

Final Report

Kisatchie National Forest Wildfire Prevention Education Team Team #4

Kisatchie National Forest
Pineville, Louisiana

July 30 – September 12, 2011



Contents

	Page No.	
Background	3	
Team Members	4	
Objectives and Accomplishments		5
Observations and Lessons Learned		11
Recommendations	11	
Commendations	12	
Appendix A – Communication Plan		
Appendix B – Key Contact List		
Appendix C – Budget		
Appendix E – Products and Reports		

Background

Louisiana is experiencing an extreme spring/summer wildfire season. Winds coupled with abnormally warm temperatures, low humidity, and record dry fuels have created wildfire danger across the State. Most fires occurring in Louisiana are human caused; with debris burning and arson the main causes. Many areas of the state have rural interface issues making large wildfires especially dangerous for the public.

In response to these severe wildfire conditions and the need to educate the public about wildfire hazards, Kisatchie National Forest requested a National Fire Prevention and Education Team. This Team was tasked to provide consistent fire prevention messages, ensure appropriate prevention products for tasks, outreach to the public, visitors as well as local communities, maintain administrative documentation and reporting for the assignment, and work with law enforcement to address issues in high arson areas.

This report details the activities, accomplishments and recommendations of the Fire Prevention and Education Team.

The Kisatchie NF requested an approach that went well beyond the borders of the Forest and interfaced with cooperating agencies, local fire departments and governments, and most importantly the parish residents. The Team targeted local residents and visitors to the area for a complete package of informational awareness.



Members engage with the community

Tropical storm Lee brought rain to southern and eastern Louisiana, yet had little effect in the northeast quadrant of the state. A line from Monroe to Leesville and the area to the northwest had little if any rain. Drought indexes still remain at extreme levels.

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Accomplishments

OBJECTIVE 1: Provide consistent fire prevention and restriction messages to the public and media.

Accomplishments:

The Team assessed the current messages and methods of delivery for prevention and restriction messages. Previous teams have done an excellent job of getting messages out through personal contacts, trap line stops, and informational venues, such as visitor centers and key local establishments. Team 4 found that the restriction messages for the Kisatchie were consistent and adapted to changing situations. The Team did not encounter any change to the restriction messages of the Forest so the emphasis was on ensuring that adequate posting was maintained and expanded where necessary.

General prevention messages of state and federal were consistent. Primary themes were 'Be Careful with Fire' and a variety of arson messages directed at hunting and personal safety. The delivery method seemed adequate except from the standpoint of the website messages. Websites can and should be improved so cooperating agencies have similar information available and link to each other to provide easy access and consistency of message.

The following prevention steps were taken to reach the objective:

- An assessment was made of message consistency and is presented in report form for documentation.
- Contact was made with federal and state agencies to determine the level of web services and capability of the agencies.
- Websites were reviewed to make determination of the consistency, ease of use, and effectiveness of the site in the efforts of prevention. The Team found agency websites to be in need of revision to provide convenient access to information and the ability to quickly link to cooperating agencies and other information.
- Contact with the public was made asking how information was being obtained. There was no consistent theme other than local knowledge. The Team feels that the media attention to Texas fires has been a major influence in Louisiana awareness.
- Refer to the 'Public Information Narrative' for information about the message consistency and recommendations for improvement of information dissemination.

OBJECTIVE 2: Obtain fire prevention products for dissemination, and provide assistance in developing new products or delivery methods, as time allows.

Accomplishment:

- Meetings with local agency personnel revealed that one Smokey materials order was already placed and two more were in the works. The Team will assess the need to add additional material back to the cache at the end of the assignment.
- Adequate materials were on hand or ordered to conduct the planned activities and events for the assignment.
- A review of posters, flyers, and other materials determined that each of the key messages for contacts and trap lines sufficiently covered assigned tasks. Refer to ‘Review of Materials Used on LA Prevention Team Assignments’. Special flyers and materials were made for the Marlow Community Meeting to address specific messages. A poster was developed to communicate the arson hot line and reward information.
- Analysis of prevention team efforts in the Grant parish area showed very positive results for previous team actions addressing the causes from ATV use and dumpster fires. District contacts revealed that since those signs were put up in the area there had been no further occurrence from either one of those causes. A major success is attributed to previous team actions.
- The general sense of agencies was the overall awareness of the public had been raised significantly. The number of human-caused fires other than arson continues to be low during the summer. The following data is a combination of fire data from State and KNF for the period January 1 through August 31. The focus area for this data is in the Vernon Unit vicinity and may not reflect the total picture of the KNF extent.

	Arson	Lightning	Debris	Equipment	Camping	Misc P line	Misc	Total #
Jan	1						1	2
Feb	2		3	1			2	8
Mar	5	2			1		1	9
Apr	12	6	1		2	2	3	26
May	7	2		2		1	4	16
Jun	6	1				5	2	14
Jul	8	2				1	3	14
Aug	5	3	3			1	7	19
Tot #	46	16	7	3	3	10	23	108
%	43	15	6	3	3	9	21	

The importance of the chart is that the combined number of fires from debris, equipment and camping is low and an unusually high number of lightning and power line fires are reported. The percentages may shift significantly if ‘Miscellaneous’ fires were defined.

OBJECTIVE 3: Make personal contacts with citizens or rural communities in Louisiana, including fire departments, county officials, and State of Louisiana forestry personnel.

Accomplishments:

The five KNF district offices were contacted to evaluate the needs for prevention assistance and to judge the effectiveness of past prevention efforts. The Calcashieu District became an immediate priority to help address an active arson problem. The other four districts were satisfied that current levels of prevention were appropriate. All expressed the need to maintain the current trap line contacts and keep the fire prevention message fresh.

Key personnel were identified and contacted in cooperating agencies, organizations, and local communities. Courtesy calls were made at the local, regional, and state levels of LDAF Office of Forestry, State Fire Marshal's Office, Volunteer Fire Departments, Department of Fish and Game, and the Louisiana Forestry Association.

Previous teams established trap lines. Team #4 took the strategy to visit all trap lines and sample the stops versus trying to hit every identified stop. Quality checks at each sampled stop were to ensure the information was still there, displayed, and current. Team members used judgment in selecting other key places where leaving information would benefit the prevention effort.

OBJECTIVE 4: Participate in community events such as fairs and local celebrations, providing fire prevention information to National Forest visitors, and giving presentations to civic and homeowner groups when applicable.

Accomplishments:

Event venues were limited during the Team #4 assignment. One primary event became the focus. The Louisiana Mud Fest was held the weekend of September 3-5. Plans were made to spend the better part of Saturday at the event with displays and Smokey Bear visits for the children. Significant rain from Tropical Storm Lee changed plans cancelling the Smokey appearances and display. The Team still made over 100 contacts, distributed materials at the vendor stations, and posted materials at the event. Refer to the Louisiana Mud Fest report in the documentation.

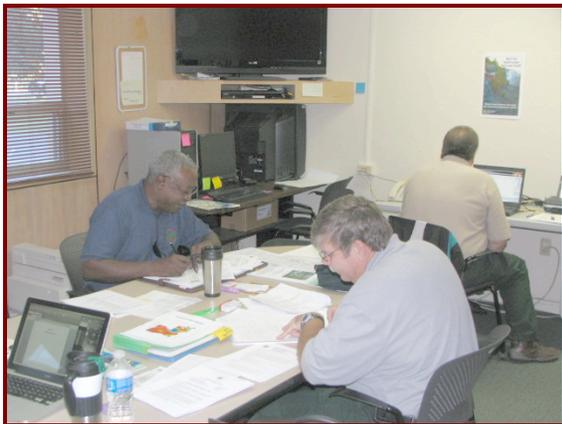


OBJECTIVE 5: Establish a record-keeping process so that when the Team leaves there is an adequate record of the Team’s activities, including contacts made, information developed and distributed, projects completed, recommendations for further action, lessons learned, and a summary of expenditures.

Accomplishments:

This objective was achieved through the standard practices of prevention team record-keeping and financial accounting. Previous team records were essential for Team #4 efficiency with the expectation that the next team will benefit from the agency directive.

- A Communication Plan was prepared in response to the Delegation of Authority signed by the Team. The plan outlined the strategies to accomplish each of the objectives of the host agency.
- A Final Report is provided to detail the accomplishments of the Team, recommendations for further action (guidance for another incoming team), and lessons learned that may help future prevention efforts.
- A detailed budget and summary is presented to identify costs of the Team, their expenses, and material costs.
- Contact logs were maintained for trap lines, general contacts, phone contacts, and conversational records.



Team in planning session



Ranger Lisa Lewis with landowner

OBJECTIVE 6: Work closely with USFS, State Forestry, and local law enforcement agencies to develop and deliver fire prevention messages in high arson areas.

Accomplishments:

This objective combined several aspects of the assignment. District contacts pinpointed the need to work on the Calcasieu – Vernon unit. A multi-agency effort was needed to address the community issue of arson. Arson fires were currently being experienced in the area during the time of the assignment.

A community meeting was held at the Marlow Fire Station in response to the situation. The fire station was kind enough to host the meeting. The Vernon Parish Police Juror gave opening remarks and was available to answer questions. The FPET facilitated the meeting, yet placed the emphasis for discussion with the local residences. Representatives were present from other cooperating partners to answer the public's concerns and interface with the group to attempt to improve the relationship between the agencies and the public.

Law enforcement from State Forestry, USFS, State Fire Marshal's Office, and local Sheriff's Office were present. A main concern of the community was to have the support of the agencies and get information on how to call in information on an arsonist. The meeting also brought out information about the arson award offered by the Louisiana Forestry Association.

Refer to 'Community Meeting Report' in the documentation for meeting results and the informational materials prepared for the meeting. Our commendation to the Kisatchie NF for quickly identifying this area of concern and to all of the agencies and their employees at a local and state level for attending the meeting and providing support.

The Team met with law enforcement at the request of Ranger Lisa Lewis, including two game wardens, the LEO detailed to the area who had been investigating recent fires, and the new LEO for the Calcasieu district prior to the community meeting. The meeting provided us with valuable insight. We also met with the investigating officer, Petty at the scene of the fire on Tower Road to discuss current information. Following the community meeting we met with two new detailed enforcement officers, Crisp and Partridge to exchange information from the community meeting. The Team felt there had been strong support from all of the law enforcement personnel throughout the assignment.

Louisiana Fire Prevention Team magnetic signs (4) are made for placement on a rental vehicle or on a Forest Service rig. The signs help identify the vehicle improving their use in high visibility patrol. The signs also help to add safety to the activities of the team by identifying who they are.



LA FPET magnetic decal



Asst. Chief Bailey at community meeting



Exhibit at Marlow Fire Station



Public interaction with law enforcement



Geri McNeal, LDAF with Burn Ban flag



Team interaction with fire departments

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The biggest lesson that applies to any assignment is that full and appropriate documentation from the agency or a previous team is invaluable in getting a quick start on the assignment and being efficient in the process. Team reports, documentation, electronic files, and access to available materials were very beneficial to the team. Agency direction was clear. The agency allowed us the freedom to perform after brief consultation of our direction.

Community meetings can be very beneficial in this area. Opportunities that are presented can be acted on by an FPET. For example, the fire near Ashland where 10 homes were destroyed may be a spark to get others in the surrounding area to meet and discuss how home preparedness and local notification of neighbors could be improved. The fire was on state land. The Firewise program may be a good hook for the meeting. If the residents whose homes were threatened or destroyed were willing to share their experiences, their emotional story might generate enthusiasm for a community to act and increase their awareness of the seriousness of wildfires.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The new transitioning FPET should consider the following ideas to continue the prevention effort and support the KNF districts:

- If the team is in place with adequate staff, attend a Methodist Church festival on September 13 here in town. Contact Ed Bratcher, Fire Staff Officer with the KNF. A Smokey Bear visit is needed.
- Place major emphasis on the upcoming hunting season beginning October 1. Work with the Vernon Unit of the Calcasieu to cover the influx of hunters and their related activities.
- Refresh the prevention message. Districts felt that with the recent rains and subsequent drying, the public needed to be reminded of the continued danger of fire and what an unusual season this is. The state is now entering their fire season.
- Check to see when the next Prevention Council was to be held. The team may be able to make a quick presentation on who they are and the role teams play in the overall prevention strategy.
- The team should consider participation at the Historic Days on September 24 at Dry Prong in the Catahoula District.
- Ask Jim Caldwell and Ed Bratcher if they want the team to pursue a PSA with Governor Jindal. There are underlying issues adding to the difficulty of this task. A previous team had suggested the PSA and Butch Browning, State Fire Marshal may be the best contact for helping to get it set up. The situation and timing have to be right.
- Follow with the process of getting the arson hot line and reward poster approved, graphically presented for review and into the printing process. The idea came from the community meeting in Marlow and at the suggestion of Ranger Lewis, the team provided

a draft for review on the last day of the assignment. The poster message should also be put into format for refrigerator magnets and small card stock handouts. The idea is to use the materials to saturate arson-prone areas on how to call in arson information with the phone number and reward information. The arson hot line is sponsored and manned by the State Fire Marshal's Office and the Louisiana Forestry Association offers the reward. The state has pending legislation that may include a toll free call to report arson and fire, yet the number is not available at this time. This is an important product and should be completed as soon as possible.

- Consider a community meeting in Natchitoches Parish to emphasize the need to improve preparedness and awareness. The Firewise theme can be used. Residents of the Ashland whose homes were threatened or destroyed may be willing to tell their story and help the community understand the seriousness of wildfire. Care and caution should be used not to invade the privacy of their loss. Refer to the news articles in documentation concerning this fire. Baily Quick is featured in the story and the only child who lost their home.
- The Louisiana Welcome Center on I-49 needs to be resupplied during the assignment. A team visit on 9/10 found that materials on Firewise and other fire information were being well received by the public.
- Letters were sent to three insurance companies and CLECO utilities for inclusion in their newsletters. All agreed to look at the material and consider its use. There is no guarantee they will use the information.
- Information was sent out to all five districts pertaining to the State Forestry program to provide 'Burn Ban Flags', 'Smokey Bear Fire Danger Signs', and a service to do prescribed fire burns and/or fire line installation for at-risk areas in the community. We hope that each district will pass the information along to their fire departments. For more information, contact Geri McNeal at 225 237-5556.

COMMENDATIONS:

The entire staff of the Kisatchie was very accommodating and addressed any concern of the Team. Special thanks are extended to Silas Hamilton for his continual assistance and Sheryl Roach for her timely handling of resource orders and financial advice.

Joel Harrison provided excellent GIS support as he produced fire map products for the community meeting. He worked with Gus Rowland, LDAF to acquire data for the project. His timeframe for the project was very short and he stayed to get it done.

Special thanks are extended to the District Rangers and their staff for taking the time to meet and talk with us about their needs and present suggestions to help in the effort. Lisa Lewis went the extra mile to help us with the Vernon Unit fire issue by hosting meetings, providing feedback, and showing support of the community meeting project with her presence and guidance.

To all of the agencies and their representatives, the participation in the sharing of information and their participation in projects was exceptional.