

Saturday, 8/11/2012

Prior to this day neither I or my family had any contact with the USFS or ODF. My brother, Bill Albertson, contacted me via phone to say the fire was coming into Yocum Valley. I loaded my backhoe onto a trailer and followed Bill to Yocum going thru Long Valley. On the Road #3940 that goes thru Long Valley and enters Yocum from the north we encountered many hotshot crews prepping the road. WE did not know at that time what their plan was in regard to the prep work on this road. We arrived in Yocum around mid day and found a hotshot crew leader coming off some of our property. We stopped him at the Cinder Pit. He informed us after we asked him what all the hotshot crews were doing that we had just passed and he said they were preparing to burn an 8000 to 9000 acre block what would also burn all of our timber. This block of land is also a large part of the water shed that supplies water to Albertson Reservoir, which we use to irrigate 1200 acres in the valley. I asked the hotshot crew leader why we had not been contacted. He replied that he did not know why, but continued to say they would put in a cat line around our property. I told him we had property outside of the fence line. He then gave me the name of Brian Watts and a phone number for him, and told me he was the Incident Commander, I.C. My brother Bill and I drove to the east side of Yocum to a gravel pit on the rim between Dog Lake and Yocum where we had cell service. I called the Fire Camp and asked to speak to Brian Watts, after about 15 minutes of waiting on the phone Mr. Watts came on the line. I told him who I was, where I was and asked him why we had not been notified that the USFS and ODF were prepping to burn Governor's Ridge and all of our timber lands? His reply was "Sorry, my bad." I told him that was not an acceptable answer. I also informed him that the "plan" to burn-- the 8,000 to 9,000 acres including our timber lands—was criminal. I then called Dustin Gustaveson at ODF and told him what we had discovered. He said he would send Mike Carlson of ODF to meet with us and get things taken care of. Dustin also said Rick Wagner with ODF would call me shortly to discuss the situation. Wagner did not call while I waited on the rim—the only place we had cell service. Bill and I went back into the valley and spent the night in our vehicles. Mike Carlson showed up and I took him back to the top of the rim between Yocum Valley and Dog Lake and showed him a better burnout spot that made sense and would NOT burn the 9000 acre Governor's Ridge block that they planned to burn. He said it was a good idea but he didn't think he could get it by the "bean counters". I told him that the fire had stopped moving towards Yocum, it had hung up under the rim on the Dog Lake side and it was ridiculous to burn Governor's Ridge and our timber lands. He agreed.

Sunday, August 12, 2012

Bill and I went from the valley back up to the rim to make phone calls about 5:00 am. I had a message that Rick Wagner left after we had left the cell phone area the night before. He said that they had got the whole idea of burning out Yocum Valley shut down and that Mike Carlson was working on a burnout a lot closer to the fire that made more sense. He also said he would be up to meet with us. Mr. Wagner did not get his phone hung up as he thought and continued speaking with someone that must have been in his vehicle. He and the other person went on to have an animated conversation about us and the fire situation. Mr. Wagner went on to make jokes about what he had said to me and what he should have said to me. He also referred to all the dozers sitting around doing

nothing and having no lights while everything turned to shit. We spent the rest of Sunday in Yocum cleaning an area around our cabin with my backhoe. Bill found where the USFS cat had cut the fence in one of the fields from the night before when they put the cat line in. We found that they had not put the line in around the fence as promised. We went home for a short time in the afternoon because the fire was STILL not moving west towards Yocum. It was still laid down just like it was on Saturday when we arrived. When we returned in the evening things had not changed, but as it got dark we could see that there was fire in Green Valley which turned out to be more back burn. We could see head lamps along the rim between Yocum and Dog Lake. They were trying to back burn along the rim where the fire had a natural stop and where it had been for two days. They did not back burn from the road leading to the rock pit as I had discussed with Mike Carlson the night before. We went home about 11:00 p.m.

Monday, August 13, 2012

I went to town to fire camp for the 6:00am morning meeting or briefing. I talked with Greg Pittman and Dustin Gustaveson and they introduced me to Travis Medima, ODF assistant chief of fire. Travis asked me if I would meet with the two IC commanders, Brian Watts and Steve Gage. During the meeting I told Watts and Gage that ODF personnel, Pittman and Gustaveson, had told me that it took a week for ODF and the IC team to get on the same page. I told them that was not acceptable and that management was like a bunch of dogs around a fire hydrant. I restated to Mr. Watts that his remarks from our phone conversation about us not being contacted in regards to burning us out and specifically the "sorry, my bad" was not acceptable. During the meeting I asked the entire group "where does it say that you can burn us out without prior notification?" They responded that it was not going to happen. I took them for their word. I left to meet with my folks and Bill for breakfast. We were eating and I was explaining that things had been resolved when my brother Hank called from the rim in Yocum to say that the fire was entering Yocum near the Picnic Ground, because the back burn from Green Valley, that had been set the night before, had jumped the road and was heading for our property. Bill went to Yocum in his pickup and I went home to load my backhoe. I went to Yocum via the Green Valley road, #4017, Hank said the fire had laid down and I could get through that way. I drove into Yocum into a safe zone and unloaded the backhoe and headed to the picnic ground. Bill and Hank had a good start on digging a hand line on the east edge of the property, so using the backhoe I started widening the line, moving downed trees and continued putting in more line. There were no other people around, it was several hours before two dozers showed up. One dozer operated by John Richmond started building line on the east boundary from south to north and on up the rim onto USFS land. Two helicopters showed up and made many drops to the east and north of us. We had a good line along the property and the water drops had things well under control. Also two air tankers made two drops a piece on the north line. Bill and I met up in the meadow with the back hoe and where he had parked his pickup. We saw four or five Greyback rigs leaving the meadow.

I built a pad to park the backhoe free of anything combustible. We had heard chainsaws running after the dozers showed up but didn't know that they were prepping the road that leads to the picnic ground. This road is the only access to the property! At about 1:00 pm. I told Bill I was going to check the fire line on the east side of the property. Bill

stayed with the pickup and backhoe. I walked to the east line and went south to the property corner and saw all was good there. I then went north up under the rim onto USFS lands and met up with John Richmond running the dozer. I worked near him for some time. I then observed a wall of flames to the south near the south property line. I headed back to Bill and the equipment; I was thinking that something had gone terribly wrong. I found Bill in a panic as he and Hank had been looking for me thinking I had gone south to where the wall of fire had erupted. To my total disbelief this wall of fire was a burn out that was set the full length of the access road leading to the picnic grounds, it was our only way out! The Lake County sheriff, Phil McDonald, had arrived while I was working near John Richmond. The sheriff was there looking for Hank, because his wife was concerned about his safety. Phil had stopped at the intersection of #4017 and the access road to the picnic grounds and asked the USFS personnel if the Albertsons were still on the picnic ground property. They told him that we were still there so he came down the access road and met with Bill and Hank. The USFS did not advise the sheriff or my family that they were going to do a burnout on the access road. We had no contact with the crews that set the back burn fires on the access road. After the burn out had cooled down the Land Owner Liaison group showed up on the property: Rick Wagner--ODF, Kelli Carlson--ODF, Dustin Gustaveson--ODF, and Randy Ostmen--USFS, also Daniel Tague, Lake County Sheriff's Deputy and Mark Suba USFS arrived on the scene. I met Rick Wagner and confronted him about the phone message he left Saturday night. He did not deny what had happened and seemed very embarrassed. The conversation with the Land Owner Liaison Group was very pointed and sometimes heated. None of them could or would answer the question of who authorized the burnout that trapped us on the property. We stayed on the property until early in the evening and then I took the backhoe back to the Cinder Pit in the middle of Yocum. We continued to monitor the fire for hotspots for several days. I then moved the backhoe home to the Westside. Later that week when the fire came close to the valley and the Westside community a friend called and was concerned that his home may be in danger as well as others on the west edge of the valley. I drove the backhoe to his home and did some work around his house, removing sagebrush. ODF personnel showed up and said that they had a dozer but they wouldn't unload it; they took it to the Mill Flat area and kept it on stand by near the north edge of the flat. The fire had already gone through that area and was headed south and west toward the valley. As the result of ODF's refusal to unload their dozer local residents—Evans Ranch, Lakeview Water Users, Ace Felder and John Albertson cleaned debris on about 2.5 miles of canal road on the west edge of the valley while the ODF dozer sat on stand by. I was told by Dustin Gustaveson that the dozer was on stand-by in case the fire decided to go north. As we all know the fire went 20 plus miles south into California, effecting about 25,000 acres of private timber owned by Collins Company and others. I contacted Dustin Gustaveson after the fire was out and asked him about getting reimbursed for my equipment costs; his reply was "We didn't ask you to help." These are the types of answers we have received for the past 8 months.

The public should be appalled by the mismanagement of our lands and resources. If they could see first hand what is happening when it comes to forest management and fire suppression they would demand changes at the highest level. We, the affected land owners, have seen first hand the lack of accountability in both the USFS and the ODF

and are asking our State and US representatives to step up and help us make the necessary changes so this doesn't continue to happen across the West. In conclusion— You can't fix the problem if you won't admit that there is a problem.