



Date: September 1, 2014

To: Mayor Searle & City Council

From: Rodger Worthen, City Administrator

SUBJ: After Action Report (AAR) on June 11 Trail-Way Fire

At approximately 3pm on the afternoon of June 11, 2014, it was reported a fire had begun along the Riverdale City trail way north of Riverdale road and adjacent the Weber River. The fire burned approximately 4 +/- acres of heavy vegetation along the City's trail and the river bank, it was reported contained early in the morning of June 12, 2014. The Trail Fire was destructive consuming significant vegetation, a wood trail bridge structure, water/sprinkler heads, garbage cans, planted vegetation, and fencing.

The fire was ignited by an individual demonstrating to his friends how quickly "cotton-seed" burns. This individual was later apprehended by Riverdale City Police. The criminal case/charges are pending. The blaze quickly spread into a significant wild land fire incident. This After Action Report (AAR) focuses on the actions directly related to the conditions of the incident, the response, and what was "learned" that we as City could improve upon. In addition, I have attached Appendix "A" identifying financial costs of the incident upon the City of Riverdale.

The After Action Review process was first used by the United States Army after the Vietnam War to capture lessons learned from simulated battles. These Reviews are now routinely conducted at all levels within various organizations after a major public safety or response event. After Action Reviews focus internally on answering questions to describe: 1) What happened; 2) What went well and why; and 3) What can be improved through the experience that transpired and how improvement(s) can be instilled to lessen or prevent a re-occurrence. At the conclusion of the review, the After Action Report is completed to share the results of the review with the entire work group or City staff to assist in learning.

This AAR focuses on the response namely on the aftermath of the incident. These findings were gleaned from several after-action meetings held with City department heads, employees, and other government agencies during July and August 2014. Although this report focuses solely on the response of the City, it does not discount the invaluable contributions of many local partner agencies and the efforts of first responders working in contiguous municipalities and state emergency response organizations. This report is focusing on the policies and procedures in a dedicated attempt to determine actionable items that can be identified and correct in advance of a subsequent event.

Strengths

The major strengths identified during the City's response to the Trail Fire are as follows:

- **Public Safety Collaboration/Mutual Aid:** Public safety agencies within the State of Utah began and rely upon effort build to build collaboration among and between the City's public safety departments or agencies. Riverdale City Fire Department has developed a strong working relationship with other entities through planning, training, and exercises as demonstrated on real-community events. The strength in collaboration was instrumental in the response to the Riverdale City Trail Fire.
- **Personnel:** Personnel from the City of Riverdale, local municipal fire response agencies, state Wild land fire crews demonstrated dedication to the incident response, as well as to the residents of Riverdale that live in the area of the Trail Fire. Training of personnel in wild land fire suppression clearly benefits our residents. In addition to the fire department(s), the ignition of the fire was initially seen and reported by an off-duty Riverdale police officer and his family. Apprehension of the suspect that caused the fire occurred as result of investigation of the incident by Riverdale City Police. Furthermore, quick response and eventual attainment of fire suppression was directly attributed to Riverdale Fire Department and surrounding mutual aid providers, agencies such as Roy City Fire, Ogden City Fire, Washington Terrace, South Ogden and South Weber Fire departments. In addition, the State of Utah Division of Natural Resources responded with assistance.
- **Training and Exercise:** The Riverdale City Fire and Police Departments are continually training for incidents that impact the safety of our residents. The City has participated in the planning efforts of Weber County and Northern Utah on incident response. Each department has a demonstrated history of coordinating and conducting multiagency, complex emergency response training exercises. The response and action of the firefighting efforts was a strength that was clearly demonstrated.
- **Relationships:** Pre-existing relationships among local government and non-profit agencies were instrumental in the well-coordinated response to the Trail Fire incident. Leadership personnel from local fire agencies were instrumental in ensuring a well-coordinated response. Leadership personnel have met face to face, engaged in training, and worked to solidify partnerships via legislative approved agreements over the past several years. These relationships provided the structure for an effective response to the aspects of containing the Trail Fire to the area of the river shoreline with no loss of private property.
- **Recovery:** The City recovered quickly from the damage to infrastructure. The City's Public Works department supported the fire suppression effort and was instrumental in the recovery effort and rebuilding of the damaged infrastructure. The Administration of the City acted quickly to recover lost resources, approve and vet reconstruction plans, and continues to promote and install the lessons learned from this event.

Primary Recommendations – What to Improve

The primary improvement recommendations are an important aspect of a Final After Action Report. Namely, what did we learn from the incident, what can we do differently, and what enhancements can we make both internally and externally?

- **Partner Agency Communications:** Overall this aspect of the response functioned as intended. Decisions were made rapidly at key points in time throughout the incident. The City should

ensure that radio and phone communication happens to first responders and key agency representatives as command decisions are made throughout the event. For the most part this information was shared accordingly but not immediate or timely. Existing communication technologies should be reviewed and modified to accomplish this.

- Communication from City personnel to adjoining property owners/residents, businesses, and Union Pacific Railroad operations should be improved. In many instances, the City's Fire Chief was the "communicator" during this incident taking him away from management duties. The use of a PIO would resolve this conflict and provide better dissemination of incident updates and status. As such, use of the City's Public Information Officer (PIO) could have been better utilized. The City should make improved efforts to communicate with residents and major business operations regarding emergency incidents, in addition, improvement to communications enhances event knowledge and response for involved property owners.
- Access to River Parkway Area: City Fire response crews encountered minor difficulty in accessing the area of the incident. Access was encumbered due to fencing and locating points of access along the river and trail path way by or thru private property, this encumbrance limited the number of ingress points upon the trail-way. As such, since the fire, the City has modified two access points along the pathway thus allowing for emergency vehicle access in an emergency response to the trail-way. The City has taken steps to improve access at the time of this publication.
- Extension of water line within the trail way access path from 575 West Street is a public works project that would supply water to firefighters more efficiently. The City, at the recommendation of the Riverdale Fire Chief and City Public Works director will undertake this project during next calendar year budget operations. By extending/constructing a new fire hydrant on this water line near the 575 West trail way entrance crews will have easier and quicker access to water supply.
- Fire Chief Roger Bodily identified potential improvements in the department's ability to deliver water to the fire via new/upgraded water hose lines; these are "Wild-land Hose Packs" which holds up to 300 feet of 1-inch forestry hose, which deploys as you walk. The department currently uses this type of hose to quickly deploy in case of wild-land fire. A weakness in this area is the limited number of these packs currently available to the department, the Chief recommends additional footage of this hose type be purchased during next year's budget cycle.
- Actively remove "non-native" tree species along the trail-way when resources permit. The City will continue to remove these trees as time and resources allow. Recently, the City removed Siberian Elm trees along the trail-way in accordance with the US Army Corps. Of Engineers 404 permit.
- Miscellaneous findings: The land area along the river upon which this incident occurred is an identified wetland and thus governed by the US Army Corp of Engineers. As such, regulation of land use activities upon the area is governed by the designation of US navigable wetlands contributory waters. Vegetation cannot be removed or altered unless the species is "non-native" to the lands upon which it grows. The City does own the land and has received a permit for the trail system in the area of the wetlands. Furthermore, maintenance and the continued needs of vegetation maintenance are not financially sustainable on the part of Riverdale City. Residents have chosen to live in this area, as such, potential hazards do exist when housing and structures are constructed adjacent wild-land interface areas or flood plains. Wildfires within these wild land interfaces areas pose great challenges and risks to both structural and wild land

firefighters. Firefighting tactics on wild land fires differ considerably from those in structure firefighting, as access to homes and availability of water are often limited, fuels are not confined and weather is a larger factor. Combining wild land firefighting and structure protection during extreme wildfire conditions is costly and dangerous. Fire prevention and planning in wild land areas are extremely important. Homeowners must understand and accept responsibilities of wildfire risks in these interface areas by investing in proper building and maintenance around their property. The City can assist with identifying potential problems upon private lands when invited to do so. However, the City cannot and should not undertake vegetation control in this area due to wet-land 404 permitting, and perpetual financial obligations that establish precedence, and liability.

- Enforcement and Education is critical for protection of resources. Increased police patrols at the time of cotton-seed emergence. The City will increase deployment of officers along the trail-way during this heightened time of fire danger. During the month of May and June the City experienced three fires along the trail-way. After the first man-caused fire the City increased patrols along the trail, however, fire danger cannot be curtailed by patrols alone. Education and awareness of the danger along the urban wild-land interface is critical to all that use the area and trail-way system. The City will be increasing the police presence along the trail and installing signage that posts the rules of use. These rules regulate and prohibit open flames along the trail-way among other enforceable measures.
- Investigate the “wetting” of cotton-seed along the trail way once the seed is done shedding from the trees. This material is highly flammable when grouped or clumped together. The City will review the possibility of wetting down this material along the trail way when possible to see if the material is less combustible once compacted. In theory this may be beneficial; the City will investigate the feasibility of such activity during the next year.

Conclusion

The Riverdale Trail fire was an incident that demanded the best of the City’s Fire Department. Fire personnel from the City and other communities reacted in a professional manner throughout the incident. This After Action Report is a tool to assist the City in finding ways to improve and assist in prevention of similar incidents along the trail-way and slope areas near the urban wild land interface.

Key lessons learned in response to this incident are:

- Mutual Aid is critical to support of major incident public emergency events.
- Continue development/ collaborate use of Mutual Aid and communications.
- Accessibility into the trail-way for emergency vehicles needs to be improved.
- Accessibility of water supply can be improved.
- Upgrade “Wild Land Fire Hose Packs” for the Fire Department.
- Communications worked satisfactorily but should be reviewed internally and externally.
- Enforcement of City ordinance regarding “open flames” within parks and trails is critical.
- Removal of vegetation along trail-way is governed by US Army Corp. of Engineers and is cost prohibitive and precedence correlated. City will continue to remove non-native trees as resources allow.
- Residents that desire to live in this area should take steps to protect private property were applicable.

- Police presence during high fire danger is important; City should take steps to improve this action.
- Education/communication of City ordinances regarding parks and trails can be improved.
- Use of City's PIO would be beneficial to "free up" incident commander on scene and provide incident status updates to residents and media.

Several of the above lessons were clearly demonstrated in this incident. As such, it is important the City take action to install an additional fire hydrant on 575 West stub street near the ingress to the trail-way. Recently, the City has taken steps to improve vehicle access onto the trail-way. The City should budget and make minor equipment upgrades in fire department hose capability and enforce and educate the City's current ordinance along the trail-way of prohibiting open flames. Placement of signage along the trails and parks of the City will improve enforcement of City code.

This document is a simple report of what occurred in the incident and is a step in a process to ensure that the City identifies proper incident response and builds upon them. The City should be committed to carrying out these recommendations. Overall, the recovery from the fire has been quick and straightforward to accomplish, other emergency response and recovery time frames can take years.

In conclusion, attached to this incident report is the costs incurred by Riverdale City in response and recovery to this event. While soft dollar costs are not or cannot be identified, the actual expenditures are reported. Much appreciation to all the employees of Riverdale City and adjoining Fire Agencies for their efforts in response and recovery of this incident, moreover, to the City Council and Mayor in support of the City's recovery efforts.

Appendix "A" – Costs of the Riverdale Trail Fire - June 2014

- 1- Additional Fire Department Personnel Costs - \$1,863.65 (personnel called in due to fire response)
- 2- Additional Police Department Costs - \$ 1,240.00 (personnel called in due to fire response)
- 3- Miscellaneous damage: Fencing, Wild Rose Plants, Sprinkler System, Trash Receptacles - \$6,000
- 4- Trail-Way Bridge replacement/reconstruction - \$23,679.00

TOTAL COST of TRAIL FIRE INCIDENT - **\$32,782.65**

Note:

These costs do not include police, fire dept., and administrative personnel hours indirectly related to the incident response expense or work to manage the reconstruction of the damaged trail-way bridge; only additional costs above normal operating hours.