

Torrance County 2016 Dog Head Wildfire
After Action Report

After Action Report

Dog Head Wildfire

Torrance County



September 15, 2016

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Executive Summary

On August 18, 2016, the Torrance County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) conducted an After Action Meeting (AAM) for agencies and individuals involved in the Dog Head Wildfire that occurred in Western Torrance County, between the dates of June 13, 2016 and August 10, 2016. The comments and recommendations contained in this document are a result of that meeting.

The Dog Head Fire started on June 13, 2016 in the Manzano Mountains just South of Chililli in Western Torrance County, New Mexico. It was declared 100% contained on July 14, 2016 and declared controlled on August 10, 2016. A Fire Management Assistance Declaration was declared on June 16, 2016

Comments and recommendations included in this AAR were developed from input provided by After Action Meeting participants.

Purpose

The purpose of this After Action Report (AAR) is to provide information that will assist the Torrance County Office of Emergency Management and other agencies involved in the Dog Head Wildfire to develop and improve plans, procedures, policies and guidelines. The report contains “strengths” (practices that should be sustained and built upon), recommended areas for improvement and suggested corrective actions.

The following contains strengths and improvement areas that were most often identified during the AAM. A more in-depth discussion of strengths and areas for improvement is located in the Analysis of Capabilities Section.

Major Strengths

- Government agencies, private industry and volunteers once again rose to the occasion, cooperating to assist the citizens of Torrance and Bernalillo Counties.
- The assistance of volunteers to responders and citizens was excellent. Volunteers played vital roles during the response to the fire.
- The use of social media during the response was identified as an excellent method to use in future operations to get information to the public.

Areas for Improvement

- Certain locations in Western Torrance County do not have adequate communication capability for volunteer fire personnel. Communications between local responders and the United States Forest Service (USFS) continue to be problematic.
- There were several areas for improvement identified that would enhance shelter operations.
- Some difficulties existed during the evacuation of citizens. Although the evacuation was an overall success, reentry processes were confusing at times and evacuees were unsure of correct policies.
- The mass care facility needs to be upgraded with communications and administrative equipment.

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Section 1: Dog Head Fire Operations Overview

Wildfire Details

Name: Dog Head Fire

Wildfire Start: June 13, 2016

Wildfire 100% Contained: July 14, 2016

Counties Involved:

- Torrance County
- Bernalillo County

Shelters Opened:

- Livestock and Mass Care Shelter at the Torrance County Fairgrounds in Estancia
- Tajique Information Center
- Torreon Fire Department

Evacuation Areas:

- Area bound by Torrance County line to the North, Peacock Rd. to the East, Hwy 55 to the South, and Camino del Norte and Barelas Rd. to the West.

Participating Organizations

▪ **Local:**

- Torrance County Office of Emergency Management
- Torrance County Fire Department
- Torrance County Sheriff's Department
- Torrance County 911 Central Dispatch Center
- Torrance County Road Department
- Torrance County Fair Board
- Torrance County Extension Office
- Torrance County Assessor's Office
- Bernalillo County Fire Department
- Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office
- Bernalillo County Public Works
- Pueblo of Isleta
- Mountainair Police Department
- Estancia Fire Department
- Estancia Police Department
- Moriarty Fire Department
- Tajique Land Grant
- Chililí Land Grant

▪ **New Mexico State Agencies:**

- NM State Forestry

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- NM National Guard
- NM Department of Transportation
- NM Environment Department
- NM Livestock Board
- Department of Public Safety – State Police
- NM Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Mgt.
- Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District
- Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District

- **Federal:**
 - National Park Service
 - National Weather Service
 - US Forest Service
 - US Army Corps of Engineers

- **Non-Government Offices, Private Sector, and Others:**
 - Torrance County ARES
 - Corrections Corporation of America
 - Estancia School District
 - Nu-star Energy Pipeline
 - Central New Mexico Electrical Coop.
 - East Mountain Community Emergency Response Team
 - Southern Baptists
 - Salvation Army
 - American Red Cross
 - Lions Club
 - Central New Mexico Electric Co-Op
 - KNXM-88.7 FM Radio
 - EMW Gas
 - 4 Winds Equestrian Center

Section 2: Analysis of Capabilities

This section reviews the discussions held during the After Action meeting.

1. Operational Communications

Observation 1.1: Area for Improvement: Communications within Torrance County between agencies involved in a wildfire incident.

Analysis 1.1: In certain areas of the County, communications is extremely limited, particularly for volunteer fire crews. The topography of the area prevents some radio communications but incompatibility of radio frequencies was another major factor. Not having adequate communications prevents personnel on the scene from communicating important safety related information, delays requests for critical resources and prevents sharing of information with the public.

Recommendation 1.1a: Investigate the feasibility of training volunteer fire department personnel in amateur radio operations.

Corrective Action Description 1.1a: Institute radio communication training for fire responders on all frequencies available for use during fire operations. Incorporate volunteer radio groups in training fire department personnel. Develop protocols that include ARES and other volunteer groups in volunteer fire department responses.

Recommendation 1.1b: Integrate frequencies used by volunteer fire departments, other responding agencies and US Forest Service.

Recommendation 1.1c: Purchase/Obtain radios with appropriate frequency capabilities for the Torrance County Fire Department.

Corrective Action Description 1.1b/1.1c: Research the possibility of Torrance County obtaining older Forest Service radios that are no longer being used by the Forest Service

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management and the Torrance County Fire Department

Agency POC: Jason Trumbull and Javier Sanchez

Start Date: ASAP

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 1.2: Area for Improvement: Communications Interoperability: Equipment, Guidelines, Plans and Protocols

Analysis 1.2: Torrance County does not have guidelines for communications interoperability that outline procedures and guidance for communicating during emergencies and disasters involving agencies from different jurisdictions i.e.; US Forest Service, State Forestry, Local Volunteer Fire Departments. Communications between the local responders and the USFS is difficult if not non-existent. They have different frequencies. There is only one frequency which becomes over loaded quickly making effective communication between responding agencies difficult.

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Recommendation 1.2: Institute standardized interoperable communications guidelines and procedures for response operations in Torrance County.

Corrective Action Description 1.2 US Forest Service personnel periodically attend Torrance County Volunteer Fire Department's meeting and training sessions to clarify USFS communications capabilities and requirements.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management and US Forest Service.

Agency POC: Anthony Martinez and Javier Sanchez

Start Date: ASAP

Completion Date: March 2017

2. Situational Assessment

Observation 2.1: Area for Improvement: Incident Response Information.

Analysis 2.1: The notification and information sharing process was somewhat vague. The flow of information and notification was not clear as to how local response organizations receive information.

Recommendation 2.1a: Standardize the notification procedures used during all emergency response operations. Procedures concerning communications between agencies need to be confirmed by all agencies as to how every agency will communicate. Coordinate contact information and procedures between all involved agencies: US Forest Service, State Forestry, Torrance County and local fire departments.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a1: Torrance County Dispatch Center and the US Forest Service Dispatch Center should collaborate and coordinate standardizing notification and information sharing procedures.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a2: Integrate daily activity maps and Incident Action Plans for the dispatch centers.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a3: Establish policies for the Incident Command post to communicate directly with Torrance County Central Dispatch.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a4: Train dispatchers in the differences between NM State Forestry and the US Forest Service notification procedures.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a5: Develop Standard Operating Guidelines that provide specific instructions for notification of wildfires.

Corrective Action Description 2.1a6: Periodically verify contact information lists and data bases of wildfire response key personnel.

Recommendation 2.1b: Develop a method to ensure involved agencies and organizations are periodically updated on current information on operations, resources and plans.

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Corrective Action Description 2.1b: Schedule a daily meeting for situational awareness and cooperative plans for senior agency and organization representatives.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management and Dispatch Center and US Forest Service Dispatch Centers.

Agency POC: Dorothy Rivera and USF Dispatch Center Representative

Start Date: ASAP

Completion Date: October 2016

Observation 2.2: Area for Improvement: Shutting Down Power Grid

Analysis 2.2a: Problems occur when the need arises to turn off the power to certain areas of the county because of wildfires. Currently the incident commander determines areas that will have the power shut off.

Recommendation 2.2a: Establish standard notification procedures for shutting down power during wildfires.

Corrective Action Description 2.2a: The Incident Commander, EOC and Power Company should collaborate with local communities to map out areas requiring the power to be shut down. Strategies should be developed by the incident command on where and when power will be turned off and on. The EOC should help coordinate all planned power outages. The EOC should use a local liaison to identify those in the communities that may require electrical power for health reasons.

Analysis 2.2b: A concern was mentioned by NuStar energy, that the Incident Command never called 811 during the fire. This one call generates a big ticket and sets forth motion the proper documentation for spotting out utilities (pipelines). Granted NuStar Energy was notified of the fire, and proper safety measures were practiced, an emergency 811 one call should have been made.

Recommendation 2.2b: Ensure an 811 call is initiated during wildfires.

Corrective Action Description 2.2b: Include 811 calls in SOGs and checklists.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management.

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 2.3: Area for Improvement: Capability to Share Information.

Analysis 2.3: The communications difficulties observed previously in this report prevent timely sharing of situational information between the responders, the USFS and the EOC.

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Observation 2.4: Area for Improvement: Coordination between Incident Command Post and the Emergency Operations Center.

Analysis 2.4: There was a break down in information sharing between the Incident Command Function and the Emergency Operations Center. In some instances the EOC director had to travel to the ICP to gather current information.

Recommendation 2.4: The IC should take action to ensure the EOC has the most current information and plans for each operational period.

Corrective Action Description 2.4: Assign an Incident Command Liaison Officer to the EOC.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management.

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

3. Evacuation:

Observation 3.1: Strength: Support and processing of evacuated individuals and companion animals.

Analysis 3.1: Livestock trailers provided by the Sheriff's department and local volunteer groups are used to assist residents of evacuated areas move their animals. Livestock is moved to the Rodeo Grounds or other designated shelter areas.

Recommendation 3.1: Sustain and locate other areas that will accept evacuated livestock.

Observation 3.2: Area for Improvement: Clarify "Mandatory" and "Voluntary" Evacuation:

Analysis 3.2: Many citizens and government officials do not understand the difference between "Mandatory" and "Voluntary" Evacuation. The misuse of terms and general confusion associated with the two terms caused problems for both authorities and citizens during the Dog Head Evacuation process.

Recommendation 3.2: Ensure that the terms "Mandatory" and "Voluntary" are understood by all involved in evacuation operations.

Corrective Action Description 3.2: Develop materials to provide to citizens and responders explaining the differences in levels of evacuation. Explain evacuation policies and procedures during town hall meetings or other gatherings of citizens that may be involved in evacuation operations.

Observation 3.3: Area for Improvement: System for tracking evacuees.

Analysis 3.3: There is no central point for evacuation control. Not having a central point for information and evacuee tracking could result in some citizens being overlooked or not accounted for. Record keeping and documentation during evacuation operations was lacking and could use a great deal of improvement.

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Recommendation 3.3: Develop procedures to ensure all citizens and resources are tracked during an evacuation.

Corrective Action Description 3.3: Develop a standard operating guide for tracking evacuees as an attachment to the Torrance County Emergency Operations Plan.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management.

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

4. Public Information and Warning

Observation 4.1: Strength: Use of Social Media

Analysis 4.1: Social Media was used extensively by public information officers to notify both responders and citizens of the current situation.

Recommendation 4.1: Continue to refine the use of social media during emergencies and disaster to rapidly inform those involved in the situation. Provide training to public information officers in different methods that social media can be used. Inform the public of how they can benefit from social media during emergency situations.

Observation 4.2: Area for Improvement. Coordination of Public Information.

Analysis 4.2a: The Joint Information Center worked well once it was established. However, it did take several days to organize and staff the JIC. The organizations involved particularly at the Torrance County level need training on how it should operate.

Recommendation 4.2a: Recruit and train personnel to work in a Joint Information Center.

Corrective Action Description 4.2a1: Develop a list of volunteers to staff the JIC that would be involved in notifying different entities of the circumstances involved with a wildfire. Develop and publish guidelines concerning activating PIOs and methods and timelines for notifications.

Corrective Action Description 4.2b2: Conduct Public Information and Joint Information Center Training in Torrance County.

Observation 4.3: Area for Improvement. Public Information Assistance to Shelters.

Analysis 4.3: Shelter personnel experienced problems dealing with the media.

Recommendation 4.3: Provide shelters with experience public information officers to coordinate with the media.

Corrective Action Description 4.3a: Train a cadre of shelter volunteers in methods to control media. DHSEM may offer a Public Information Officer

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Course to Torrance County in the next year. Provide positions for a few shelter volunteers to attend this course.

Corrective Action Description 4.3b: Assign a member of the Torrance County Public Information function to be responsible for shelters during emergencies that require sheltering of Torrance County citizens.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County OEM

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

5. Shelter Operations

Observation 5.1 Area for Improvement: Shelter Communications

Analysis 5.1: Communication both into and out of the shelters was poor during most of the Dog Head Fire Operations. It was several days into the operation before the shelters had communications with other functions i.e. EOC, Command Post or Joint Information Center.

Recommendation 5.1: Take action prior to next incident to improve shelter communications capability.

Corrective Action Description 5.1a: Install a land line in the shelters. Install a dedicated line in the EOC to allow for immediate communication and not rely on EOC normal land lines. Cell phone connectivity is very poor in the shelter locations and unreliable.

Corrective Action Description 5.1b: Install a “hot spot” in the shelter to improve electronic communication capability.

Corrective Action Description 5.1c: Assign a volunteer radio operator (ARES) to each shelter as soon as they open.

Corrective Action Description 5.1d: Develop a method to better communicate with the 4 winds equestrian center.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 5.2 Area for Improvement: Shelter Computer Equipment

Analysis 5.2: The shelters were not capable of efficiently perform administrative duties due to the lack of proper computer and printer equipment.

Recommendation 5.2: Provide proper computer equipment and accessories for shelters.

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Corrective Action Description 5.2: Obtain necessary equipment for the shelters. Specifically identify the equipment for the shelters and assign responsible personnel to maintain and ensure equipment is available when shelters are activated.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 5.3 Area for Improvement: Shelter Volunteers

Analysis 5.3: The volunteers that staffed the shelters did an outstanding job and deserve to be commended. During the AAM some suggestions were mentioned that will improve shelter operations.

Recommendation 5.3: Increase the number of volunteers available to assist during shelter activations.

Corrective Action Description 5.3a: Initiate a volunteer recruitment drive through out Torrance County using the CERT as a starting point.

Corrective Action Description 5.3b: Ensure that all volunteers are trained and qualified to perform specific shelter functions.

Corrective Action Description 5.3c: Develop a pre-activation call down system that notifies volunteers that they may be needed because of existing emergency situations. This will allow volunteers to prepare to deploy and allow shelter managers to develop staffing lists.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 5.4 Area for Improvement: Donations Management

Analysis 5.4: There were not organized procedures or methods to account for, manage and distribute donations.

Recommendation 5.4: Institute a Torrance County donations management function.

Corrective Action Description 5.4a: Request donations management training from NM Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Corrective Action Description 5.4b: Through plans and operating guidelines assign responsibility for donations management prior to an emergency situation and shelter activation.

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Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

Observation 5.5 Area for Improvement: Shelter Security

Analysis 5.5: Because of the number of individuals and animals at the shelter some type of security should have been implemented. The long hours of shelter operations particularly through the nighttime hours required some type of organized security.

Recommendation 5.5: Provide shelter security when shelters are activated.

Corrective Action Description 5.4a: Identify a responsible agency to provide shelter security and ensure implementation through Operating Guidelines or Procedures.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

6. Recovery

Observation 6.1 Area for Improvement: Verifying Losses

Analysis 6.1: Losses of structures and public and private property was not completed until after the incident. This made initiating the recovery process cumbersome and slow.

Recommendation 6.1: Identify and report losses to public and private property as soon as possible.

Corrective Action Description 6.1a: Identify responsible agencies and develop standard operating guidelines to identify report and track losses as soon as safety allows.

Corrective Action Description 6.1b: Establish pre-emergency agreements with agencies that may provide aviation assets to perform flyovers of the affected to identify extent of damages.

Primary Responsible Agency/Office: Torrance County Office of Emergency Management

Agency POC: Javier Sanchez

Start Date: October 2016

Completion Date: March 2017

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Conclusion

Operations during the Dog Head Wildfire provided Torrance County response agencies and their partners an opportunity to utilize their wildfire response policies and procedures. During Dog Head response and operations, agencies excelled at cooperation and coordination. Certain events during the wildfire provided opportunities to improve and fine tune current policies and procedures. By implementing the recommendations contained in this report Torrance County will increase their ability to assist citizens during emergency and disaster events that may affect lives and property.

This report outlines both “Strengths” and “Areas for Improvement”. These areas were identified, through comments and discussions by individuals (Participants are listed in Appendix A) that participated in the Dog Head Wildfire After Action Meeting.

The primary shortfall identified was in the area of communications. In most cases these shortfalls were due to the lack equipment or the severe mountain terrain in Western Torrance County. All agencies participating in this exercise recognized the need to work together to solve communications shortfalls. Another area identified as needing some improvement pertains to logistical shortfalls for shelter operations.

The “Areas for Improvement” outlined in this report should be viewed as recommendations. In some cases agencies may determine that the benefits of implementation are insufficient to outweigh the costs. In other cases, agencies may identify solutions that are more effective. Each agency should review the recommendations and determine the most appropriate action and time needed for implementation.

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Torrance County 2016 Wildfire Tabletop Exercise
After Action Report & Improvement Plan



Appendix A: After Action Meeting Participants

Name		Department/Agency
Anaya	Martin	NM DOT District 5
Anaya	Taylor	Torrance County (PIO)
Austin	Larry	LA Consultants
Barela	Ted	Senator
Barela	Felix	Tajiqui Land Grant
Briggs	Don	Bernalillo County Public Works
Brown	Robert	NM State Forestry
Cabber	Betty	Torrance County Assessor
Chávez	Antonio	EOC
Darling-Roberts	Sandra	Red Cross
Daugherty	Ben	TC Dispatch
Gary	Lester	Estancia Fire Department
Guetschow	Steve	Torrance County Flood Plain
Hatten	James	Safety Manager
Hughes	Mike	Central NM Electric
Kertzman	Eliza	NMSF/NRCS
Lucero	Jesse	Torrance County Assessor
Lujan	Cl	ETSWCD
Lujan	Leonard	Torrance County Road Department
Macdonald	Jerome	NMDHSEM



Torrance County 2016 Wildfire Tabletop Exercise
After Action Report & Improvement Plan



Name		Department/Agency
Mathiasen	Donald	NM DHSEM
Nigg	Cheryl	CERT
Ortiz	Anett	PIO Deputy Manager
Padilla	Adrian	US Forest Service
Perea	Arlene	U.S. F.S. Mountainair Ranger District
Perea	Johnny	Torreon Fire
Sánchez	Javier	Torrance County Emergency Management
Sánchez	Juan	Chilili Land grant
Sedillo	Nick	Torrance County Risk Management
Smythe	Brenda	Edgewood Soil & Water Conservation District
Stropki	Cody	SWCA
Swenka	Arthur J.	Twin Peaks Ranch,
Tills	Jack	Amateur Radio Communications Group