

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Blackwater Fire – Tactical Decision Games (TDGS)

Tactical Decision Game #1

You are the Crew Boss for a 20 person, Type 2 district hand crew. It is 1530 on August 20, 1937. It has been a drier than average fire season, and fuel conditions represent this. Many of the “old-timers” say that they haven’t seen it this dry in years. Over the past several days the afternoon temperatures have generally been in the mid-80s, daily humidities have dropped to the middle to low teens, and there have been some widely-scattered thunderstorms. Today the temperature is 85 degrees, the humidity is 16%, the winds are not even noticeable but you can see some developing cumulus clouds to the far west. You have been dispatched to a lightning caused fire on the west bank of the creek approximately 3.8 miles up Blackwater Canyon. Eventually this route in will require you gear up and hike to begin initial attack.

As you drive/walk up the two-track road into Blackwater Canyon, what is your initial assessment of the situation?

What are your instructions to your crew?

What questions do you have when you link up with your assigned fire line supervisor and adjacent crews?

Tactical Decision Game #2

You are a Squad Boss assigned to anchor and flank this section of the fire. You have been walking into the fire for well over an hour and have just arrived at the saddle (Trail Ridge) north of the main fire to continue digging direct line along the backing fire on the north side of the ridge. During the past shift, there were a handful of small spot fires across the line, but these were handled individually as line production continued. Today's plan is to continue flanking the fire until all crews can tie in the left flank with the rock/scree areas above timberline. The winds have been relatively calm as you hiked up to this section of line and are currently light out of the southwest. At your location, the fireline is fairly under-slung across the ridge. Currently, the fire has a low rate of spread uphill and is very slowly backing downhill on the northern aspects. You know that one squad is working below you, improving your line and checking for spots and the other squad is above you, planning a route up the next ridge to the rock areas above timberline.

What are your instructions to your squad?

What are your concerns?

You just realized that due to topography and poor repeater coverage, your radios barely work, even between adjacent squads. The only options that exist for you now are message runners and face-to-face interaction. You have no dedicated lookouts, just you and your crewpersons along the line. You don't have any available aircraft to give you accurate, "real time" fire status information.

What are your new instructions to your squad?

Tactical Decision Game #3

You are a Squad Boss and your squad has been assigned to develop a small water source on the left flank of the fire to aid in filling backpack pumps for line patrol and mop-up. The wind has shifted out of the northwest due to a passing cold front. The squad working above you, and above timberline, has noticed a spot fire in the drainage downhill and north of your current location. The fire is beginning to gain some intensity and the dense timber and heavy smoke is making it difficult to see. Seeing that your squad is basically in a heavily timbered chute, you have decided to disengage and cease operations at the water source and have given the order to run down the drainage, going out to the west down the trail you came up on. The winds are now gusting to 30 mph, fire behavior has increased dramatically, and the fire is rapidly gaining on you. There is no time for delays as your chances of out running the fire are diminishing.

Do you have an identified safety zone(s) and escape route(s)?

Where are they?

Is going downhill to get below the fire an option, now? How about trying to make it uphill, above timberline?

What is your next course of action?

Tactical Decision Game #4

You're the Crew Boss of the upper group and have over 35 individuals at your current location on Post Point. You know that there is one squad working below you, unsure of their current status. The spot fire below you continues to grow in intensity as the cold front winds push from the northwest. You have noticed the upper edge of the main fire actively running upslope and above you, between your location and the rock/scree areas you thought would be your safety zone. You realize that due to the topography of the ridgeline, the spot fire has multiple options to make runs at your location. Post Point is where you are to make your stand.

Do you think that it would be difficult to maintain crew cohesion at this point?

Is Post Point a good place to deploy your fire shelters? Is there any other option?

Describe one lesson learned from this event you will share with those you work with?