

THE ASSESSMENT PHASE (Phase 1)

BRIEF FIRE HISTORY, Boundary County

Large forest fires have played a prominent role in the forests of Boundary County for a period dating from the end of the last glacial period. Most forest types in the county show a history of large, stand replacement fires that often leave burn patterns of several thousand acres on the landscape. Large fires have been caused both by lightning and humans.

The large fires were documented in the 1900-2000 period, many of which occurred in present day wildland/urban interface. In 1910, a large fire burned along the Katka face and into Montana. The Hellroaring fire burned from Round Prairie to the top of Queen Mountain in 1926. In 1931, the Deer Creek fire started in lower Deer Creek and burned north and east into the Yahk River drainage in Canada.

The Brush Lake fire in 1945 was probably set by children at play. It burned from west of US 95 east into the area burned by the Hellroaring fire.

1967 was dominated by two large fires in the Selkirk mountains, Sundance and Trapper Peak. These fires burned outside the urban areas, but during its historic run, the Sundance fire was pelting the Kootenai River valley with firebrands. It is perhaps only by good luck that this fire did not cause a disastrous wildland/urban interface fire somewhere in the Kootenai Valley.

In 1979 two large human caused fires occurred. A fire started by a chainsaw burned about 1000 acres above the Camp 9 road, barely missing two rural residences. At about the same time, an electric fence started the Brown's Creek fire, burning several thousand acres and making a run through a developing rural community. Several homes burned, and many others barely escaped destruction.

In 1985, the Swimming Pool fire, caused by humans, made a run along the ridge just above homes on the east side of Bonners Ferry. This fire spotted across the Kootenai River. Fortunately, the firebrand did not land in cured crops nearby, or a major fire racing out of the valley and onto the North Bench, toward the city of Moyie Springs, would have developed. Quick action by firemen and agencies kept the fire away from the many homes along and below the ridge above Bonners Ferry.

This brief summary of some of the larger recent fires in the county shows why fire managers have had a long-standing concern for the protection of life and property within the entire county. Fire history, existing fuel types, and the expansion of dwellings further into the wildland setting, all suggest that there is a need to assess and address the potential for future disastrous fires.