

Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



The Thirtymile Fire by John N. Maclean

Why Read *The Thirtymile Fire*?

The Thirtymile Fire is a study of the Thirtymile Fire in Washington, in which 4 firefighters perished on July 10th, 2001. Leaders and followers at all levels should take the time to read case studies and books like this to learn from these events. While books can have a certain bias from the author, and some details may be disputed, you as the reader can use your own judgement to evaluate what you read. Leaders can and should read to learn from the experience of others.

At the time of writing, almost twenty years have passed since this fire, and it's important to carry forward the knowledge gained, good and bad, into the future. Twenty years is almost a generation of firefighters, and some of our younger firefighters will have been born after this fire occurred. Learning from those who have gone before is a great way to honor their sacrifice and give us the knowledge to try to prevent fatalities from occurring again. As fire leaders and followers, we work in a high-risk environment, and we owe it to those we serve to do what we can to minimize that risk. Learning from the past is one way to do just that.

There are several videos and other resources related to the book and featuring the author available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **30 Mile Fire Fatality Case Study (20 minutes):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KK4SjPqYor4>
- **Thirtymile Fire - Six Minutes for Safety “This Day in History” page:**
<https://www.nwcg.gov/committee/6mfs/thirtymile-fire>
- **Staff Ride to the Thirtymile Fire (NWCG):**
<https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/staff-ride/library/thirtymile-fire>
- **Thirtymile Fire documents pages (Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center):**
<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/search?executeSearch=true&SearchTerm=thirtymile&l=1>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

Blog: <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

Professional Reading Program: <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

Main WFLDP page: <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

The Thirtymile Fire Discussion Questions

Things to think about as you read

As you read this book, try and put yourself in the shoes of the people involved, and see things from their point of view. It's all too easy to read about someone's actions and say "well I'd never have done that," but in reality we don't know what we would have done in those exact conditions... we can guess, but we don't know for sure. Keep an open mind as you read through the book, and keep an eye out for things you can apply in your own situation.

Keep in mind that a LOT has changed in twenty years - agency culture, hiring practices, policies regarding rest, technology and communication methods and expectations, staffing levels, fuel conditions and weather patterns (especially longer fire seasons/years), and the greater societal culture around us has changed as well.

One of the great tragedies of the wildland fire community is that despite our best efforts, we often don't pass along lessons from generation to generation of firefighters as well as we should. As a leader and a follower, it's important to take the time to read about fires like this, think critically about them, study the other resources available, and to discuss them with others. There are a multitude of lessons learned from these fires, many of which have become "just another policy" that we follow without knowing why it came to be, and it's our role to keep those lessons alive.

Read the book, read (and watch) the case studies, think about it, and have discussions with others. Share what you know and have learned with newer firefighters... Context is key. Pass the knowledge along!