

# IMPACT

University of Idaho  
Extension

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## Extension response to the 2015 fire season: multiagency coordination for fire recovery

### AT A GLANCE

Extension leads multiagency response for fire assessment and recovery from the 2015 wildfires in North Central Idaho.

### The Situation

Given the devastating scale of fires on private lands in North Central Idaho in 2015, agencies and community leaders struggled with how to create a coordinated response across jurisdictions for assessing the damage and getting fire recovery assistance to landowners.

### Our Response

Extension filled the need for coordination among agencies and across jurisdictions by taking the lead in providing a forum for multiagency coordination for conducting post-fire assessment and getting assistance to landowners. This effort eventually resulted in the establishment of a formal five-county organization to conduct region-wide fire assessment and provide fire recovery assistance to landowners.

This activity served a valuable unmet need, as there was no formal inter-agency structure in existence to respond to the aftermath of the fires (that involved over 80,000 acres of non-industrial private lands in the Clearwater Valley alone) to conduct fire severity assessments and coordinate the gathering of information important for assistance to the non-industrial private landowner. While this effort began informally while the fires were still burning, it led to several participating agencies making a formal request to have Extension become the Communication Coordinator for the developing multi-agency post-fire response group.



Interagency fire recovery coordination meeting in Fraser. Photo by Nick Gerhardt.

This effort led to interagency technical meetings held in conjunction with public agency fire recovery assistance meetings (see *IMPACT Extension response to 2015 fire season: public outreach and information*), and with the eventual growth of an Extension lead email communication and coordination platform for participating agencies to 92 email addresses. The Extension office was also able to act as a “clearinghouse” for information and point of contact for those involved in fire recovery, or desiring information on these efforts from outside the region.

Entities involved included the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, county commissioners, county departments of Emergency Management and Weed Management, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, Clearwa-

ter Basin Collaborative, Bureau of Land Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and University of Idaho Extension.

### **Program Outcomes**

This effort culminated with a meeting of the multi-agency technical group with the Clearwater Basin Collaborative in Lewiston in September and a meeting with Division II of the Idaho Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Orofino on October 8<sup>th</sup> where a formal leadership and technical structure was set up to conduct basin-wide post-fire assessment as well as a coordinated effort to obtain additional resources to assist private landowners affected by the 2015 fires. The formalized leadership and technical groups, which include representatives from the Clearwater Basin Collaborative, Idaho Department of Lands, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, University of Idaho Extension, US Forest Service, county government and Emergency Management, have met since October 8<sup>th</sup> and are making progress on completing the fire assessment and formalizing the operating protocols for this new five-county coordinating entity.

Quotes: "I want to commend Bill on the great service he has provided to local communities in leading this effort," Idaho County Commissioner; "Great job, Bill! I appreciate your willingness to take the lead." Lewis and Clearwater County NRCS; "Excellent, and my sincerest thanks, Bill" Idaho County Emergency Management; "Nice job, Bill. Thank You." Idaho County NRCS; "You are the best - Thank you!," Idaho County Farm Service Agency; "Bill has been the glue that has held this thing together" Volunteer Post Fire Assessment Team; "Bill has done a yeoman's job!," Forest Supervisor, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest; "Bill has accomplish a herculean task!," Co-Chair, Clearwater Basin Collaborative.

### **The Future**

It is anticipated that the recovery from the 2015 fires will be a long-term endeavor that will require the continued existence of the multi-agency/multi-county coordination effort, not only on fire recovery and funneling what is hoped will be additional resources to assist private landowners in recovering from the disaster, but will also involve proactive endeavors to encourage the creation of more fire resistant landscapes in the region to lower the risk of catastrophic fire in the future.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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