

Emergency Meeting

May 12, 2000

The Board of County Commissioners, in and for the County of Otero, State of New Mexico, met in an Emergency Meeting at the Otero County Courthouse in Alamogordo, County and State aforesaid. Meeting called to order by the Chairman at 3:30 p.m., May 12, 2000; and he announced that reasonable notice for this meeting was given to the Alamogordo Daily News, Holloman Sunburst, El Paso Times, Mountain Monthly, and to Radio Stations, KPSA, KINN and KYEE.

Present:

Tim McGinn	Chairman
Richard Zierlein	Vice-Chairman
Ronny Rardin	Member
Ruth Hooser	County Manager
Virginia Fletcher	Assistant Administrator
Robyn Silva	Deputy Clerk

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1. The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked the Village of Cloudcroft for allowing the County to use their facilities and everyone else in attendance for being here on such short notice.

The following people were present: Dave Venable, Mayor of Cloudcroft, Kelly Wallis, ADPS, Mary Holguin-Spring, Village Clerk of Cloudcroft, Gary Atwell, Chief Alamo West County Fire Resource Officer, Joe Bailey, Emergency Services Representative from the City of Alamogordo, Denise Ottariano, Lincoln NF Public Affairs Specialist.

Commissioner Zierlein requested that Denise from the forest service begin this

meeting by updating the public of their knowledge of the fire and where we stand at this point.

The fire started at approximately 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2000 at Scot Able Campground. From the time the fire started until this morning we had extreme fire behavior. That means that it was growing at a rate that surpassed what we were capable of doing to contain the fire. It basically burned from the 4-H Camp in Scot Able Canyon in an east northeasterly direction and skimmed by Sacramento and Weed. After it passed Weed it changed direction and headed south by the Bell Ranch where it slowed down a bit. Last night they focused on evacuating people out of their homes. That was the main priority. Then concentrated on structural protection. Last night the winds did not die down like they should have but they have died down somewhat today. The next concern was to focus on directly building lines from the anchor point, which was the origin of the fire at Scot Able. They have brought in 12 of 32 crews that were ordered. We have nine air tankers that are being used. It is so hard to get in and assess the situation because the fire is so active and there is so much smoke. What we could determine through reconnaissance in the air was that approximately 20 structures have been lost. She further stated that a Type 2 Incident Management Team is coordinating the management of this fire and because of the severity of this fire we will be bringing in a Type I Team that will be here as soon as possible. These teams are a group of people that are trained to work together to fight major disasters such as fires, floods, and hurricanes through the incident **command system** to manage events like this. They are made up of experts in the fields of the Incident **Commander**, Safety, Finance, Air, Logistics and are all very experienced as a team in this area. Mr. Bryan McGuire from the audience stated that the team that has been sent here is made up of people mostly from Southern California and they handle these situations time and time again. This same team also handled 2 or 3 of the major hurricanes last year in the South. This

management team is very skilled and very good at what they do.

Commissioner Rardin stated that the County has asked Joe Bailey from the City of Alamogordo to act in the capacity of Mike Riley, the Emergency Services Manager who is currently on vacation.

Commissioner Rardin asked how Otero County could help the Forest Service with the situation.

Denise stated that the main thing to do is to get the information out because there is a lot of rumors out that are putting people into a panic. The winds are mostly westerly. If the fire were to spread it would most likely go in an east-northeast direction. Michael Nivision stated that they have been handling a lot of phone calls with misinformation and when there is a phone call from a television station or a resident who has seen something on the television that is false we try to get the number of the person or business giving out the false information and contact them to correct the information. Dave Venable stated that one problem that has occurred is that the Village is having a hard time trying to develop a contact point with the Forest Service. Denise stated that the command post is at mile marker 31 at James Canyon Camp Ground. Denise stated that the message the Forest Service is trying to convey is that although there is a fire in Ruidoso and the fire in the Sacramento's, the fires are just effecting those areas. The forest is not closed, the communities are not closed. It is just effecting the area where the fire is, not the surrounding area. The Lincoln National Forest went into a level 3 fire restriction as of today. This means no fire of any kind is allowed in the Lincoln National Forest. Commissioner McGinn asked where all of the supplies be taken and what do they need. Denise stated that what needs to be the focus right now is the evacuees. There are approximately 125 people that have been evacuated from their homes. The fire is very active and it maybe a few days before they can get back into their homes. Shelters are being

set up at the Cloudcroft High School and the Church of Christ. Commissioner Zierlein stated that the Weed School is a County building and once people can go back in it will be available for use. One of the priorities is getting people back into their homes as soon as possible. Commissioner Rardin asked about the Senior Citizens in the mountains. Mr. Nivision stated that there is a complete list of all the seniors and people at risk that are on life support and what kind of life support they need. Mr. Nivision stated that communication is the tough thing and is ongoing. What is the policy on allowing the people to return to their homes? We do want them to have access as soon as possible but right now the fire is very active and their lives would be in jeopardy if they were allowed back in. We do not have the legal authority to stop them from going to their homes. Once they are out they cannot go back in. Commissioner Rardin stated that the Commission will have the County Administrator get with the Sheriff and see if they can have escorts to go into their property. Mr. Nivision requested that the shelter be moved to the Weed School instead of Cloudcroft because the residents would be more comfortable closer to home. That is a good idea, but right now that is in the path of the fire. Denise stated that one other problem that occurs during fires is that people kindheartedly flood into fire camps, when really they are not useful. The best place they would be most helpful would be at the shelters. Commissioner Zierlein stated that we need to let the public know that they are appreciated but that only the trained people can be on the line. Denise gave an idea of how their system works as far as people working the fire and how we get them. The Forest Service works through an incident command system. The Forest Service already has people all over the nation that are trained in all different areas. They are qualified both academically and physically. When there is an incident we go through a system to order people. The first ones ordered are the closest. For the fire here we go to the Lincoln Zone dispatch center.

They have a list of everyone in southeast New Mexico who are qualified. Then we go regional which is Albuquerque then nationally. The Forest Service also has private companies in the area they contract out. Michael Nivision stated that when a fire occurs all of the volunteer fire departments in the County come out and want to help, since the Forest Service is setting up their system there has been some conflicts whether they should be out there or not. These conflicts need to be resolved. Mr. Nivision stated that it needs to be worked out if there needs to be a red card or not. The volunteer fire fighters were told in Ruidoso that they could not go out to fight the fire unless they have a red card. This issue goes all the way down to feeding the fire fighters. Yesterday the fire fighters were eating anything they could make today we were told that we could not make sandwiches or serve cokes because the contractors would be upset. These are issues that need to be resolved. Commissioner Rardin asked if there are any restrictions for people flying over the fire? Denise stated there is a restriction. While there is aircraft fighting the fires there is always temporary restrictions in place that covers over and around the fire. The restriction goes up 3000 feet. This information is broadcasted to all airports and bases. The Commission stated that the information that has come to us is very comforting and we would appreciate the continued openness. We are not fighting the fire but our updates are very important. The Village Offices has been set up to be the focal point. Michael Nivision complimented the Village and the County for working together. **We have broken down** our boundaries, we are not the Village or the County we are people helping people. Commissioner Zierlein stated that as far as the County is concerned the focal point started out being here in Cloudcroft and not to have any confusion this is the best place for us. Commissioner Zierlin stated that the County has a lot of resources that need to make available. Commissioner McGinn stated that the Assessors office have a print out all of the structures that are

in area of the fire. At this time there has been no confirmed cause of the fire. Commissioner Rardin made a motion to allow our County Administrator to take our emergency funds which are set aside for this type of situation and any property that is under our assets that can help contain the fire and that the County become a player in fire. Commissioner McGinn seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously. See pages

Joe Bailey stated that there needs to be a Resolution from the County declaring a disaster. From there it will go to the Governor then to FEMA. FEMA is going to want a detailed description of what everything that has been done. All the people that have been affected by the fire need to start compiling a list of everything that was lost and what they need to be compensated for.

Commissioner Rardin made a motion to allow the commission to take action, pass a resolution and direct staff to contact FEMA so they can review the resolution. Commissioner McGinn seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously. See pages

The Commission thanked Denise for contacting them. Until the fire camp is in place they are going to be taking calls at the Sacramento Station and also at the Sheriff's dispatch. There are 9 tankers and 32 crews ordered and 12 are already here. Wesley Lane superintendent of Cloudercroft Schools stated that food is arriving from all over the state. If they need any kind of help with canned goods and paper goods please let him know.

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The time being 4:15 PM, the Chairman recessed the meeting.

APPROVED:

CHAIRMAN

ATTESTED:

OTERO COUNTY CLERK