

Fire dragon starts to run, but danger lurks: I.V. blesses, thanks firefighters

A week after the Tuesday, July 30 public meeting during which fire officials stood before residents of Illinois Valley and requested that they voluntarily evacuate, things have steadily progressed to a calmer situation.

Finally receiving a break in the weather pattern that calmed the winds and lowered temperatures for several days, the fire growth slowed.

As of Monday, Aug. 5 at 6 p.m. the entire fire was "upped" to a four-hour pre-evacuation notice. It had been 30 minutes since Tuesday, July 30.

Meanwhile, bulldozers and fire crews worked continuously to construct a fire line along the eastern side of the fire, with backburn operations occurring throughout the week.

As of Tuesday, Aug. 6, fire crews were working along the northeast flank of the Florence. Fire, continuing to prepare fire line from Hanson Saddle to Soldier Camp. From Sam Brown Campground to the area of fire line west of O'Brien, firefighters will be patrolling fire lines and mopping up. In the area south of O'Brien, fire line construction continued.

Fire officials were anticipating weather conditions that would begin a gradual warming and drying out with the possibility of sustained northeast to east winds in excess of 15 mph. That change, with the relative humidity dropping below 35 percent, prompted a fire weather watch Tuesday night.

On Monday, the Broyles Type II Incident Management Team transitioned management of the Sour Biscuit Fire-Zone 1 to the Pacific Northwest National Incident Management Team; a Type 1 team. It now will manage the east side of Florence Fire and the Sour Biscuit, which fire officials believe will merge.

With transition of the management the fire camp at "Forks" State Park in Cave Junction has been demobilized, with the Florence Fire Camp at Lake Selmac becoming the hub of fire-fighting activity.

As of Tuesday, the Florence Fire, including Sour. Biscuit up to the California border, was listed at 241,282 acres, with 10 percent containment. The cost of the fire-fighting effort so far is estimated at \$13.7 million.

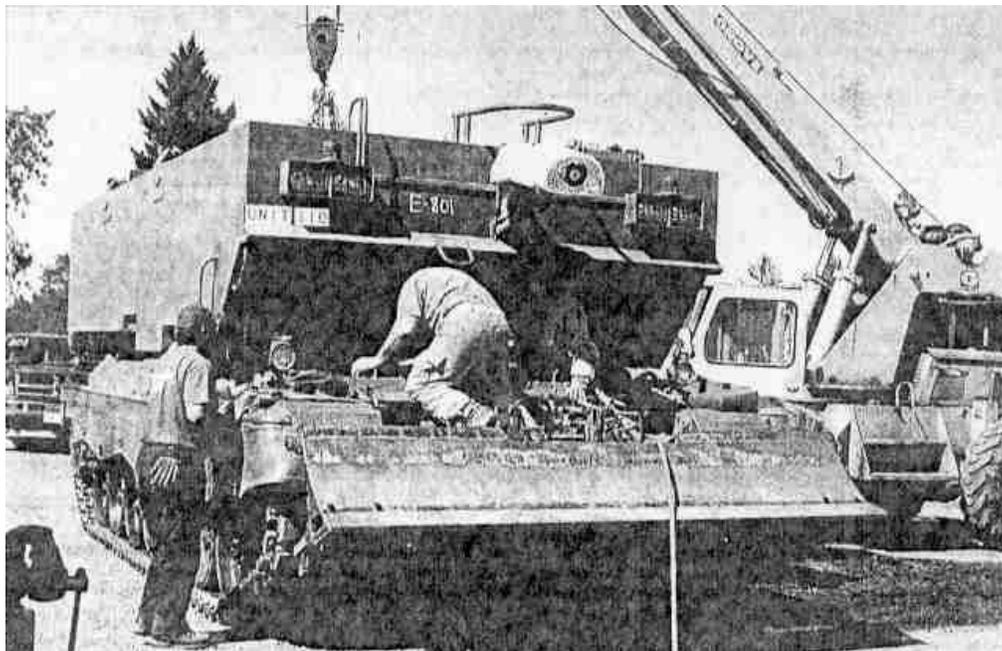
An estimate of total containment is not available.

A Federal Emergency Management Agency team traveled from Seattle to the area on Tuesday to meet with fire management officials as well as area municipal officials and emergency agencies.

The principal focus of the visit was to view how fire disaster management proceeds. The FEMA team visited the Florence Fire Camp; met briefly with local government representatives; and proceeded to the spike camp at Sam Brown Campground. They also intended to view the Timber Rock. Fire scene.

According to city of Cave Junction Recorder Jim Polk, who met briefly with the FEMA team, the valley's situation still does not meet the thresholds established for the fire situation to be designated as a FEMA emergency. However, there might be some assistance for the cost of fighting, the fire in the form of monies from the Fire Suppression Act, which is part of federal fire management legislation.

There also exists the possibility of the Small Business Administration making some assistance available.





The Jumbo Fire Tank was prepped for its U.S. debut as part of the equipment for the Florence Fire. The apparatus was used in fires in Greece last year, but has not been used in this country. With a Leopard I chassis, and a water tank that holds 5,000 gallons of water with foam-making capabilities, the apparatus can be used in wildland, urban and industrial fires. At 10 psi the tank's track effect is less than other fire vehicles, and it can access areas that traditional vehicles cannot. North Tree Fire International, a private Monterey, Calif.-based company that contracts with the U.S. Forest Service for provision of tenders, engines and dozers, communicated with Texoga Co., a Houston, Texas-based company that is involved in developing military technology for other uses. In cooperation with USFS, the tank was brought to the United States to evaluate its effectiveness as a fire-fighting tool, and then brought to the Florence Fire by North Tree (Photos and text by Sherri Hopper)