

**Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests,  
and Prineville District, Bureau of Land Management  
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## **Escaped Prescribed Fire Review Released**

*Bend*—The review of the prescribed burn (“Metolius Research Natural Area—Unit 61”) that escaped control lines and became the “Wizard Fire” in late September is now completed and available to the public. Copies of the report are available on the web at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon>.

The report covers the events that occurred on two days: the date of ignition of the prescribed burn (September 24, 2008) and the date the fire escaped (September 25, 2008). The primary cause of the escape was lack of patrolling on the evening of September 24<sup>th</sup> and the morning of September 25<sup>th</sup>. The escape was reported at 12:25 p.m. on September 25<sup>th</sup>. Patrolling and monitoring of prescribed fires is a routine procedure. The report provides further details on why patrols did not occur during this prescribed fire.

The burn project was ignited on September 24<sup>th</sup> in the Metolius Research Natural Area of the Sisters Ranger District near Camp Sherman, Oregon. On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the burn escaped its boundary and was managed as a wildfire. The original burn was planned to treat thirty acres of natural fuels in the Deschutes National Forest. The fire perimeter grew to a total of 1,840 acres, with a wide variety of burn intensities within the perimeter. Many of the acres resulted in light underburns. No private lands were involved. No structures were burned. No injuries occurred in the management of this fire.

It is standard Forest Service procedure to conduct a review into the key causal factors of a prescribed burn that escapes and converts to wildfire status. Forest Supervisor John Allen convened a team of five people to conduct the review and report the results to the Regional Forester in Portland, Oregon within sixty days after the prescribed burn was declared a wildfire.

The Sisters Ranger District has a long history of using prescribed burns to meet fuels reduction needs and forest health objectives. For fifteen years, the District has successfully conducted an average of thirteen prescribed fires, averaging approximately 750 acres per year using fire in a very complex environment adjacent to the communities of the greater Sisters area.

“We regret the mistakes that led to the Wizard Fire,” says Supervisor Allen. “We will further examine the prescribed fire program this winter and develop an action plan aimed at preventing recurrence of a similar event in the future. I expect the action plan to be implemented prior to the Spring 2009 prescribed fire season in the Deschutes National Forest.”

Key lessons learned and recommendations in the review for the action plan include:

- Review all Standard Operating Procedures. Focus on each position in each function as well as transfer of command.
- Provide overview and operational briefings each morning and evening during a prescribed burn activity regarding plans for the next operational period.
- Review the Burn Plan thoroughly. Particularly, ensure emphasis is placed on mop-up standards, patrolling and multi-ignition and multi-day scenarios in the burn plan including the briefing checklist, covering from ignition to when the burn is declared out. Identify specific responsibilities and assignments for mop-up and patrol.
- Prior to burning season provide an overview of the prescribed fire program to all employees with fuels qualifications to reiterate roles, responsibilities and expectations.