



FIREFIGHTERS UNITED FOR SAFETY, ETHICS & ECOLOGY

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Firefighters' Group Releases Report on Arizona's Bighorn Fire of 2020 Bighorn Fire was a Big Fire Management Success; Offers Model for Managing Other Big Fires

EUGENE - Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE) released a report on Tuesday, June 8, 2021 analyzing the management actions on the 2020 Bighorn Fire, the nation's first big wildfire during the Covid-19 pandemic, that burned nearly 120,000 acres in the sky island forest outside of Tucson, Arizona. The U.S. Forest Service attempted to quickly put the fire out, but when those efforts failed and the blaze spread further into rugged terrain in a wilderness area, firefighters backed off and concentrated suppression actions on protecting nearby homes and communities. Their efforts at implementing a strategy of Ecological Fire Use with Point Protection tactics paid off: not a single home or business was burned, no firefighters were killed or caught covid-19, and the fire improved habitat conditions inside the wilderness.

"The Bighorn Fire's modified suppression actions offer a model for firefighters to manage future big wildfires in ways that prioritize firefighter safety from both the spread of flames and the spread of virus infections, prioritize community protection by focusing suppression efforts on repelling flames from reaching homes and communities, while steering fire into fire-adapted ecosystems that benefit from burning," said Timothy Ingalsbee, executive director of Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE) and one of the co-authors of the new report. "The Bighorn Fire was a big-fire management success!"

FUSEE's report, [Bighorn Fire: A Big Fire Management Success of Managing Wildfires with Ecological Fire Use in the Age of Covid-19](#), presents several maps and photos from the Bighorn incident to tell the story of the Bighorn Fire suppression actions, highlighting the firefighters' successful strategy and tactics that offer a model for managing future big wildfires in 2021.

"Unlike most media accounts that portray large wildfires as management failures or define them as disasters, the Bighorn Fire was an unheralded success," said Mike Beasley, veteran firefighter and co-author of FUSEE's report. "Going forward this year amidst record drought conditions across the west while the risk of firefighters catching covid-19 is still present, ecological fire use strategies and point protection tactics should become more common as a way of protecting the health and safety of firefighters, communities, and the land."

The Bighorn Fire burned in the same area of the 2003 Aspen Fire that destroyed over 300 homes in the small mountaintop town of Summerhaven. Despite its large size, not a single home or

business was burned in the Bighorn Fire. FUSEE's report demonstrated how firefighters were able to manage the wildfire with multiple objectives simultaneously: protecting the health of firefighters with new anti-virus protocols, protecting rural towns that were in the path of wildfire spread, and protecting wilderness values and natural resources such as the famed "desert forest" of Saguaro Cacti. Both homes and the cacti were at risk of flames burning intensely through invasive grasses that have spread across the desert. Firefighters currently managing a couple of fast-spreading wildfires in Arizona could benefit from applying similar techniques of ecological fire use with point protection rather than aggressive suppression and perimeter control strategies.

FUSEE's new report on the Bighorn Fire is available [here](https://fusee.org/fusee/bighorn-fire-storymap)
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