## Appendix E: August Total Eclipse

August 21, 2017 was a memorable day in the state of Oregon – the day of a total solar eclipse that crossed the United States. The path of totality began just north of Newport and ended just north of Ontario as it passed into Idaho. However, this eclipse was also at the typical height of fire season and the state of Oregon had advertised hard to bring eclipse viewers into the state. The state expected about one million visitors for up to a week to view the eclipse and participate in associated events, such as music festivals. The number of expected visitors would also create a significant fire prevention and education need and increased emergency response capability for both wildfires and human health and safety.

Planning for the eclipse in the Forest Service and BLM fire organization began in January with monthly calls to local units to develop prevention and response plans. Coordination calls also occurred between the federal and state agencies, such as Oregon Department of Forestry, the State Fire Marshall, and the Oregon Office of Emergency Management. Oregon was divided into west, central, and eastern zones to facilitate planning. Recreation, Law Enforcement, and Fire Management all had roles to play before, during, and immediately after the eclipse.

Within the Fire Management organization, the State Office-Regional Office (SORO) served as the coordinator and communicator between the three zones, passing ideas along for how to prepare and potentially respond to emergency situations, such as new fire starts, accidents, and injuries. Particularly important was evacuation planning in the event of a new fire or existing fire that would threaten any of the many impromptu campsites or event sites created for eclipse viewing. Since many viewing sites were characterized by typical forest and rangeland roads with limited traffic capability, another important concern was responding to medical emergencies.

Part of the preparations included fire severity requests to bring in extra fire fighting resources and helicopters with medivac capability in addition to firefighting capability. The Aviation program was responsible for keeping track of helicopters and fixed wind aircraft, including securing motel rooms so that pilots could get the level of rest needed to meet safety requirements. Local airports, such as the one in John Day, provided parking areas for the additional aircraft.

The Fire Operations program was responsible handling new fire starts and making early severity funding requests. Well before the eclipse, it was obvious that fire danger levels were trending above seasonal normal, further increasing fire risks associated with influx of people into the eclipse viewing area. As part of that effort a National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) team was stationed at SORO to support both the local units and SORO before and during the eclipse. NIMO teams consist of seven members assigned year-round and full-time to Command and General Staff positions (Incident Commander, Safety Officer, Public Information Officer, Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, and Finance Section Chief). In addition, the Central Oregon Fire Management Service (COFMS) established a Multi-Agency Command (MAC) group consisting of the Forest Service, BLM, Oregon Department of Forestry, and county and local fire departments prior to and during the event.

Lastly, there was the need for a vastly increased fire prevention education effort. Many of the expected visitors to viewing sites were foreign nationals and residents from elsewhere in the United States with limited to no experience in western fire seasons and the associated fire risks that can arise from campfires, carelessness, or driving through dried grass. SORO brought in five national prevention teams to talk to the eclipse viewers one-two weeks ahead of the eclipse. These prevention teams worked with local units to know who to contact, when, and to craft specific messages. In addition, SORO provided numerous eclipse and fire prevention handouts such as stickers and brochures to help spread the safe viewing and fire prevention messages.

At the time of the eclipse approached, monthly coordination calls became weekly calls. Oregon’s Office of Emergency Management established an Emergency Operations Center and a Joint Information Center in Salem, which included a representative from SORO. One purpose of the Joint Information Center was to ensure that all participants at the federal, state, and local level had the same information and to avoid having that information pass through multiple layers. In addition, SORO recommended that federal units in each zone of the state embed a representative in the Emergency Operations Center for that zone. The Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordination Group (PNWCG) worked to coordinate fire restrictions between the federal agencies and the state while the Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC) provided weather forecasts for eclipse viewing areas. In the western Oregon zone, the Northwest Oregon BLM District and the Willamette and Siuslaw National Forests created precut orders for closures in certain areas to prevent eclipse viewers from entering hazardous areas with on-going wildfires.

As the day of the eclipse approached, it was clear that the Forest Service had to close potential eclipse viewing spots near or on the crest of the Cascades due to on-going wildfires. These closures displaced some eclipse viewers to other locations and resulted in the cancelation of some events planned for the Jefferson Park area on Mt. Jefferson. In addition, the potential for smoke to obscure eclipse viewing in areas away from the immediate vicinity of a wildfire became a concern.