



Jacob Ware, Concept Photography

By Val Jaffe

On a windy April day in the Northern Rockies, twenty machines with operators, lowboys, and support crew assembled to demonstrate the mechanical might of logging sides for fire suppression and rehab. Part of the first national weeklong inter-agency dozer boss training, the in-woods demo included daytime and night shifts for hands-on experience with mechanized task forces. Good practice for this year's fire season.

"Overhead must recognize the potential for more mechanized use," says George Neils, Fisher River Fire and Rescue, Montana, "especially as safety of human resources will become much more problematic with bigger fires and more WUI (Wildland Urban Interface)."

Dozers were only one of ten different equipment types that contractors brought to the event held on Montana State Land. Trainees learned to conduct equipment inspections, scout firelines, and work directly with operators. They executed minimal impact suppression tactics (MIST) and managed pruning operations for ladder fuel reduction and hazard tree felling.



Two task forces of complementary machines, configured specifically for the terrain, built firelines in two different forest fuel types. The firelines will be used for broadcast burning this Fall, and the wood harvested as a product of the demo will be sold, with the proceeds going to the state's public school trust fund.

Agile operation of the "dozervator" (Kobelco ED 190 excavator with shovel and thumb) was applied to rehabilitate firelines, while a carrier-mounted mulcher (Gyro-Track 25XP) left a rehab blanket of burn-resistant wood chips in its wake. Feller bunchers, harvesters, forwarders, skidders, skidgines, softtrack skidgines, super-skidgines, boom and carrier-mounted mulchers, and even a converted military tank vehicle were in on the action. Each one is catalogued in the Mechanized Equipment for Fire and Fuels Operations, made available at the demo and now online.

"More line officers and resource advisors should go to this workshop. This class is very progressive; looking to the future of equipment on the fireline and showed how we can do better work with less impact. What I learned will make me more efficient. The instructors were

top-notch!" Matt Weakland, BLM, dozer boss trainee.

Capable operators in well-outfitted machines showed the trainees, agency officers, and even a few Montana legislators, how safety and cost-savings are possible with mechanized fire teams. Everyone learned common equipment safety terms like FOPS, ROPS, and OPS.

One trainee noted it "was remarkable to see the new diversity of equipment."

Mechanized task forces, modeled after logging sides, offer more options to fire teams for direct and indirect fire suppression, with less impact than imagined.

This year, count on the growing cadre of equipment bosses to document successful strategies and tactics, and improve from lessons learned. For starters, they'll take back the night, when wildfire is generally the easiest to control. The workshop demo was a unique display of assembled machinery with experienced operators ready for fire operations contracts; one worth repeating.

Look for the next mechanized fire operations demo in Oregon, 2009. Loggers need this work alternative, while fire operations need timber industry contractors for all phases of forest fuels reduction. From pre-positioning equipment in fire-prone areas for initial attack, to fire suppression and burn rehabilitation, fire managers and taxpayers alike benefit from mechanized alternatives. If only the agencies can improve the ordering system to capture the efficiency of a logging side.

<http://www.nationalfiretraining.net/misc/meffo.pdf>

Mechanized Fire Team logo by Casey Steinke, Top Sign & Graphics

