



## **Success Stories from the Northeast Region**

### **Cohesive Strategy Success Story: Highway 1 Fire 2012**

The story of the Highway 1 Fire on the Superior National Forest was a short and dramatic one that might easily have lasted much longer with a very different, less positive outcome, if not for the quick response of the Forest Service, partner agencies, and local community.

The fire started by a snapped power line that created multiple fires at approximately 1:30 p.m. on May 17, 2012 about a quarter mile south of the resort town of Ely, MN. The Forest Service coordinated the response with partner agencies of the Minnesota Incident Command System (MNICS) including the local law enforcement, St. Louis County Sheriff. Ely and Morse Township fire departments were part of the initial attack engine group. The Sheriff evacuated the southeastern portion of the town of Ely along with residents along Highway 1.



*Hwy 1 fire nears the town of Ely, MN. Photo Tom Remus, BIA*

Collaborative preplanning at the Minnesota Interagency Fire Center (MIFC) and coordinated efforts with State and other federal partners, allowed for aviation assets to be quickly identified and mobilized, allowing rapid response to the fire. Federal CL-215s were swiftly dispatched, and MN DNR CL-215s were diverted from another fire to assist with suppression. This collaboration of partner aviation assets in concert with helicopters and fixed wing aircraft already prepositioned in Ely by the Forest Service, allowed for quick, coordinated and effective fire suppression.

A Type 2 Team assumed command of the Highway 1 Fire as of 6 a.m. on May 18 under unified command including Forest Service, St. Louis County Sheriff, City of Ely Police and Fire Chiefs, and Town of Morse Fire Chief. Ely residents were allowed to return home by evening. Those residents along Highway 1 were escorted

by the St. Louis County Sheriff to briefly access their property, and get pets and needed supplies. Public communications were complicated by the fact that a Verizon cell phone tower and both Lake Country Power and MN Power equipment were affected by the fire, resulting in a loss of cell phone coverage and an interruption in transmission for local radio station, WELY.

Residents along Highway 1 were allowed to return to their homes at noon on May 19. Management transitioned to a local Type 3 Team on May 20, with the fire 90% contained and most of the heavy equipment demobilized. By 10 a.m. on May 22, the fire was declared controlled thanks to the efforts of approximately 127 people from a variety of agencies.

Outcome of this incident: No injuries. No homes were damaged. Three outbuildings were confirmed lost. Final size: 175 acres. The collaboration that went into this favorable outcome attests to the pre-existing, strong working relationship between MNICS partners, the local community and the Forest Service.

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