machinery, allowing operation until 10:00 a.m. By September 16, the district had received enough rain and cooler temperatures to

ease the fire danger level back to "High" and drop the Industrial Fire Precaution Level to II.

But fire season was not over. A 10-acre fire blazed through dry grass and oak woodland near Meadows Road in central Jackson County on October 1, burning an outbuilding and prompting a large response from ODF Medford Unit crews and nearby structural fire protection agencies. Two weeks later, Medford Unit crews swarmed onto a ½-acre fire on Willits Ridge west of Prospect.

Rain on October 19 allowed the Southwest Oregon District to drop the fire danger level to "Moderate" and lower the Industrial Fire Precaution Level to I. Fire season ended on the district on October 28.

Despite early concerns that the 2015 fire season would be severe, it was one of the lightest seasons in recent history with 255 fires (slightly higher than

normal) burning 347 acres (far below normal). The district's firefighters had suppressed more than 97 percent of its fires at 10 acres in size or smaller.

However, just because fire season was over didn't mean wildfires weren't able to burn. On Halloween, windy weather blew several pile burning projects out of control and prompted a wholesale response from southwest Oregon's structural fire protection agencies and the Oregon Department of Forestry. The largest fire that day was a 55-acre blaze on Dunn Butte, located a few miles south of Ashland. In Josephine County, a 12-acre fire burned between Grants Pass and Murphy. Four other fires in Jackson County burned an additional 16 acres.

No structures burned and no injuries were reported, and overnight rainfall helped to put most of the October 31 blazes to bed.

Southwest Oregon District 2015 Fire Statistics

| Cause | Number of Fires | | | Acres Burned | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | 2015 | Historic: 2005-2014 | Percent of historical average | 2015 | Historic: 2005-2014 | Percent of historical average |
| Lightning | 53 | 57 | 93% | 89 | 4,821 | 2% |
| Railroad | 0 | 1 | 0% | 0 | 3 | 0% |
| Equipment Use | 69 | 63 | 110% | 29 | 573 | 5% |
| Recreationist | 21 | 20 | 105% | 16 | 26 | 60% |
| Smoker | 23 | 15 | 153% | 4 | 9 | 49% |
| Debris Burning | 44 | 28 | 157% | 113 | 44 | 257% |
| Arson | 3 | 9 | 33% | 3 | 30 | 10% |
| Juveniles | 4 | 9 | 44% | 3 | 20 | 13% |
| Miscellaneous | 36 | 28 | 129% | 77 | 91 | 85% |
| Under Investigation | 2 | | | 13 | | |
| Total Lightning | 53 | 57 | 93% | 89 | 4,821 | 2% |
| Total Human-Caused | 202 | 173 | 117% | 258 | 796 | 32% |
| Grand Total | 255 | 230 | 111% | 347 | 5,617 | 6% |

Number of Non-Stat Fires: 22

Percent of Fires 10 Acres or Less: 97.3%

Total NFCAs: 1,056

The Southwest Oregon District's aviation program is a critical portion of the fire protection responsibilities performed by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

There are three aircraft on exclusive-use contracts and two on severity-funded contracts. The Grants Pass Unit hosted a Type 2 severity helicopter with a manager and fuel truck. The Medford unit hosted a Type 3 and Type 2 exclusive use helicopter. The Medford Airtanker Base was the location for the Type 1 severity air tanker and a Cessna 206 air attack/recon platform.

With a total of five types of aircraft available for initial attack, the SWO District provided an extremely efficient and successful aviation program.

The SWO District's air attack team is effective in rapid aerial attack starting with an order placed through dispatch followed by the launch of aircraft. A typical launch will include an Air Attack Group Supervisor (ATGS) in the fixed-wing 206. The ATGS aids ground support and coordinates other aerial resources, if needed.

Typically, the Type 2 helicopters provide bucket drops of water with the ability to conduct long-line cargo delivery to fire crews in remote roadless areas. The Type 3 is a standard category helicopter capable of ATGS, reconnaissance, light bucket work, long-line operations and crew transport

This year Air Tanker 62 was replaced with Tanker 66, both of which are Type 1 DC-7 air tanker owned by Erickson Aero Air and are severity-funded.

Earlier in the summer there were two fires located in the Soda Mountain Wilderness. This area is roadless for the most part, with minimum impact suppression

tactics applied, the use of aviation resources was critical. The use of call-when-needed aircraft (CWN) was necessary to complete missions in the Wilderness. Multiple long-line cargo missions were completed along with crew transport. This offered up training opportunities

Fire Aviation

By Jesse Blair

for those needing an assignment. Several aviation-based task books were completed in 2015, which is a critical need for the SWO District.

Fire season 2015 was mild in comparison to 2014 fire season. With that said, let's hope the same will occur in 2016.

Southwest Oregon District Fire Aviation statistics from fire season 2015

The fixed-wing Cessna 52 Uniform flew for a total of 95.1 hours in the SWO District in 2015 compared to 172.4 hours in 2014.

The aircraft flew on 33 days for 48 missions, (38 days with 69+ missions in 2014).

- 34 recon flights
- 14 air attack flights
- 40 days on standby

Type 2 Helicopter 17N flew for 51.4 hours in 2015 compared to 102 hours in 2014.

- Total buckets 2015: 431/139,644 gallons on 22 incidents
- Total Buckets 2014: 968 /313,632 gallons on 43 incidents
- Cargo delivered in 2015: 6,000 lbs.

Type 3 Helicopter 84CK flew for 74.6 hours in 2015 compared to 110.75 hours in 2014.

- 46 total buckets = 4,416 gallons on 4 fires of the 28 total incident responses
- 32 Recon/ATGS missions
- Crew Shuttle 44 passengers

This year, the Grants Pass Unit's severity helicopter's missions were shared with three different aircraft. Total flight hours on 26 different fires was 30.6 hours and 289 buckets for 82,855 gallons.

Air Tanker 66 had only one mission on the SWO District this year, but was busy with out-of-district missions most of the summer.



Private Forests

By Tyson Schultz

2015 was a busy year for Private Forest and the Southwest Oregon District's administrative staff due to a high level of harvest operations and out-of-district fire assignments.

Some of the 2013 fire season salvage harvest continued through the 2015 operating season, but mostly operators had shifted back to planned management objectives. Nationally, interest rates were low and "housing starts" were strong through 2015, thus fueling a demand for lumber. A number of local operators expanded by adding equipment and employees to harvest on multiple operations simultaneously.

A number of updates occurred to the FERNs electronic NOAP system and a refined mobile version was released for testing on the iPad. Later in the year a major overhaul of the FERNs system was launched, which kept Steve Wetmore busy as a FERNs development committee member.

A total of 920 notifications were received on the District with 447 in the Grants Pass Unit and 473 in the Medford Unit. Of the NOAPs received many contained multiple activities, 170 for Herbicide application, 332 for partial cuts, 91 for clear cuts, 43 for salvage, 70 for road related work, 93 for slash treatment, and 312 for other (rock pits, PDMs, etc).

Stewardship Foresters traditionally fill key roles in fire suppression duties during fire season and this year was no different. In addition to District fire suppression support, there were multiple off-district assignments filled throughout the season. Lee Winslow was first out in May to

Brainerd, Minn., to run an initial-attack helitack crew. Tyson Schultz later was sent to both the Cable Crossing and El Dorado incidents with Steve Wetmore leading in numbers of dispatches as his ODF Team 3 membership sent him to the Cable Crossing, El Dorado and Dry Gulch incidents. Fortunately for the District, fire activity was minimal locally and while some districts went into an industrial closure, SWO remained at an IFPL III or lower throughout the season which kept operators at work and provided for equipment to be available in the forest to help should a need arise for fire suppression.

Closures 2015

Start of Fire Season,
Moderate Fire Danger Level, IFPL 1: June 5



High Fire Danger Level:
June 13

IFPL 2: July 1

Extreme Fire Danger Level:
July 28

IFPL 3: August 1

High Fire Danger Level,
IFPL 2: September 16

IFPL 1: October 17

Moderate Fire Danger Level:
October 19

Fire Season Ends: October 28

Fire Prevention

For southwest Oregon residents, there are two reliable indicators that wildfire season has arrived: smoke in the air, and Brian Ballou



on the evening news. Since 2004 the Oregon Department of Forestry fire prevention educator has taught homeowners, recreationists and forest operators common-sense ways to avoid accidentally starting fires while working or playing in the woods. In recognition of his efforts, Ballou received the coveted Bronze Smokey Award in June.

"This is the highest honor given to organizations or individuals for outstanding wildfire prevention service that is national in scope," said Dan Thorpe, Southwest Oregon District Forester. The award recognizes individuals and organizations for "outstanding wildfire prevention service or projects rendered."

His nomination for the Bronze Smokey Award received broad support from the community, with 31 letters of support submitted by organizations including the U.S. Forest Service, Oregon State Fire Marshal, The Nature Conservancy, Congressman Greg Walden, Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association and others.

Gwen Beavans, National Fire Prevention Coordinator with the U.S. Forest Service, said, "Brian is a longstanding stalwart representative in fire prevention and a household name in southern Oregon, just like Smokey Bear," she said.

The 2015 fire season started about the same date as last year, beginning June 5th. The Medford Detection Center was fully staffed starting June 29th. This fire season the detection center had six camera



locations, each location has two cameras, giving the detection center an advantage when looking at a location for smoke. The cameras in the detection center include Manzanita, Tallowbox, Sexton, Old Baldy, Peavine and Reuben.

The Medford Detection center trained seven new dispatchers to monitor the cameras during this fire season, one dispatcher specialized in camera detection. The Southwest Oregon District had 18 days of lightning during the 2015 fire season causing 53 lightning fires within the

Fire Detection

By Matt Fumasi

District. The cameras helped us to locate some of these fires. The detection center staff was able to direct crews into the fires while monitoring the behavior and size from the cameras.

Due to large fires surrounding our valley during August, camera detection was severely hindered as the smoke made it nearly impossible to detect additional new smoke in the valley.

Throughout the fire season there were 25 total alarms logged in the detection center. Ten

alarms were first reports from the cameras this year, most coming from an early season lightning storm on our Grants Pass Unit.

The Medford Detection Center has been a positive addition to the Southwest Oregon District since first being added in 2009. The cameras have helped the district with early fire detection and resource management, as well as provide monitoring to ongoing fires in the valley.

We look forward to what the cameras will help us detect next fire season.

| Camera | District | Assist | Search Rescue | Security | Smoke Reports |
|-----------|----------|--------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| Tallowbox | SWO | | | 1 | 3 |
| Manzanita | SWO | | | | |
| Sexton | SWO | 9 | | 1 | 9 |
| Old Baldy | SWO | 13 | | | 13 |
| Peavine | SWO | 1 | | | |

The beginning of the 2015 burning season in January continued along the same pattern as the previous 2 years which were warmer and dryer than normal. As spring progressed this trend intensified with record breaking high temperatures in March and April, which put an end to spring burning season with fuels being dryer than normal.

Fall burning season in 2015 started off late with Fire Season hanging on until almost the end of October. November roared in with above normal precipitation and above normal snow fall. This mixture provided a few weeks of great burning

Smoke Management

By Shelly Hoffer

| 2015 Accomplishments | Units | Acres | Tons |
|--|------------|---------------|---------------|
| Medford District BLM | 151 | 3,840 | 20,521 |
| Private/State | 104 | 7,103 | 45,123 |
| 2015 Totals | 255 | 10,943 | 65,644 |
| | Units | Acres | Tons |
| 10 year Average Accomplishments | 242 | 10,174 | 76,240 |

opportunities but also closed the door on mid and higher elevation burning towards the end of the month due to the snow. December burning was minimal with the continued snow pack and heavy rains.

In summary, when comparing burning activity between 2014 and 2015, the activity was virtually the same. There were no smoke intrusions in 2015 in either the Medford or Grants Pass SSRA's.

State Forests

By Chris Rudd

We have had several dry winters in a row which has given us an opportunity to harvest longer into the winter on dry roads. But, we are beginning to see some patterns of growth that are less than ideal. In my travels through the woods I see individual tree mortality, or spots of dead trees. Dying trees are often suppressed or diseased and stressed from the lack of water combined with excess competition or insects. Our 2015 plantings were successful except for Quines Run which lost most of the newly planted trees probably from inadequate soil moisture. After harvesting timber, we have commonly planted and then inter-planted the following year to insure sufficient numbers of trees after harvests.

The greatest impacts though, from the dry winters and reduced snow pack have been large fires, especially from 2013, that burned on about 400 acres of State Lands, 200 of which were severe, killing young trees and merchantable timber. Of those 200 acres that need replanting from salvage operations and to replace young stands, the unit has completed

the first planting, but will be doing some vegetation control and additional inter-planting. As I write this though, it appears that this winter, at its start, seems to be wetter than the last three.

Timber

The table below shows the timber sale revenue during the 2015 fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2015. The revenue from timber sales totals \$473 thousand on expenditures of \$361 thousand. The district also manages two cell towers at Wolf Peak (BOF Lands) which raised \$42,667.43.

The unit sold two sales this year that have yet to be logged, Buck Ridge and Rockpit 2015.

Reforestation

In 2015 the district planted 25,055 trees on 72 acres or 348 trees per acre. Two units were inter-planted –planted to fill in a previous year’s mortality- at 228 and 140 trees per acre, Bear Combo and northwest windy. In total, 1,954 Sugar Pine, 2,800 Ponderosa Pine, 20,301 Douglas-fir were planted. Quines Run (23 acres of CSL Land) and Perkins (36 acres) were first-year planted. 13,555

trees were planted in the Dad’s Creek fire from 2013, or 37 acres whose seedlings were paid for by an Arbor Day grant of \$5,557.55.

Outreach & Education

Once again Oregon Department of Forestry teamed up with Douglas Forest Protective Association, the Glendale School District, US Forest Service, BLM, OR Department of Fish and Wildlife and Wildlife Images for an educational field day. Children from Glendale middle school participated in small group sessions learning about topics such as tree height calculation, reforestation plots, fish, wildlife, and soils.

Personnel

The unit is staffed with two full time foresters, a unit forester and a sale prep/admin forester. In the winter, a Forest Officer moves into a State Lands roll doing primarily reforestation work. An equipment operator is partially funded in the winter and GIS support is provided by our district systems administrator. In September, our NRS1 forester left for another job. This position will be filled in the near future. It is also common to employ a forest technician for a couple months each year to help out with fieldwork.

Timber Revenue from Sales in Fiscal Year 2015: July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.

| County | Fund | Sale Name | Purchaser | VOL BOF | Vol C SL | Val BOF | Val C SL |
|---|------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|
| Douglas | CSL | Quines Run #2 | Boise Cascade | | 284.82 | | \$81,411.84 |
| Douglas | BOF | Middle Windy Bear | Murphy Company | 243.79 | | \$73,732.01 | |
| Douglas | BOF | Rock 'n' Windy | Murphy Company | 395.48 | | \$149,907.10 | |
| Douglas | BOF | Perkins North Salvage * | Gypco Inc. | 334.30 | | \$102,688.30 | |
| Josephine | BOF | Watertank Gulch * | Greg Liles Logging | 329.41 | | \$65,765.62 | |
| Grants Pass | | | District Totals | 1,302.98 | 284.82 | \$392,093.03 | \$81,411.84 |
| *Salvage from Douglas Complex fires of 2013 | | | | | | Total | \$473,504.87 |