

# INCIDENT SUMMARY

AUGUST COMPLEX NORTH ZONE, CA-MNF-753

September 17 - October 7, 2020

Alaska Team, Type 1 IMT  
Norm McDonald, Incident Commander  
Tom Kurth, Deputy Incident Commander



# INCIDENT NARRATIVE

A lightning event started several hundred fires on August 16th-17th throughout Northern California. A Type 2 Incident Management Team was in-briefed on August 18, with an estimated 35 fires burning a total of 3,000 acres in the August Complex. A high-pressure system in the Pacific Northwest behind an upper level trough caused strong, warm, and dry down-sloping winds on the night of the 18th causing the Doe Fire to grow 20,000+ acres overnight. These same winds continued to cause rapid fire growth for the next several days and many of the fires grew together. Over the next month, the Complex grew and several State and federal Incident Command Teams as well as an Area Command Team were assigned to the fire.

The Alaska Incident Management Team was ordered on September 15 and travelled to Redding, CA on the NICC Jet on the 16th. The Team took command of the North Zone from CIIMT #5 on Saturday, Sept. 19 at 06:00 hrs under a delegation from Agency Administrators through Area Command. Mandatory evacuations were in place for Ruth to the west, and Post Mountain and Trinity Pines to the north as the fire approached Highway 36 from the south. The IMT established their ICP in Redding and based resources in two camps, Hettenshaw on the west side of the fire and R-Wild on the east. The IMT's initial strategy was to anchor on the east and the west and pinch the fire on the north side. Good progress was made between Sept. 16 and Sept. 26 in the South Zone and West Zone and the Alaska IMT modified their strategy in an attempt to use Highway 36 as a barrier to prevent spread north into Post Mountain and other communities to the north.



However, strong dry northeast winds surfaced on the August Fire for a second time in three weeks, starting on the morning of Sunday, September 27 and continuing into Monday, the 28th. In the North Zone an unburned canopy on Rattlesnake Ridge south of Hwy 36 quickly transitioned into a crown fire that spotted across the South Fork of the Trinity River, over Horse Mountain Ridge and down into Ruth Lake, spotting well across the lake north of the community of Ruth. This impacted structures on both sides of Ruth Lake, all the way out to Hettenshaw Valley. This 10-mile extension of the fire to the southwest filled in on the 28th moving south along Mad River Ridge to Smith Peak, surrounding the community of Ruth and the camp at Hettenshaw. With egress routes potentially compromised, personnel at Hettenshaw spike elected to shelter in place. The camp was located in a large field and provided a safe location while the fire moved through the area over the 27th and 28th of September. During the event, the safety of all personnel remained the highest priority and accountability for all resources on the North Zone was maintained. Crews shifted their focus to point protection around structures but protection efforts were hampered by the need to locate and reunite missing people and families, including children, who chose to ignore the evacuation orders. On October 1, all support resources located in Hettenshaw spike were relocated outside of the fire perimeter to Triumphant Life Camp, known as TLC spike.

## INCIDENT NARRATIVE (continued)

The community of Forest Glen was also impacted as fire became established north of Highway 36. On September 28, the fire moved three miles northwest down the South Fork of the Trinity River. Efforts to protect structures within the community were hampered by high winds and extreme fire behavior. During this same time, a new fire started to the northeast. The Zogg fire, under command of CalFire moved rapidly south towards Highway 36 and prompted the evacuation of the R-Wild spike camp supporting two divisions within the North Zone. Accountability was maintained and an orderly evacuation of the R-Wild camp was achieved. Resources were shifted to a new camp at Hayfork so that northern operations could continue to be supported.

On October 4, the North Zone was split into Northwest and Northeast Zones and Pacific Northwest Team 2 (PNW2) assumed command of the Northwest Zone. The Alaska IMT remained in command of the Northeast Zone while in the background Area Command also transitioned with a fresh Area Command Team. The IMT conducted tactical burns to bring fire down to Highway 36 and to control lines on the eastern flank. On October 3 fire from well within the containment lines came into alignment with wind and topography and slopped over. Crews continue to work to control the northward progression of the slop towards Highway 36.

On October 6, the Alaska IMT began to transition the Northeast Zone to the Great Basin 2 Incident Management Team who assumed command of the Zone on October 7. The Alaska IMT successfully overcame numerous challenges on this incident including a shortage of appropriate resources, historically dry fuel conditions, several extreme weather events, and an inability to use air support due to poor visibility. The Team was able to limit structure losses by placing resources where they were most effective, while providing for the safety of firefighters and the public throughout their tenure on the August Complex.



# COMMAND

On September 18th, authority to manage the North Zone of the August Complex was delegated to Norm McDonald, Incident Commander (IC) of Alaska Incident Management Team (IMT) 1. The fire is spread across three federal land jurisdictions including the Mendocino, Shasta-Trinity, and Six Rivers National Forests. State jurisdictions involved are the under protection of CalFire. The Complex was originally divided into three zones, North, South, and West, under the command of CalFire IMT 5. The North Zone went through five transitions between IMTs and/or Area Command.

Continuity with Agency Administrators is challenging and trying in this type of environment. Overall, the incident had a steady series of challenges. Fire behavior, COVID, values at risk, and infrastructure made for a thought-provoking environment for trainees, team members, agency administrators, and cooperators. The decision to extend by the AK IMT contributed to meeting end state objectives rather than time frames. This tends to bring an operational emphasis to the entire team.

Structure loss and damage reports have been difficult to establish. Trinity county, where most of the loss occurred, was shorthanded as were the usual teams that are assigned to make these assessments. In this situation - a long duration fire with changing teams- an accurate count is still being pursued.

Relationships with counties on the east side, specifically Trinity, needed strengthening regarding public health, COVID testing facilities, and timeframes. This challenge was identified during initial IMT arrival and coordination between USFS COVID coordinator(s) and IMT assigned personnel was initiated to address the issues. For example, COVID testing was not available on the weekends. An ad hoc committee consisting of the Deputy IC, and personnel from Safety, Medical, Liaison, and Logistics was formed to deal with mitigations and response. Eventually, the team COVID Coordinator was instructed on how to test and bring results to the lab. COVID related issues often tend to divert focus from everyday fire management. Assistance from the USFS COVID Coordinator is to be commended.

The Incident Status Summary (ICS 209) was combined for all teams by Area Command. The August Complex, being the largest fire in California history, covers considerable geography. Large areas of the incident were in various stages of management, therefore mop-up and/or monitor portions could often dominate the overall narrative in the 209s. This diluted the story that additional resources were critically needed in areas where fire activity was high and, at times, extreme. Zones would be better served by individual 209s.

CalFire made regular appearances at the Incident Command Post (ICP), on conference calls, and interfacing with field personnel. Their local knowledge, resources, and participation were appreciated. CalFire had the ability to provide needed resources from local stations in a timely fashion. Similar accompaniments came from local law enforcement, emergency service, and utilities (see Liaison Section). In addition, the National Guard made available a night operations helicopter with hoist capabilities.

A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was offered to all personnel following the extreme fire behavior on September 27th and 28th. The primary focus was due to spike camps being challenged by fire during the evenings of the events and several days after. The R Wild Ranch camp was forced to evacuate because of the start and fire movement of the Zogg Fire, and the Hettenshaw camp was surrounded by the August Complex while support personnel sheltered in place..

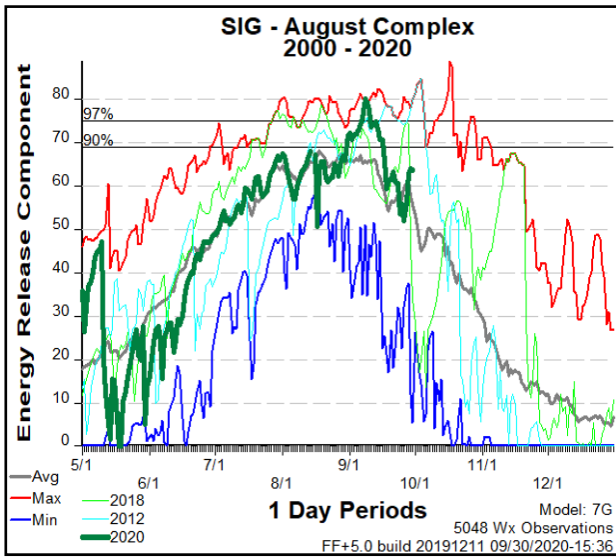


# INCIDENT OBJECTIVES

- Provide for firefighter and public safety by assessing and mitigating risk in order to develop and implement sound tactical operations. Ensure all resources have a clear understanding of assignments and associated hazards.
- Provide for point protection within the fire area where it is safe to do so. Develop and implement direct and indirect contingency lines to protect communities, utility infrastructure, transportation corridors, county watersheds and timber values from immediate and long-term threats.
- Maintain and enhance relationships with agency partners, cooperators, stakeholders, and the public through timely and accurate information exchange. Ensure long-term strategies are communicated.
- Ensure coordination and communication is taking place between South Zone, West Zone, Northwest Zone, and Area Command to provide unified strategic direction, efficient resource use, and common public messaging.
- Follow CDC, local, state, and federal COVID-19 mitigation guidance and protocols to reduce exposure and protect firefighters and the public from virus spread.
- Treat all personnel with dignity and respect by providing a harassment free, zero-tolerance work environment.
- Ensure financial and documentation packages are prepared in accordance with agency requirements and agreements are closed out when no longer necessary.



# FIRE WEATHER AND BEHAVIOR



## Fire Weather Summary:

- Three types of significant weather events have potential for large fire growth in the area.
  - ◇ Pre-frontal winds are strong south to west winds associated with storms approaching from the Pacific Ocean. This occurred 9/23 but smoke over the northeastern part of the fire limited the potential for large growth.
  - ◇ Offshore flow which is a strong east to northeast wind. This affected the fire 9/27-28 and resulted in large growth to the southwest.
  - ◇ Thermal low which creates strong west to northwest winds caused by hot weather in the Sacramento Valley. This was forecast over the fire 9/30-10/1 but never fully materialized.
- Critical fire weather conditions with red flag warnings occurred from 9/27/20 to 9/28/20. A strong high pressure was building into northern California from the Pacific Northwest, resulting in a moderately strong offshore wind event. Breezy winds of 30 to 40 mph were observed, along with relative humidity values in the teens and temperatures in the 80s. These critical fire weather conditions, combined with persistent long-term drought, resulted in several very tall columns and large fire growth. Historically, peak dryness in Northern California is mid-August to mid-September, before a trough develops across the region with increased frequency of moisture and cooler temperatures associated with onshore flow. Season ending events in the area also have regularly been experienced later in the fall.

## Fire Behavior Summary:

- Lower elevation fuels consisted of oak savannah with heavy grass load transitioning to forested fuels in higher elevations. All fuels live and dead, and all size classes were critically dry. 1000-hour fuels are averaging between 8-10% and burning completely.
- Old fire scars were not reliable barriers. The 2017 Buck fire was the only fire scar that served as a barrier to fire spread. Older fire scars are composed of heavy dead and down timber and thick brush.
- Solar radiation and wind were the main drivers of fire behavior. When the sun penetrated the smoke inversion, a significant increase in fire behavior occurred. This occurred when the inversion began to lift, or winds were strong enough to encourage smoke movement.
- Prolonged fire seasons in Northern California are regularly occurring events and October can be a very active month. Season ending events were calculated at 50% on October 7, and 75% on October 17.

# OPERATIONS



## Key Decisions

- A strong Operations roster was developed prior to mobilization.
- The IMT remained committed to incident objectives: firefighter/public safety and providing for point protection.
- A mobile retardant base was ordered and operational prior to major fire runs in the wildland-urban interface.

## Significant Events

- The plan changed after the first transition: Dozer line was built for fire coming from a different direction, which delayed firing operations.
- The Sept. 27-28 wind event resulted in erratic and extreme fire behavior, loss of values in Ruth Valley and Forest Glen, mandatory evacuations, and forced moves of Hettenshaw and R Wild spike camps.

## Notable Successes

- The IMT was able to pivot and respond to areas of greatest need despite limited resources.
- The safety record on the incident showed a dedication by line supervisors to firefighter safety. Firefighter accountability was a top priority.
- Excellent support of operations from other functions.

## Challenges and Resolutions

- A shortage of resources, especially night resources, made it difficult to build a long term strategy. The Team used multiple channels to describe operational resource needs required to successfully meet our objectives.
- Members of the public that did not evacuate went to Flying AA Ranch for refuge, increasing the stress level among firefighters.
- Communications were difficult due to the large geographic area involved and very limited cell phone access. Repeater communications systems were adjusted quickly as needs evolved.
- Critical fire weather conditions including historical high temperatures, red flag events, and prolonged drought created challenges. Periods of high winds and extreme fire behavior followed by periods of stagnant air with low visibilities due to smoke and marine inversions limited helicopter operations for the life of the assignment. High altitude flights were also limited due to smoke columns exceeding 25,000 ft.

## August Complex North Zone Air Operations

Water Delivered, Rotor	785,000 gals.
Water Delivered, SEAT	65,100 gals.
Retardant Delivered, Rotor	85,000 gals.
Retardant Delivered, Air Tanker	503,000 gals.
Rotor Flight Time	424 hours
SEAT Flight Time	30 hours
Total Air Attack Flight Time	46.3 hours
Total Aviation Costs	\$4,461,283

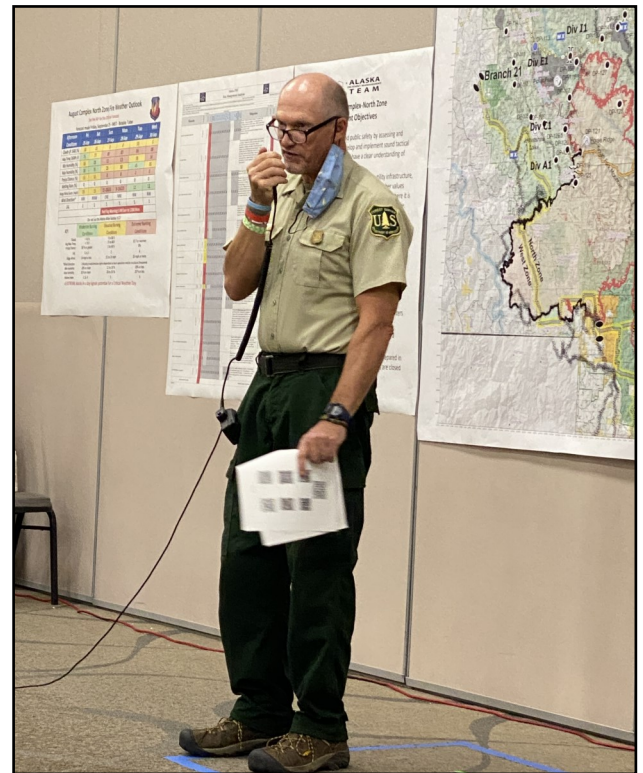
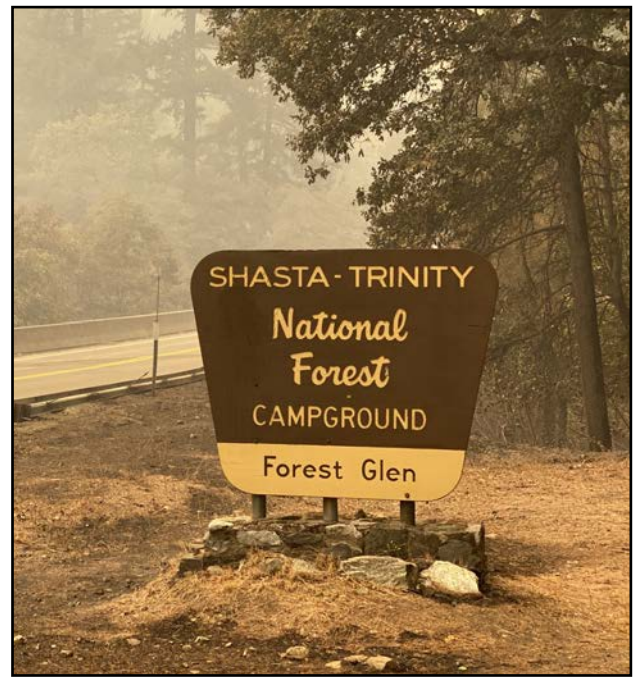
# LIAISON

## Notable Successes

- Trinity County Office of Emergency Services, Cooperators, and Pacific Gas and Electric emergency managers provided key information to Operations on local knowledge, gas pipeline safety, and road construction projects. Timber interests provided maps to assist Plans with understanding values at risk.
- Liaisons were co-located in ICP with Operations, Safety and Situation units which allowed for rapid information exchange.
- Relationships established with five Law Enforcement agencies and Department of Transportation at County and State levels allowed Liaisons to coordinate evacuation and Highway 36 closures during red flag conditions and periods of rapid and erratic fire growth.

## Challenges and Resolutions

- Identifying the different concerns and objectives of various timber interests across the breadth of the fire was a challenge. Some interests wanted to stop fire from impacting their holdings, others wanted to assess salvage opportunities, and some wanted to do both.
- Conveying the commercial values at risk versus the value of private property was challenging.
- During periods of reduced fire activity there was substantial public pressure on elected county law enforcement to allow access to evacuated areas. Law enforcement, having been engaged in support for fire operations for over a month, was challenged to provide for expanding evacuations.



# HUMAN RESOURCES

## Notable Successes

- The Team's willingness to include the Human Resources Specialist (HRSP) in all relevant meetings enabled the HRSP to anticipate potential issues and/or provide mitigation through appropriate messaging.

## Challenges and Resolutions

- The distance between the IAP and Spike camps may have impacted the HRSPs ability to keep a good pulse on what was happening in the camps and limited in-person connections with personnel working or staying in the camps.
- It has been a long fire season and, as anticipated, HR is seeing more issues related to focus and tempers.
- Personnel on the fire had to be reminded to not engage in political or social discussions which could lead to unproductive or hostile conversations between the parties or those overhearing the conversations.





# LOGISTICS



## Key Decisions

- Rostering two Communications Technicians enabled surge capacity to deal with the workload.
- Having two Medical Unit Leaders allowed the Medical Unit to divide responsibilities: one managed resources and operational responsibilities while the other performed administrative tasks.

## Notable Successes

- Organized the Ground Support Unit into functional areas to divide responsibilities in the absence of a Unit leader and insufficient Equipment Managers.
- Secured the Land and Facility Use Agreement (LUA) for the Triumphant for Life Camp (TLC) on Sept. 30, enabling relocation from Hettenshaw Base Camp the next day.
- Daily Logistics-specific briefings with Operations at spike camps.

## Challenges and Resolutions

- Inability to fill resource and supply needs initially impacted our ability to support the camps and operations in a timely manner. Expanded dispatch and the buying team agreed on a new process for tracking and adjudicating orders.
- Using a Blanket Purchase Authority for tire repair and a micro-purchaser to procure items and services on the west side of the fire significantly reduced drive time.

Logistics Statistics				
<b>Food Unit:</b>	<u>Hettenshaw/</u>	<u>R Wild/</u>		
Meal Count Total:	<u>TLC</u>	<u>Hayfork</u>	<u>Total</u>	
Breakfast	2,555	11,537	14,092	
Lunch	4,455	14,130	18,585	
Dinner	3,197	12,323	15,520	
<b>Facilities:</b>				
3 Shower Units				
Potable water used: 28,600 gallons				
Land Use Agreements: 4 NE Zone, 8 NW Zone				
<b>Communications:</b>				
Repeaters:	6 CMD, 3 LOG			
Command radio kits:	10			
Logistic radio kits:	4			
Radios issued:	136 CMD			
<b>Supply:</b>				
Pumps issued:	57			
Chainsaws:	30			
Miles of hose (1 ½")	150,000' or 24.8 miles			
( 1" )	130,000' or 24.6 miles			
<b>Ground Support:</b>	<u>HAY</u>	<u>TLC</u>	<u>ICP</u>	<u>Total</u>
NERV Rentals:	22	20	33	75
UTV Rentals:	13	10	0	23
Fuel Tenders:	3	2	0	5

# SAFETY



## Key Decisions

- Spike camp evacuation/shelter in place plans were prepared before they had to be implemented.
- Night safety officers were essential because of the scale and scope of night operations.
- Medical, Logistics, Safety and IC met to address the critical shortage of medical and safety personnel. This was pivotal for the fire receiving personnel to support operational plans.

## Notable Successes

- Risk management was continually assessed. Operations, Medical and Safety worked together to establish mitigations and ensured our capability to respond was communicated and adequate for each shift.
- There were two incidents-within-an-incident. Both had positive outcomes due to medical capabilities and response times.

## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- There were no laboratory test options for COVID-19 on the weekend and the fastest turn around was about 24hours.

The COVID Coordinator was trained and qualified to administer tests in the field for faster results.

- A new spike camp was established at Hayfork, including a larger presence of Logistics and Plans personnel, to reduce driving time between spikes and ICP.

# PLANS



## Key Decisions

- Stationing Plans personnel on location at spike camps to facilitate communication and delivery of products.
- Retaining the GISS trailer allowed a fairly seamless transition.
- Long-Term Fire Analyst (LTAN) and Strategic Operational Planner (SOPL) support was invaluable.

## Notable Successes

- Use of virtual team members helped manage workload and also minimized potential COVID-19 exposure.
- Addition of a second lead Resource Advisor (READ) and READ coordinator for the US Forest Service.
- The second largest ponderosa pine in the US was protected through cooperation between the READs and operational personnel.
- 87 trainees were assigned to the incident, including 12 in Command and General Staff positions.

## Challenges and Resolutions

- Maintaining social distancing in the ICP was a challenge. Furniture was placed to manage traffic flow, and a Plexi-glas shield was set up to protect check-in personnel.
- There were insufficient on-site personnel for tasks that could not be done by virtual workers, ranging from field positions such as fire archaeologists and field observers to people to help with office tasks such as printing and making copies.
- It was a challenge to keep track of resources when using both virtual and in-person Plans personnel. TRELLO, an on-line collaboration tool that organizes projects into boards, was effectively used to provide a visual representation of resource assignments similar to T-Cards.

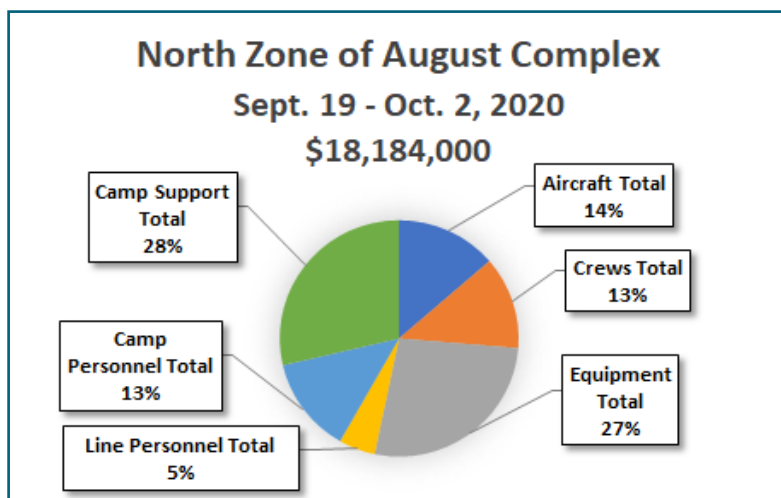
# FINANCE

## Notable Successes

- Establishing spike camp finance sections at both Hettenshaw/TLC and R Wild/Hayfork camps significantly increased our ability to support resources in the field.
- Successfully executed the remaining Emergency Equipment Rental Agreements (EERA) with local initial attack resources, and established and executed LUAs for operational and logistical field needs.
- Developed a process to provide an estimated cost for just the North Zone of the Complex.

## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Resources from multiple fires were combined and most were assigned new request numbers, but people continued submitting time under their old numbers. Switching to an alphabetical filing system for equipment made it easier to locate files.
- Originally established naming conventions in the e-Suite database caused resource tracking issues that took time to resolve.
- 75% of the finance personnel were trainees. Additional section resources ordered could not be filled.



## GIS Statistics by Zone, August Complex, 10/6/2020

	Containment (%)	Uncontained Fire Line (miles)	Acreage
Northeast	40	225.9	263,329
Northwest	23	109.2	65,493
South	83	107.7	544,932
West	60	52.7	134,836
Complex	60	495.6	1,008,590

# PUBLIC INFORMATION

## Key Decisions

- Nine on-site and 6 virtual Public Information Officers (PIO) flexibly balanced daily workloads based on fire activity and events. Virtual PIOs were able to post to InciWeb, process email, distribute electronic products, and handle other duties that didn't require being on-site.
- We partnered with two businesses in Hyampom to print and post our emailed updates and maps.
- Due to concerns related to COVID-19, in-person gatherings at community meetings, bulletin boards, etc., were largely replaced by virtual meetings using Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms.

## Significant Events

- The Oct. 2nd virtual community meeting for the town of Hyampom using Zoom was a resounding success, reaching 1/3 of the approximately 241 residents.
- The North Zone was subdivided into two zones on Oct. 4, with the resultant transfer of two teammates and the west trap line to the incoming IMT to ensure continuity of operations west of South Fork Mountain.



## Notable Successes

- Zoom-to-Facebook Live was effectively used during community meetings by incorporating presenters who weren't co-located at the ICP; this greatly broadened our pool of presenters to enable the right person to talk about the right topic.
- Most interactions along the trap lines were positive. The communities and individuals in Hayfork, Dinsmore, and Hyampom areas, along with Mad River prior to evacuation, were grateful both online and in person.
- The PIO team deployed a Virtual Office approach. Real-time participation across time zones was accomplished by having a monitor in the information shop connecting virtual workers with on-site staff through Microsoft Teams. This allowed virtual PIOs to listen, observe, and interact with on-site PIOs in real-time and maintain a common operating picture for the incident.

## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Developing a meaningful training rotation for on-site and virtual trainees was a challenge effectively handled by the virtual Assistant Lead PIO, who coordinated a training routine.
- Getting situational awareness as a virtual employee was a continuous challenge. We encouraged virtual teammates to call often or enter the virtual office for updates.

### Information Statistics

Community Meetings:	4
Phone Calls:	364
<u>Social Media (Sept. 19-Oct. 4):</u>	
Posts:	909
Reach:	2,015,954
Facebook/Twitter/YouTube Followers:	58,999
Post engagements:	204,659
Video Views:	551,826



# SHARED EXPERIENCES

The August Complex North Zone was notable in that it occurred during a global pandemic, new technologies and databases had been deployed this fire season, and numerous wildfires throughout the western states resulted in a shortage of resources. This situation led to experiences shared among multiple functions.

## Notable Successes

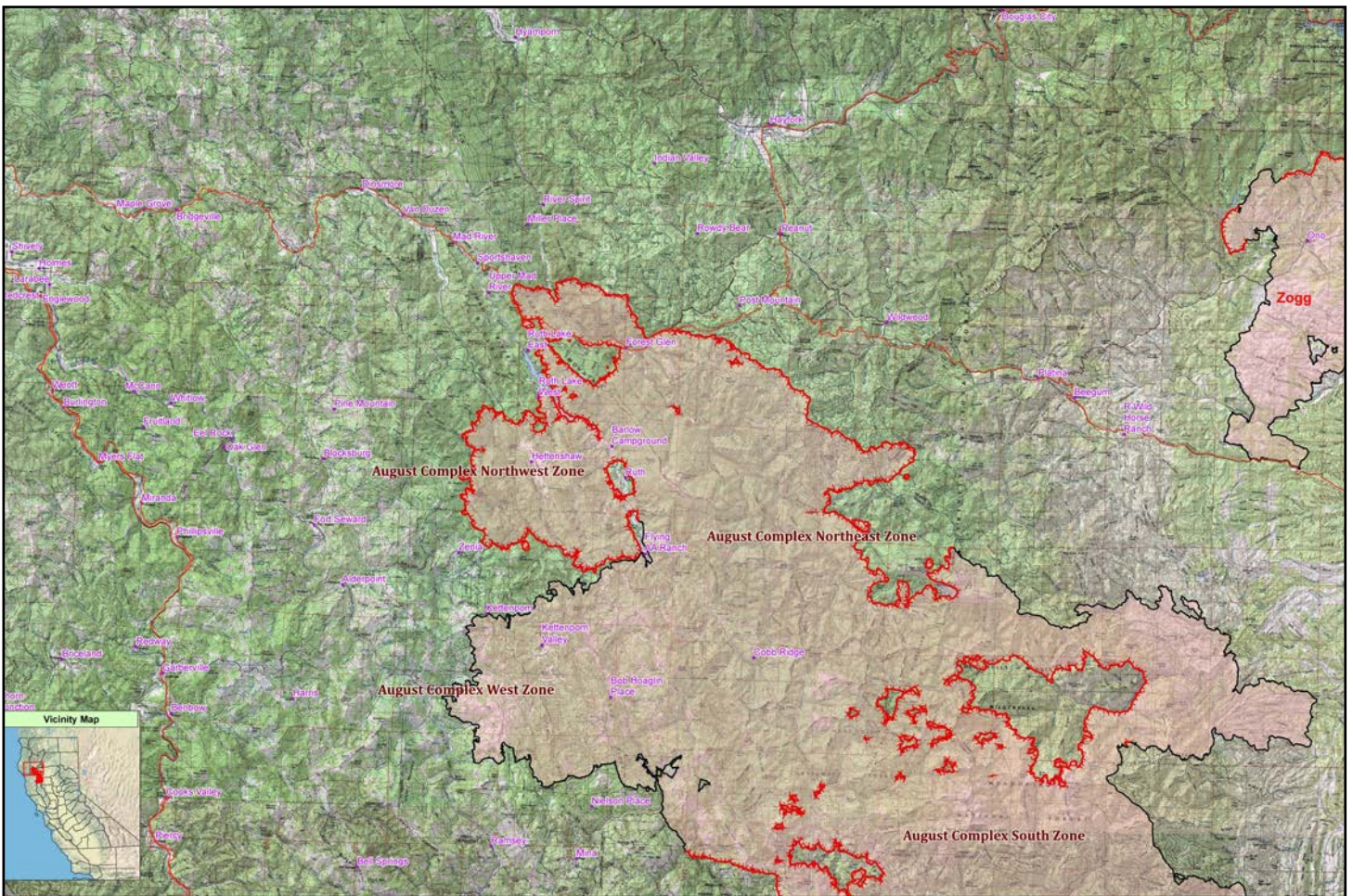
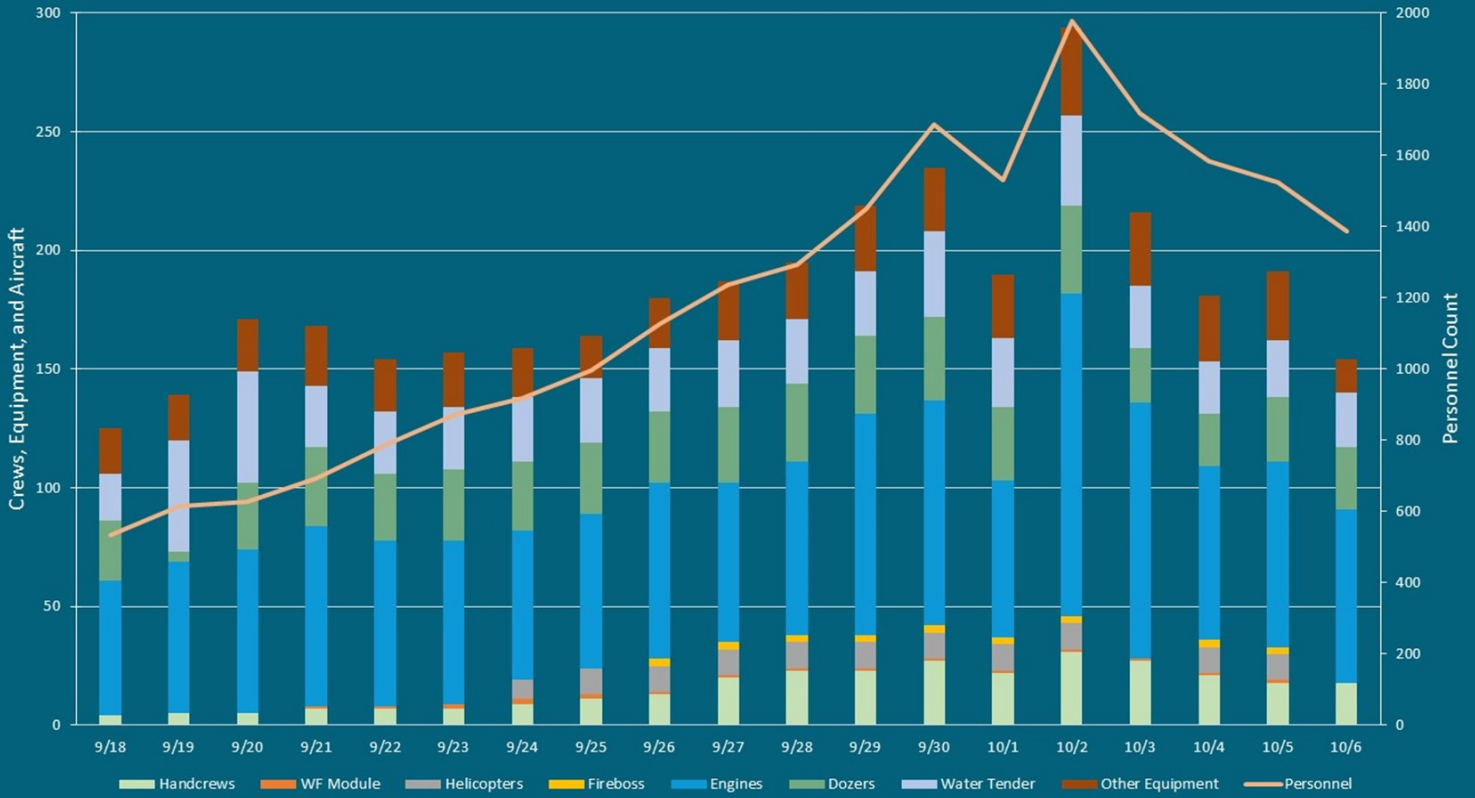
- Successful use of people working virtually and communicating among multiple locations via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and more traditional forms of communication.
- Mitigation measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission.
- Cooperation among different teams assigned to the complex.

## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- A Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team was provided to all personnel following the extreme fire behavior on September 27th and 28th. The primary focus was due to spike camps having to evacuate or shelter in place.
- Although virtual resources were generally an asset, managing them was time consuming and added to the workload of supervisors. Develop guidelines for virtual tasks that would be common to most incidents.
- Insufficient resources led to a large number of trainees in multiple functional units. While this enabled trainees to gain valuable experience on a complex fire, training added to the workload and the training experience was sometimes diminished due to trainers' lack of time.
- Distance between ICP and spike camps reduced the ability to communicate efficiently face-to-face and resulted in significant time on the road, contributing to fatigue. Different tactics were used by units to reduce driving time. Splitting the fire into two zones with another IMT enabled sharing of resources and eased the burden of managing the fire.
- Following COVID precautions required constant vigilance. A COVID coordinator position was established, and it was recommended that conversation regarding COVID should be handled through the COVID coordinator or Deputy IC to ensure consistent messaging. COVID protocol reminders were included in briefings and in the IAP. Personnel were quarantined following possible exposure.



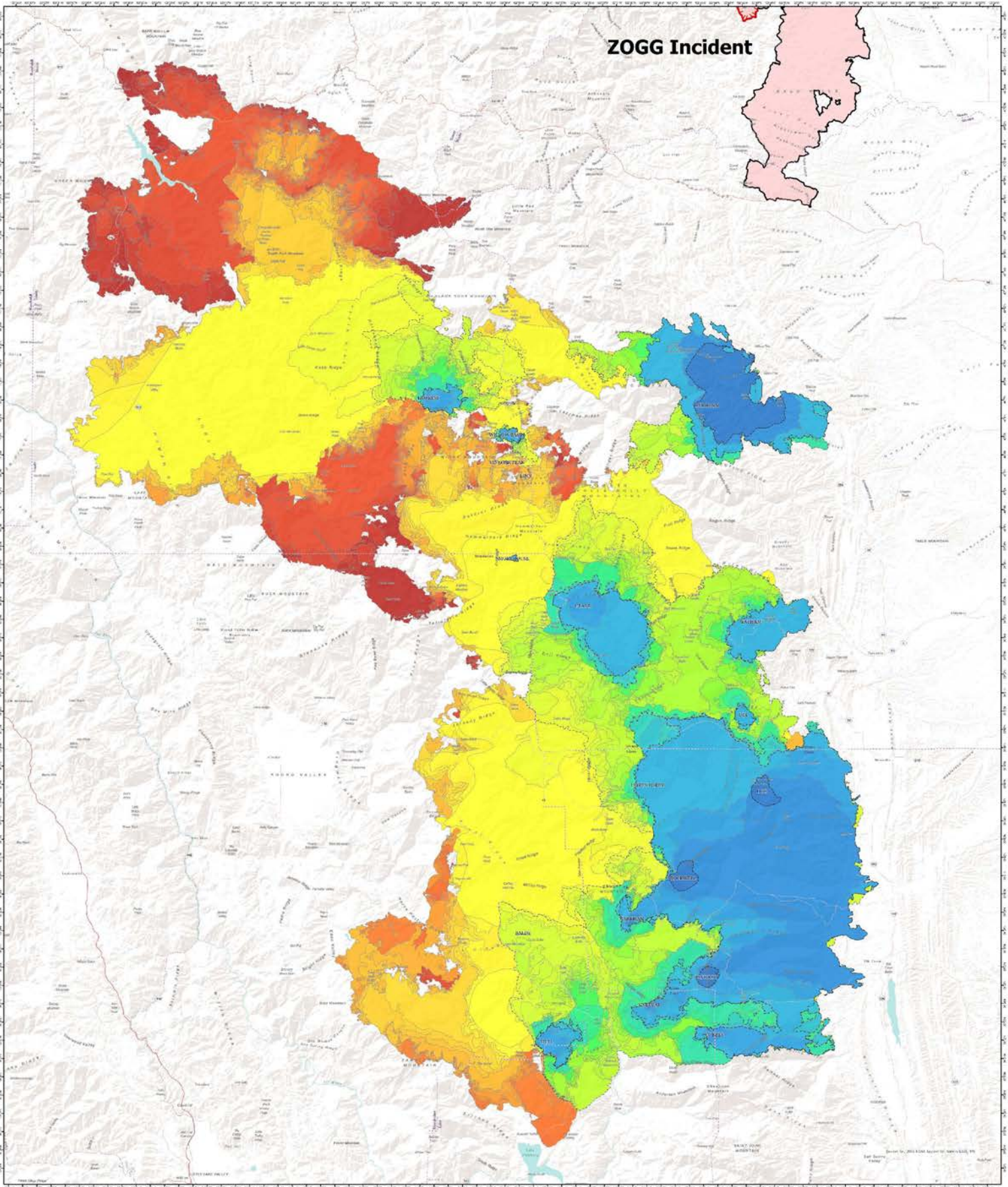
# August Complex North Zone Resources Sept. 18 - Oct. 6



**PUBLIC INFORMATION**  
 August Complex Northeast Zone  
 CA-MNF-000753  
 October 6, 2020

Datum: NAD 83  
 0 2.5 5 10 Miles

- Communities
- Uncontrolled Fire Edge
- Contained Line
- Wildfire Daily Fire Perimeter



**Progression**

August Complex  
CA-MNF-000753



**Progression**

August Complex  
CA-MNF-000753

Legend Type	Color	Area (Acres)	Perimeter (Miles)
Zone 1	Dark Blue	1,000 - 2,000	0.5 - 1.0
Zone 2	Blue	2,000 - 4,000	1.0 - 2.0
Zone 3	Light Blue	4,000 - 8,000	2.0 - 4.0
Zone 4	Green	8,000 - 16,000	4.0 - 8.0
Zone 5	Yellow-Green	16,000 - 32,000	8.0 - 16.0
Zone 6	Yellow	32,000 - 64,000	16.0 - 32.0
Zone 7	Orange	64,000 - 128,000	32.0 - 64.0
Zone 8	Red-Orange	128,000 - 256,000	64.0 - 128.0
Zone 9	Red	256,000 - 512,000	128.0 - 256.0
Zone 10	Dark Red	512,000 - 1,024,000	256.0 - 512.0



**Progression**

August Complex  
CA-MNF-000753