



**OFFICE OF THE COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
EMERGENCY SESSION MINUTES**

Wednesday, April 20, 2022, 5:30 p.m.

Community Meeting Regarding Tunnel Fire

Sinagua Middle School, 3950 East Butler Avenue, Flagstaff, AZ, 86004

Present: Chair Patrice Horstman, Supervisor Jeronimo Vasquez, Supervisor Judy Begay, Supervisor Lena Fowler

Absent/Excused: Supervisor Matt Ryan

Also Present: County Manager Steve Peru, Deputy County Manager/Public Works Director Lucinda Andreani, Public Affairs Director Trey Williams, Program Manager III Gregory Nelson, Sheriff Jim Driscoll, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors Lindsay Daley were present in person.

The meeting was a community outreach meeting meant for evacuees of the Tunnel Fire.

Chair Horstman called the Special Session community outreach meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Chair Horstman spoke about acknowledging and recognizing what the community is going through. She thanked the first responders. She explained that the County will continue to share timely updates. She also went over the format of the meeting. She requested that citizens who have been evacuated from their home due to the Tunnel Fire to call the call center to get added to a contact list so that the County can contact them. She also explained that the County is focused on recovery. She thanked those who were in attendance.

Vice Chair Vasquez thanked the first responders and the County staff. He also thanked the Representative Tom O'Halleran, Senator Mark Kelly, Representative Kristen Sinema and Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez for coming or having staff come to the Emergency operations Center to visit. He also explained that they are working hard to get answers and will share any information as soon as they can. He noted that the Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day.

Incident Commander with the US Forest Service Matt Brown explained that there were first responders with various agencies that responded to the emerging incidents and that will be on the

scene until a more qualified management team is in place. He explained that they are a group made up of local people from the Flagstaff area.

Operations Section Chief of the Incident Management Team Steven Van Kirk went over the map that showed where the fire is and he explained where they have put resources to fight the fire. He explained that they have been battling spot fires and that the movement of the fire was to the north with the wind from today. He also explained that they made good progress to the east and where the dozer line is.

Meteorologist with U.S. National Weather Service Brian Klimowski explained the meteorology of the rapid spread of the Tunnel Fire. He explained the wind conditions of Tuesday and the winds that occurred over night, the weather outlook that will impact the Tunnel Fire, which will continue to be windy and dry. He also explained that a red flag warning has been issued that will continue into Thursday evening, that a strong front will come to the area Friday with cooler temperatures, continued winds and chance of showers. He spoke about the weather Saturday through Monday and that there will be a wind shift to the north with cooler temps, lighter winds from the northwest or north. Lastly, he explained that there are no significant storms in the future with a chance of showers on Friday but that it will be dry.

Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath thanked partners and acknowledged the pain and stress of the community as several residents had evacuated and one of their employees lost their home. He explained that they are looking ahead and working to keep people safe.

Coconino County Sheriff Jim Driscoll spoke about it being a difficult time with county employees and staff that are also evacuating. He explained the role of law enforcement during this time- safely evacuate, provide security, provide traffic control, provide orderly and safe re-entry. He spoke about re-entry being important but that it has to be done safely and there are still hazards in the area such as propane tanks, hazardous materials, animals, utilities that are hazardous, roads that may not be safe, burning of stumps underground, and safety of the firefighters who are still fighting the fire. He explained that there are a lot of people involved and that they will work for a safe re-entry back for people in coordination with the Forest Service.

Preparedness Division Manager with the County Health and Human Services Division Joel Bunis spoke about the Community Assistance Center. He explained how the assistance center can be accessed, how citizens can explain what needs they may have and staff will try to help them with the appropriate provider. He explained what information is needed, the Assistance center process and the services available such as behavioral health, food, animal care and financial assistance and housing assistance.

Lucinda Andreani, Deputy County Manager spoke about recovery efforts. She explained that the County will work hard to do what it can to care for the area and that the County will be with citizens through the entire process. She spoke about the communication with the state and federal government and with emergency organizations. She explained that staff from Representative O'Halleran, Senator Mark Kelly and Representative Kyrsten Sinema's offices have been there. She explained that a group, Team Rubicon, will be utilized to work on cleanup and recovery

after disasters. She also explained that the County will be working with the Arizona Department of Emergency Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency and will be working on preparing for assessment teams to go into the area and do property assessments to determine what the citizens and county are qualified for regarding assistance from the state or federal government. Deputy Manager Andreani spoke about how the County has engaged Waste Management to get dumpsters into the area to get burn materials off properties and how the County is working with United Way for volunteer efforts to assist with property recovery. She explained that she also serves as the Flood Control District Administrator and that the County has a flight scheduled to be conducted to collect information about the fire, characteristics of the fire, intensity of the fire, boundary of the fire, and get more detail about what has been burned. She spoke about the watersheds that will likely be impacted by the fire and that the County will work to identify the threats and manage those threats and mitigate impacts to properties.

Chair Patrice Horstman thanked Flagstaff Unified School District Superintendent Mike Penca for letting the County use the space for the meeting. She then opened the meeting up for questions.

Question 1 from unidentified person asked what is being done keep the fire coming back at the area. Incident Commander Matt Brown explained that were there is fire- they are trying to establish control lines and stop the spread within the neighborhood communities and monitor fire spots and that have been doing that all day today as it is the number one priority. Mr. Brown showed the map and explained where the primary concerns are and where the bulk of the resources are working. He explained that if the fire gets to a certain point there would need to be more evacuations of the Doney Park area or an evacuation up towards Antelope Hills.

Question 2 from John Walsher, who stated he has property in the Timberline area, asked why there are not air assets fighting the fire and asked if they can expect to see any in the following days. Incident Commander Matt Brown explained that they requested the air tankers this morning; however, air tankers have not been able to fly due to the winds.

Question 3 from unidentified person explained that she is a visitor to the area and was camping in the Coconino Forest across from Hwy 89 across and Sunset Crater. She explained that they had to leave everything including her conversion van and asked if it will be 3-4 more days until she can get into that area. Sheriff Jim Driscoll stated they will try to get an escort to get her in and get her out tomorrow.

Question 4 from Mike- last name not identified. He thanked everyone for their effort and explained that his daughter Cassidy lost everything in the fire, and he asked if there is any temporary housing that can be provided to help his daughter. Preparedness Division Manager with the County Health and Human Services Division Joel Bunis explained that they should call the Community Assistance Center to get help and that they can get temporary housing in a hotel or somewhere.

Question 5 from an unidentified person asked if the County will provide help with debris removal from the burned houses. Deputy County Manager Lucinda Andreani explained that Team Rubicon will bring heavy equipment and physical resources to remove debris and that the

County will bring in dumpsters to help. She explained that they are waiting until it is safe to go into the area.

Question 6 Fang Choia explained that she met someone named Kelly Becker and that Ms. Becker is at the KOA with disabilities and animals and will need assistance. Deputy County Manager Lucinda Andreani asked her to stay after the meeting to get the information so that they could get Ms. Becker some assistance.

Question 7 from an unidentified person asked if/when the information can be released as to whose homes have burned so that they can start talking to insurance. Sheriff Jim Driscoll answered that there have been about 25 homes burned and explained that they would like to get those people identified and get in contact with them specifically, before everyone is able to go back into the area. He explained that it needs to be safe, and that weather is a big factor in that.

Question 8 from an unidentified person asked when the information regarding the flyover will be available. Incident Commander Matt Brown answered that the flight will be done overnight and will likely be on the website tomorrow as well as provided in press releases. Deputy County Manager Lucinda Andreani explained that the information will also be on the County's website for the Tunnel Fire.

Question 9 from an unidentified person asked if they might be able to get into the Fernwood area to check on their animals and if they can get in daily. Sheriff Jim Driscoll answered that his office can assist if staffing permits and if it is during daylight hours- they will try to escort people in and do what they need to do.

Question 10 from an unidentified person asked if a transcript summary of the meeting can be provided for those that are hard of hearing. Chair Horstman answered that the meeting is being recorded and can be accessed on the County website.

Question 11 from an unidentified person asked how soon they can get back into the area. Deputy County Manager Lucinda Andreani answered that it needs to be safe for people to go back in and don't want to let people in and then have to evacuate again.

Question 12 from Dennis Chavez asked if the Forest Service will ban fires on the forest land. Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath answered that their agency continues to have those discussions and that some people follow fire bans and some don't. He explained that they are considering it.

Question 13 from an unidentified person stated that a laser light would be helpful when staff speaks about the map and then asked how far the fire has gone into Alpine Ranch. Incident Commander Matt Brown answered that the fire is not in Alpine Ranch.

Question 14 from an unidentified person asked why the Forest Service will not shut down access to the forest. Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath answered that forest closures may not be the answer to the problem and that if they put a gate up, people drive around it and that it is impossible to close the forest. He explained that he understands the frustration around the process of determining campfire restrictions and closing the forest. He also

explained that the citizens who follow the rules are the best source of information when the forest is open, which can decrease response time to fires. Deputy County Manager Lucinda Andreani spoke about the Museum Fire flood mitigation work that has to be done, which is impacted when there are forest closures and fire restrictions.

Question 15 from an unidentified person asked what the percentage is of wildfires that are human caused. Jeremy from the Forest Service answered that human caused fires have statistically been lower than lightning fires.

Question 16 from an unidentified person explained that his wife called the fire in at 4:22 p.m. on Sunday and asked how the fire got out of hand Tuesday even when it was reported quickly. Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath explained the resources that were deployed when the fire was called in and explained the sequence of events in their work to suppress the fire. He explained that there was no fire and no smoke by Sunday night and Monday; however, then by Tuesday morning there was smoke and flame.

Question 17 from an unidentified person asked why they didn't do more, knowing that the winds were going to be bad. Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath answered that they asked themselves what they could have done different or if they could have done more and that he didn't feel there was anything different that should have been done since there was no smoke or flame.

Question 18 from an unidentified person explained that he lived in Fernwood and that it is the second fire and that it is frustrating to see the slow response on the fire and that he thought it would be taken care of and that it costs a lot of money for taxpayers. Flagstaff District Ranger for Coconino National Forest Matt McGrath explained that the fire was called in at 4:22 p.m. and that they were there within 11 minutes and stated that he may have been speaking about a different fire.

Chair Patrice Horstman explained that they may get more information with the investigation that is being done and encouraged residents to sign up for emergency notifications and to stay safe.


Chair Horstman adjourned the special session/community meeting at 6:57 p.m.

COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

(SEAL)



Patrice Horstman, Chair

ATTEST:


Lindsay Daley, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

