

## Fire Boss: Thinning helped protect Lost Trail, Hwy 93 from Mustang Fire

October 24, 2012

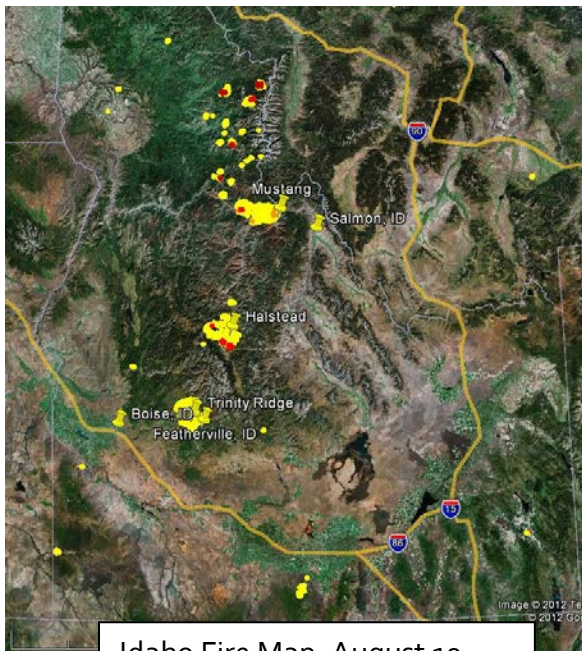
Contact: Gina Knudson, Salmon Valley Stewardship 208.756.1686

SALMON — A community-driven forest health project in Idaho's Lemhi County gave fire fighters a critical edge to limit the danger and damage done by this summer's Mustang Wildfire, according to firefighters on the ground.

Long before the late July electrical storm sparked the massive Mustang Wildfire Complex, the Lemhi Forest Restoration Group had worked with the Salmon-Challis National Forest to complete a forest restoration project in the Hughes Creek drainage, about 5 miles north of the community of North Fork.

"The thinning treatments in the Hughes Creek area implemented by the North Fork Ranger District were put to the test during the Mustang fire," said Danny Montoya, fire team operations section chief. "I firmly believe that they provided us with the opportunity to steer the fire away from the Highway 93 Corridor and the Lost Trail Ski Area."

Fire operations chief Russ Long, who was assigned to the Mustang Fire as it moved into Hughes Creek, confirmed that when crown fire hit some of the units in the 13,000-acre Hughes project area, the fire dropped to the ground — which was exactly the intent of the treatments. According to Long, the thinned units stopped the fire from running through the tree canopy. This gave firefighters a safer boundary to help guide the fire away from Gibbonsville and lower Hughes Creek where the majority of the residences are.



Idaho Fire Map, August 19,

In Hughes Creek, firefighters had an advantage. "We will never entirely fireproof the forest, but it's important to plan ahead and be good stewards of the land," said Gina Knudson, of Salmon Valley Stewardship. "The success of Hughes Creek drives home the importance of doing what we can to safeguard communities and waterways and decrease the risk of losing property, wildlife habitat, and other important assets," she said.

The 2012 fire season broke records in Idaho. The Mustang Fire complex alone burned some 340,000 acres and covered much of eastern Idaho and western Montana in a

shroud of smoke through August and September.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, efforts to corral the Mustang Complex cost some \$38 million. At the peak of activity, approximately 1,100 fire fighters worked on the fire. The Lemhi County Sheriff had to evacuate several rural homes when fire approached, but no houses were lost. Some residents were displaced from their homes for two weeks and at two separate times during the evacuation order.



North Fork, August 2012



Mustang Fire from Salmon River Corridor, 2012



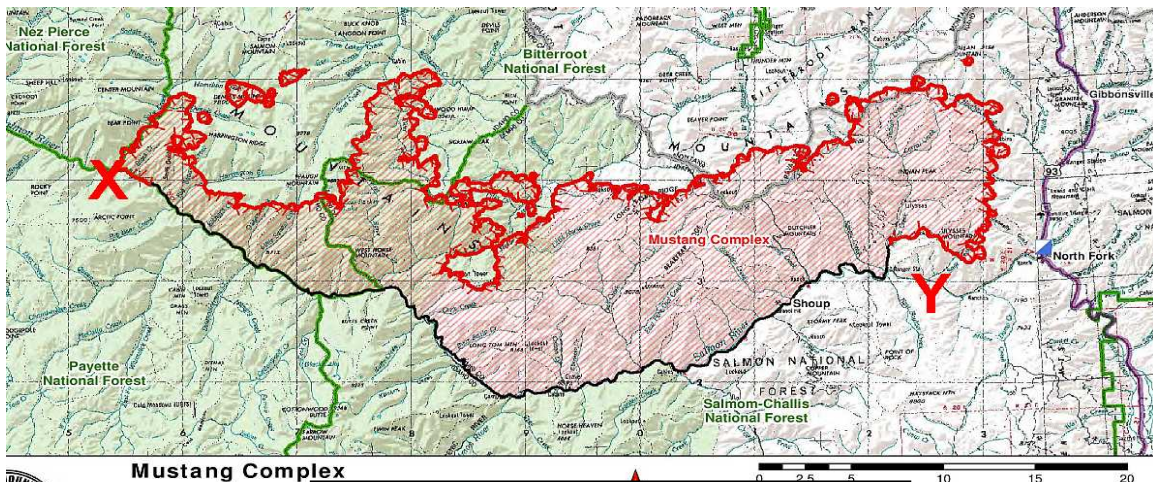
Photo Courtesy M. Seaburg



LFRG Post Mustang Fire Tour November, 2012



SVS, Lighthawk Flight Post Mustang Fire, Oct, 2012



Mustang Fire, September 2012