**July 2, 2023 Brush Fire Extinguished**

**A Belated Thank You to Our Valued Firefighters**

**10/10/23**

On July 2nd Seal Rock FD participated with Newport, Yachats and Central Oregon Coast fire departments, in containing and extinguishing a potentially devastating fire just south of Waldport. Training, practice, recruiting and other preparations reduced the fire to a mere byline in the news.

The fire began with the discharge of fireworks from two individuals who attempted to put it out with a fire extinguisher. They failed and fled the scene.

A witness called the emergency number and several departments responded. Our Seal Rock Fire Department responded quickly and we were first on scene, even though this was out of our district, and we were the furthest from the fire. Initially Joe Munger and Neeko Gilbert saw the fire while driving South across the Alsea Bay Bridge. Neeko immediately accelerated. Seconds mattered. They rolled on scene and confirmed instant smoke and giant flames—a wildland fire rapidly spreading. They were confronted by a wall of flame reaching upwards of twenty feet. The fire was eating new territory at a rate of several feet per second. Their cool heads and quick actions set a positive tone for the day.

Joe Munger, Seal Rock Fire Department Captain and Training officer. His training certifications include Fire Fighter 1, Fire fighter 2, Fire Fighter Officer 1, Instructor 1, Pumper Operator and EMT. He has been with the department for one year.

Neeko Gilbert, Seal Rock Fire Department Firefighter and Emergency Medical Responder. His training certifications include Fire Fighter 1, Fire Fighter 2, Emergency Medical Responder, and Driver Operator. He had been with the department for four months.

Joe and Neeko were at SRFD Bayshore Station 62 when they got the call. They were pulling their gear off Rescue 62, getting ready to be relieved from shift. The call came from Brush 82 in Yachats at about 2 PM. Their initial information was for a low-risk grass fire. Given the strength of the wind and the tinder-dry situation for most of the county, they knew the situation would escalate from low-risk immediately. They put on their turnouts and went to work. Neeko was the Apparatus Officer, so he drove Rescue 62 while his captain was the company officer. They took Rescue 62 to the fire. The fire fighters encountered a rapidly spreading blaze with a front of about one-hundred feet. Joe took initial command to direct the fight for containment until help arrived. The wind, and steep terrain, combined in a manner that might allow the fire to leapfrog to the South, endangering beach houses and possibly Yachats. The fire was already too big for two firefighters, and as help arrived, Joe turned command over as he felt he had to respond to the immediate threat he observed initially. He then directed his attention to where he and Neeko were needed most—a point ahead of the moving flames were the vegetation narrowed.

Neeko Gilbert: “My captain and I were fire attack/ beach division, which consisted of rappelling down a small cliff with a charged wildland hose, contacting the fire, and constant battle with the red beast.”

Firefighters arrived from Yachats FD, Newport FD. and Central Coast FD. They attacked the fire directly with Munger as the Beach Group Leader. They worked on the fire line for five to six hours.

A quote from Joe Munger: “My thoughts were that this was a fast-moving fire, threatening people and houses. I knew from my initial size up that this was going to be bigger than us. We needed to scale up the incident to properly manage it.”

Paul Highfill received a page at his Seal Rock home. He joined fellow firefighter Lyle Beard at Station 61of SRFD. They rushed Engine 62 South through Waldport to the fire. They joined Joe and Neeko on the front line.

Paul Highfill, Seal Rock Fire Department firefighter since January 8, 1988. His training certifications include Firefighter I and Water Rescue. He has also been a First Responder.

Lyle Beard is another long serving firefighter with many years’ experiences and, with Paul, the longest serving volunteers in the Department.

Paul’s initial perception of the fire was, “it covered three-hundred to five-hundred square feet.” Brush and trees covered the steep terrain with no obvious fire breaks. Paul and Lyle added their efforts to stopping the fire.

SRFD had 8 people on scene. Joe Munger, Neeko Gilbert, Erick Deiter-Small, Jeremy Garbina, Jeff Mathia, Paul Highfill, Lyle Beard, and Jeff Steere.

In addition, we had 5 at the station on standby ready to protect our district or other unprotected districts, or leave for the grass fire on a moment’s notice. Emily Clark, Greg Musil, Nicole McKay, Joe Schwab, and Lisa Welch. A total of 13 Firefighters.

A quote from Neeko Gilbert:” I think it could have gone a lot worse. I’m glad we immediately knew what we had to do. My captain and I make a good team. It was Joe and I fighting that monster initially and I’m glad we contained it. Super happy no one got injured and we did a good and thorough job.”

So, how did the day end?

The fire was visibly extinguished. Smoke remained. The US Forest Service stayed on watch until no chance of reignition existed. The assembled teams succeeded by combining manpower, sharing the water supply, and using each other’s tools.

Covered with soot, sticky with sweat in their heavy turnouts, roasted from the fire and July weather, the fire crew reassembled for pizza and winding down.

The remark was made that they looked and smelled like real fire fighters.

Which, fortunately for Seal Rock and the neighboring districts, they are!

**A short synopsis of the equipment committed to this fire:**

Rescue 62, first out from Bayshore. Wild land fire rig, rescue and extrication. The workhorse of the district.

Engine 62, first out Seal Rock Station:850-gallon fire fighting engine, including structural fires.

Tender 61: 1800-gallon capacity normally used to shuttle water but is equipped with hose.

Engine 64: The same as engine 62.

**By: Tom Snethen, 10-1-1 volunteer**

**Edited by Seal Rock Fire**