

OCTC Impact Area –Fire Specialist Report

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Area Description (Fire):

Fire is both a threat to natural resources and, if used properly, a valuable ecosystem management tool. OCTC fire history, frequency, threats to mission and natural resources, wildland fire protection protocols, and prescribed burning are detailed in the IDARNG Integrated Fire Management Plan (IDARNG IWFMP 2013). The 2013 IWFMP is modeled after the BLM Fire Management Plan and is designed to meet military and BLM requirements for the proper management of wildland fuels and fires while contributing to the preservation of the NCA.

The OCTC as a Fire Planning Unit (FPU) is within the BLM Boise District and the BLM managed, Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). The OCTC is divided into five fire management units (FMU); Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and Impact. The FPU often experiences fire ignitions that escalate to large fires in a short time, due to predominantly flashy fuel types including annual grasses and brush, combined with summer temperatures in the 90- to 105-degree range, and humidity in the 10- to 25-percent range. The fire season typically starts in May and ends in mid-October. Fires can occur as early as March and as late as December in dry years. The Impact Area is a mix of native perennial bunchgrass in the north half and exotic annual grasses/forbs in the south, both of which return the following spring.

In general, prevention is the primary emphasis of fire management on the OCTC. This includes adjusting military training during periods of high fire danger and presentation of environmental awareness materials that stress the importance of preventing fire. Fire danger is evaluated with information provided by three IDARNG maintained remote automated weather stations (RAWS) within the OCTC. The OCTC fire suppression program (began in 1997) protects numerous acres of shrub habitat and provides a safe environment for Soldiers and the public. This programs effectiveness is demonstrated by the OCTC containing the largest stand of big sagebrush remaining in the NCA. OCTC fire crews place high priority on protecting slickspot peppergrass habitat in the Bravo FMU.

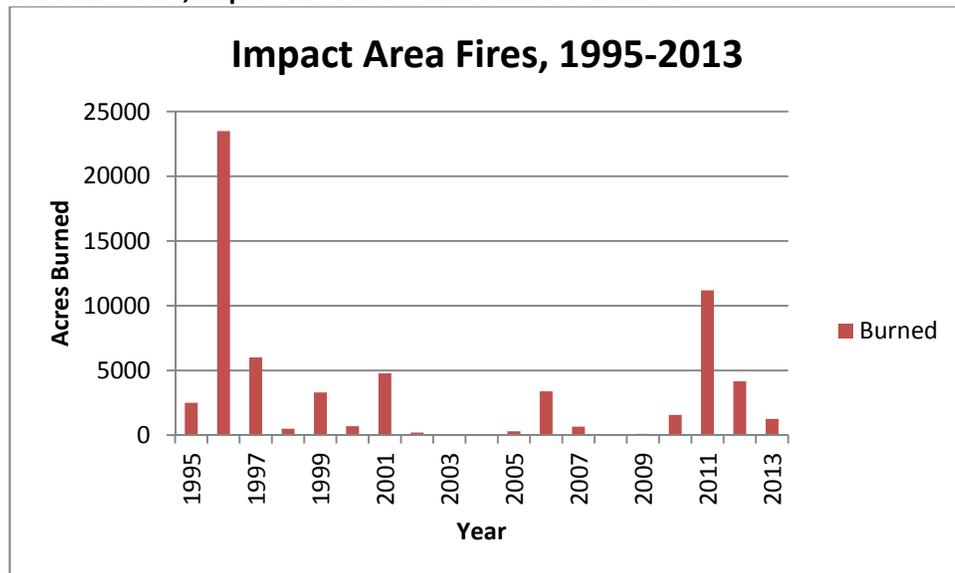
Prescribed fire as a management tool is limited on the OCTC to tumbleweed removal along fence lines, target areas, and firebreaks within the Impact Area. Many OCTC native plants (sagebrush, winterfat, and shadscale) are eliminated by fire. Since the introduction of exotic annuals to the area, wildfires have continued to burn larger areas, more often. Exotic annual plant seeds survive these fires while sagebrush and other shrubs do not.

Specific areas within the Impact Area are likely to burn every year. These areas include the livestock “drift” fence, which divides the spring/fall grazing allotment area on the north from the winter allotment area on the south. Tumbleweeds gather along the fence line each year, providing large areas of flammable material. Various target areas on individual ranges are likely to burn during training activities. Training Site personnel prepare prescribed burn plans addressing these areas and coordinate with BLM fire staff each spring. Long-range scheduling of prescribed burning is not feasible as wildfire and annual burning conditions greatly affect burning schedules. However, the spring burning season minimizes the disturbance to wildlife and is most effective if completed before May when Annual Training events and the fire season begin. For purposes of effective burning and fire control, proper temperature conditions, relative humidity, wind speed and direction, and fuel moisture must normally be met prior to burning. Training Site personnel staff, seasonal firefighters, and Natural Resources personnel receive appropriate fire management/suppression training from qualified BLM or National Interagency Fire Center trainers before participating in prescribed burning.

Available Data Investigation

This report is based on OCTC annual fire reports (IDARNG 1995-2013), IDARNG GIS data, and the 2013 IDARNG IWFMP. From 1995 to 2013, an average of 3,378 acres (6% of the total area) within the Impact Area burned annually with a low of 6 acres burned in 2004 and a high of 23,500 acres in 1996 (Table 1). In comparison, during the last 30 years, the Boise District BLM lands surrounding the OCTC experienced a total of 3,057 fire starts which burned approximately 2,093,387 acres, for an annual average of 69,890 out of 3,966,542 total acres (IDARNG IWFMP 2013).

Table 1. OCTC, Impact Area Acres Annual Acres Burned



In addition to the OCTC fire suppression program, in 2013, the IDARNG constructed an OCTC fire station near the Impact Area which is staffed by six full-time personnel trained to BLM Fire Fighter 2 certification standards. IDARNG annually employs fifteen additional temporary seasonal fire fighters also trained to FF 2 standards. OCTC firefighters occupy all active ranges during military exercises, with most training related fires extinguished quickly. OCTC firefighters utilize a variety of equipment including four quick attack 70-150 gallon capacity modified UTVs, three 4x4 water trucks (300-400 gallons), three 4x4 brush trucks with 298 gallon capacity, two 275 gallon modified pick-up trucks, and two 5-ton water trucks with 1,000 and 5,000 gallon tanks. In addition to these firefighting assets, varying amounts (500-2,500 gallon tanks) of water assets are placed strategically at several firing ranges for quick access. Military helicopters, flight crews and sling buckets are available for fire response on the OCTC when trained and certified for fire suppression operations.

IDARNG fire suppression program annually maintains approximately 89 miles of fire breaks within the OCTC Impact Area to minimize the spread of fires (Figure 1). In addition to these fire breaks, Range Road is a two lane gravel road bordered by borrow pits (approx. 45-60' wide) that restricts fires from spreading outside the Impact Area.

In 2011, IDARNG replaced two existing rain bucket gauges at Range 2 and Range 14 with fully automated remote weather stations (RAWs). A third, new automated station was added to a site in maneuver area D2 in the southeast of the OCTC (Table 2). In addition to being included in the WIMS for obtaining Fire Danger Rating, these sites are accessible at the University of Utah, MesoWest website. Each station collects and reports hourly data on site temperature, dew point, wet bulb temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, wind gust, pressure, altimeter, solar radiation, soil moisture, fuel temperature, and 10 hr fuel moisture.

Table 1. OCTC RAWS Stations

WIMS ID	Station Name	Lat.	Long.	Elevation
102602	IDARNG1_RG2	43.2728	-116.1508	3304
102603	IDARNG2_RG14	43.2025	-116.0253	3012
102604	IDARNG3_D2	43.1056	-115.9972	2934

http://mesowest.utah.edu/cgi-bin/droman/name_search.cgi?name=idarng1_rg2

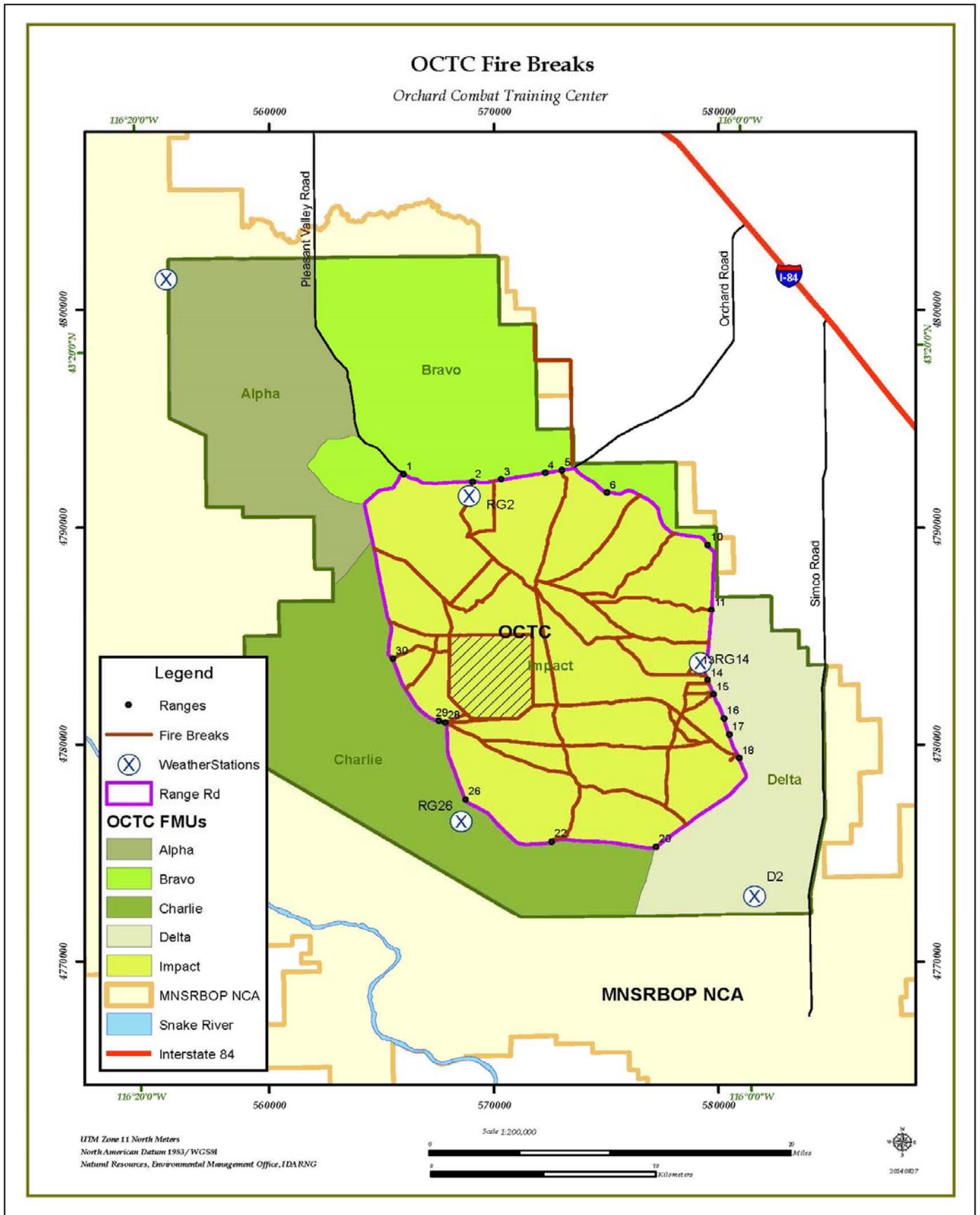


Figure 1. OCTC Fire Suppression Map

References

Idaho Army National Guard. 2013. Orchard Combat Training Center, Integrated Resources Management Plan. IDARNG, Boise, ID. 418pp.

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Idaho Army National Guard. 1995-2013. Orchard Combat Training Center. BLM Annual Report (Range). IDARNG, Boise, ID.