Diana: What is your name?

John: John Ketron.

Diana: And where do you live and what is your occupation?

John: Sheriff of Clark County Kansas.

Diana: And how old are you?

John: 43 years old.

Diana: Okay, so when did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire."
John: As far as date and time? On March 6. I shouldn't forget it; I don't think any of us will ever forget it. I don't remember the approximate time; it was before lunch. We had gotten a phone call about needing assistance with a fire in Beaver County Oklahoma.

I started heading that direction to assist, to see what they needed, even though it was out of our territory, just to see what kind of aid we could offer. I knew the winds that day were horrible. Shortly after, I didn't even hit the Clark County line, the Meade County line, before we got another call of another fire which was up around the Denton Ranch area in Clark County.

So I broke off from that fire because it was out of our state still at that point. To me, a county fire has more priority than something outside of our region. So I went ahead to that fire to see what kind of aid we could render there first. I went to that fire and thought we were getting things kind of beat down and under control. Then I got information that the fire that was in Oklahoma was now in Kansas and it was creeping up on Clark County very quickly. That's when I headed back toward the fire, then down around the south/southwest Englewood area.

Diana: You said the winds were awful that day. So was there any indication previous to Monday, March 6th, that there could be some kind of an event?

John: There was notice. Luckily, our weather service in our area, I think, does an excellent job of notifying us and putting out bulletins to let people know that we're under what they consider "red flag" conditions, which means extremely high winds with low humidity. Which means fires can start quickly and they can travel very quickly.

Diana: So we kind of knew that could happen.

John: We kind of knew it was there and it was a danger. We knew we were in a danger area in time, which in the past we've been on the red flags numerous times. We've had fires, we've dealt with those fires. Were they fast moving? Yes. Were they as fast-moving as the fire on March 6th? No, I have never seen a fire move with that kind of speed or intensity.

Diana: So as the sheriff of the county, what were your obligations to the residents of the county during the fire.

John: Being a rural county, we all kind of wear multiple hats. Not only as sheriff do you worry about public safety for security reasons but you also assist with fire and EMS, and you also help them whether it be traffic control or resources or whatever you think is needed.

When something happens in a rural county, we all help, no matter what it is. And you know, that event, when I started out my first intent was to go to the fire up north to be there if they needed something. We would get extra supplies coming and be an extra radio link between. I knew at that point, the emergency

manager was headed toward the Beaver County fire. So I kind of stepped up to a role a little bit to help, even though it's not part of my capacity as far as title or anything. But to me, part of our job is, if I have firemen out dealing with and fighting a fire, and I've got other equipment there, if they need other things, and I overhear the traffic, then I'm going to assist and to try to get those things there quickly. If it's something we know we need to help get people out of a house, firemen are busy fighting a fire. They may not have time to stop what they're doing to go try to warn somebody in the house. Hopefully, the residents of the house are aware of what's going on near their house, but you never know. You want to make sure those people get notified, where we have the ability to move a little quicker in our vehicles, compared to a larger fire rig. We can make up a little time and distance faster. So it might be advantageous for us to get out in front and start warning people.

Diana: So how many how many of your deputies were on duty at the time the fire started?

John: On duty, on the clock scheduled, there were three of us.

Diana: And how did that change as the day went on?

John: I deployed officers as quick as I could, once I knew. Once I left the north fire and started coming back to the south fire and saw what we had and how fast it was moving, and I called out the rest of my officers that day and got them active. I even pulled an officer that technically I should not have had out in a patrol vehicle into duty because I knew I needed the extra eyes and needed the vehicles. I knew we were in for a long day, not realizing the type of long day we had. But I deployed every resource I had. And once we knew the danger of how fast this thing was moving, that's when I went ahead and started making calls saying, "Hey where can we get extra help, because we may need it," from highway patrol and things of that nature.

Diana: So when was the evacuation notice made for say, like Englewood and then for Ashland. Was it early in the fire?

John: Englewood was earlier. Ashland, I think we gave the call when it had already jumped 283. The exact time, without going back and looking at my records, I can't recall the exact time. Once we knew the path and how fast this thing was moving and knew we were not, or the firemen were not, going to be able to do a whole lot with this thing, we were trying to get out in front of it as best we could. We saw the path, and for us, we called it out.

I remember this too; we called out saying, "The way it's moving, it is going directly along the same path as Angle Road," which is a road that travels from Ashland to Englewood. And in that path, the way it is, it's coming straight from Englewood straight toward Ashland. And we knew that was going to be an issue. So we're like, okay, we've got to get people out of the way of this and get people warned, because if we can't get this thing stopped before it gets to town, it's going to take over the whole town. I knew fire units were battling up around Englewood. At that point, I knew they were battling, but I didn't realize the intensity of that till after we had gotten here and had a command center set up and started getting more information in. But at that point we were battling fires all along the line, from not only where it comes up into Kansas, from the initial hit, everything and units were spread everywhere. I think we had every fire unit available out plus we were begging for help from other agencies around us. The problem was, they were busy fighting their own fires or either helping down in Oklahoma or tied up on things or didn't feel comfortable letting loose the resources to come this way because of their own danger.

Diana: So the evacuation notice was given by the EOC or emergency management?

John: Emergency management, initially through me and then we started trying to get the word out.

Diana: And how did you do that?

John: At that time, our resources were limited. We had what we refer to as the IRIS notification system. The problem with that is, there were people that had been signed up on the program that had let the program drop

or had opted at that point to get out of it because they were tired of the constant updates. And so they dropped away from it, so we're trying to think of every avenue possible. I use the sheriff's office Facebook page because I know it is followed by a bunch of people, not only within our county confines but also people outside that have resources to contact people.

I posted on it, trying to get word out as quick as possible, to get as many people notified as possible. To me, one of our biggest issues at that point was we had planned for lots of things but had never really determined how we were going to properly notify and to get full notification to as many citizens in the county as possible about an evacuation event.

John: In my career of being here, I have never considered having to, never thought I would have to, order the evacuation of a town or asked to do that or be part of that. In visiting with citizens after the fire, most of them have been here their entire lives, 80 plus years. They've never been evacuated from this town for any type of disaster. So it was an extremely rare event for us.

Diana: So how well did that work? Did most people evacuate?

John: I think overall... from what I heard, without having true statistics, I think overall we had the majority of the citizens that heeded the warning, packed up stuff quickly, and got out.

The call was given out. At that point, we were sending people to Coldwater High School. We were also advising people that if they didn't go to Coldwater, to head south to Buffalo or Woodward. Initially, it was Buffalo, then Buffalo became in danger of the fire, and those people then moved on to Woodward. My wife and her family went on into Woodward, on down that way.

We did have calls in the middle of the fire once we thought everybody was out, of citizens that, "Nah, we'll wait this out and see how it goes." But then they called dispatch and said, "Hey, I'm ready to leave." By that time all the roadways were cut off, surrounded by the fire surrounding the town. Unfortunately, all we could do was say, "You're here with us. You know, hunker down. There's nowhere to go."

It gives you a really bad feeling, but I wouldn't say... Hard numbers? I would say probably 70 percent of the town easily left, whether they went to a designated site like Coldwater down to Woodward, went somewhere outside of the region to get away from it. The rest of it, you know, you've got to figure numbers of volunteer fire firemen that were out. People that were firemen that were reactivated and put back out on trucks; the farmers that stayed to help, those that felt that they didn't need to evacuate because they were too busy trying to help us didn't leave. Now as far as numbers on that night? Roughly, I would say 70 percent.

Diana: So when did your first help as sheriff, like highway patrol, show up? Were they here before that evening?

John: Yes. Before the evening, before sunset, we had units showing up to help. My first help from law enforcement-wise was Meade County sent over a few units, which I greatly appreciated because that gave me some extra manpower. Probably within an hour or two after they got here, highway patrol started showing up. Their command staff showed up at command center to help us. As soon as they got here, they said, "Hey, you've got this many troopers right now. We'll determine later what we need from that point. Anything you guys need while you're here. We'll go get it set up and have it done." We had roughly two to three troopers per shift for a week.

Diana: So there weren't very many troopers in western Kansas, so where did these guys come from?

John: That's one of the things with the change in the state, with economics, and things going on politically within the department or whatever. We used to have a road trooper station per county in every county. That has evolved in my 20 years from, "Okay, you don't have an actual road specifically for you, but you have a motor carrier inspector trooper that lives here, that if you guys need something he's kind of your local guy," they stationed them around Dodge City, Liberal, Garden City and they'll have five to six in those areas.

Those are supposed to spread out and cover.

We didn't have anything like that, I mean outside of those officers, for a long time. At this time, we did have one trooper that was assigned to Clark County and Meade County, and it was Trooper Clayton Hardaway. He's actually from the Meade area. He was kind of our local area trooper, and he was here on to help. Most of our troopers, we had several from the Dodge City/Liberal area. I think we did have a couple from Garden area. We had a couple from the Greensburg area that came in this direction.

I think we ended up with eight troopers initially, on the on the day of the fire. And then we backed that off to three troopers per shift. They were here to help us answer calls within the county, because just because we're fighting an issue or dealing with fire doesn't mean there still aren't calls in the county, whether it be an accident or things of that nature. So they were here to help us in those capacities.

I had troopers that were willing to come in and cover town because we'd evacuated the town. We evacuated the hospital. That was a big concern of mine, to have a hospital sitting empty, knowing they've got narcotics and other medications there. That was a risk that I wanted to have covered, because I don't know if the hospital, when they evacuated, locked the doors. I don't know if many people locked their doors, because they were in such a hurry. I wanted to keep eyes over the town just in case, because in my career, I mean, I know that when something else is happening, eyes are pulled away from other things. That's when other things happen, because bad guys that want to do wrong, that's when they think it's easy to pick. So we wanted to try to make sure that was covered. I don't think we've had any reports of any issues from anything like that from the fire, I feel blessed in that.

Diana: So early on, most things that you were doing was blocking roads to keep people from leaving?

John: Initially, it was trying to get people out and then starting to block off roadways to try to get traffic shut down. We were contacting highway patrol helping with that, KDOT, trying to get traffic shut down and out of the area, to keep new traffic from flowing through.

That was one of the things we had some issues with on 34 Highway, where we did have our one loss of life. That truck driver decided he wanted to keep driving through the smoke. Unfortunately, it became a fatal event for him, and outside of that, we had several accidents involved with that too.

So we were worried about getting those people out of there and getting them to safety, we'll deal with the accident later. You know, if we can, because you've got people that are in an accident where they could be injured, you've also got the fire danger coming at them. So you've got to step things up and get them to appropriate care. We did have injuries in those accidents over there.

So we had to get those people from there to the nearest hospital, which at that point they were transported to Minneola, because we couldn't take them to our hospital. Our hospital was closed down at the time. So trying to get those people there and get them to proper care and taken care of was a priority.

Traffic control was an issue, and that's that's an issue we look at with any type of major event, trying to shut down our highways, because we do have quite a few pathways through the county.

Diana: So did you have a hard time keeping track of the fire because it was everywhere?

John: To a point, yes, and to a point no. I mean, I think command center did a pretty good job of keeping track, and it was constant. When we were getting updates on movements of fire, we had a dry erase board with a map behind it. And whenever we were hearing about properties or houses we knew that were either being consumed or in danger being consumed, we would readjust our fire line there.

I spoke with Millie after the fire when we were getting maps of the burn areas, and I think we did an excellent job of trying to keep track live-time where the fire was actually at, compared to our fire maps or anything else. We were fairly accurate.

We were trying to get information from what fire crews we had in those areas plus the officers in those areas. It's one of those things, unless you have somebody following right behind the fire line with a GPS, you're not going to keep super accurate, but I think overall, we did a pretty good job. And that definitely helped us later on, when we started trying to get into aftermath and trying to figure out total damages and things of that nature.

So during this event, the wind shifted several times. How did that impact what you were doing?

John: That impacted quite a bit, because it was one of those things that we thought the fire was on a set path with the wind. It starts to change, moving the flames around on us, so we're trying to plan ahead of this fire because you're trying to get ahead of it. You're trying to look at things down the road where you need to clear people from, then your fire shifts. So an area you were trying to tell people and make sure they were out of their homes, that you're getting out of, all of sudden you're looking at a completely different area trying to get cars out to warn people and make sure people are safe. Then it shifts again and comes back another direction, and then our concern was town. We had people trying to help protect the town, but it was a big concern for us because we had our EOC set up in town. At the time, you know starting out, it was definitely the right call. Then we started considering okay, the fire's shifting. If the fire comes into town, where are we going to go?

Trying to determine the location for that, well, we knew north of town had been burnt in an area up by David Bouziden's ranch. But we knew he had a large shed/garage area or storage barn that was still intact. And at one point we determined that may be a point we go to. We also considered the middle of a wheat field. We learned during the fire, our green wheat fields that were just starting to come up were actually really good safe spots. Your biggest danger was smoke.

You know, we thought if we had to, that would be a possibility for us also. At the time of the fire, we didn't have a mobile command center. That's something since the fire we're learning to possibly get to, we may need some time, whether it be a trailer type system that we can grab and go or something of that nature. I think it's definitely something we've got to look at, because what we've learned definitely from this that you know through your training for EMS and ICS, we want to have a stable command center with all kinds of connectivity to contact and do what you've got to do. Out here in western Kansas, you've got to be mobile, because as we learn, things in that event can change. You may have to relocate.

And that definitely was something we had to reconsider. But the wind changes definitely made it harder. I think that definitely added to the fire as far as total damages across the county. Had it stayed on that northeast track, I think it would have been a lot less, but I think the way it moved around the north fire which was moving northeast, then turned and combined with the southern fire, which made it a larger event total. It definitely made it a different animal.

Diana: So what about communication during the fire?

John: Communication overall went pretty well. As far as what I saw from command, I know we did suffer issues with our VHF radio systems because we had some repeater damage to a tower. That became an issue. Most of us had some 800 type system radios; those worked really well. As we were bringing in other agencies, once we did finally start getting other help in, the 800 system was very valuable bringing in extra systems from the state, once the IMT squad showed up from the state, definitely helped us so we could get radios to people and open up communications.

Diana: How soon did help get here, like to help in the EOC, the incident management team?

John: The incident management team? It was the next day. I don't remember what time, we had a few of their people show up first, and then the others flowed in with the trailers and other response equipment to start setting up their stuff.

Truthfully, I think the response time was actually very good, as far as what that type of resource was to get agencies and IMT teams from all over. I mean we try to use people in a certain area or district when they can, if those people are available. If not, then they have to pull from other regions.

So you could see two to eight hours of drive time, depending on where some of these people come from. Let alone, they're gathering their resources before they even hit the road to come this direction. I know Millie was in contact with them, keeping them up to date on things as best we could. It was extremely hectic. The first 24 hours, I say we had pretty good communications that things were flowing good, it seemed like it did, but it was extremely hectic.

Diana: Did you use cell phones a lot, besides the radios? Since the repeater burned?

John: Cell phones were very valuable. I can't tell you how many minutes on our plan for the sheriff's office, but between my phone, the county attorney's phone, and Millie's phone... there was usually somebody on a cell phone at any given time as well as radio communications. We had to use everything at our availability. Whether that cell phone call was to a media outlet to give an update, or things of that nature, those things were extremely handy.

I never experienced any overload issues with the cell phone system. Not with my phone. I think United had a little bit of an overload issue. But that's also one of the things that I've only seen one other time in my career where we've had that kind of issue, and that was a pipeline event. We were flooded with calls, and they were not only our county but several counties out. The F.A.A.,that you can get reports on about planes flying over because they thought the whole county had blown up.

But in that call, we actually had an overwhelming response from other counties, once they determined where it was at, sending us help because they could at that time. In this case, they knew what we were dealing with, but didn't have the resources to send. And so that's what made a big difference. The first 24 hours was total chaos. Not total chaos, wrong terminology. It felt like total chaos, but it was controlled chaos, would probably the best way to put it.

We all knew our jobs; we were doing our jobs, were working together doing what we had to do with the minimal manpower. It was it was an overwhelming feeling of helplessness, because you knew you had all your resources tapped. You knew you had people's property in danger. You had the risk of life, and you're getting calls from people from houses that were worried about their houses being burned. You were trying to notify fire crews, who say, "We can't get there, we're too tied up here trying to protect this property."

So when you think of that fear of losing this house and hoping people are out of that house, for fear of losing citizens' lives because of that, it's the biggest feeling of helplessness I've had in my entire career here in this job.

Knowing we're doing beyond what we normally do to get the job done but we're not doing what we should do for the type of event we're trying to tackle. We were just extremely stretched then. It was 32 hours before me and Millie even considered trying to take a break, and that was even long enough to run home just to get a shower and try to get some fresh clothes on.

Diana: So did you spend a lot of time in the night at the E.O.C. that first night?

John: It was both. From the initial start, when I was out at in a patrol car at the fires, on the move, trying to clear people from houses, to when we set up the E.O.C. Then I went to the E.O.C. to assist there while my officers were out. Part of the overwhelming feeling for me was, I wanted to be out with my officers to give help in the field. But I also knew part of my job and my command role was to be at the E.O.C.

Diana: What were you doing there?

John: It was everything from assisting Millie with E.O.C. command, because her phone was ringing off the

hook, to people offering assistance and things going on, fielding those calls, logging.

I dispatched until we had things set up with dispatch, and knowing we've got to start keeping records on this stuff, whether it be a type log or a handwritten log, and when it slows down enough, to move the typewritten log to a computer log. You know, you start looking at the things you've got to do to start keeping track of things going on. And a lot of people don't realize, when there's an event like this, the amount of data keeping and tracking that actually needs to be done. I mean it is overwhelming.

They think with all this help, we all show up, we take care of business, and we all go home. If you want to make sure you're covered down the road, you've got to account for every truck, every fireman, every car, every police officer. Their times, their fuel, because we want to get these people reimbursed for them coming to help. The data keeping is just immense.

Diana: So when did you first know somebody was coming?

John: Outside of law enforcement, and when they were coming, I think it was Meade or Fowler. It was actually within the county lines trying to help us, was actually the first fire units.

Diana: Comanche County was here earlier in the day.

John: Yeah, Comanche was too.

Diana: They had to go home. .

John: Yes. Thank you. I don't remember the true timeline that we actually tried to calculate on when we actually saw assistance relief with Kansas agencies. I'm not counting the Colorado crew when they came in.

Diana: There are people from Cowley County that came.

John: Yeah, we had trucks, outside of the Colorado units, we had trucks from all over the state of Kansas that sent units, let alone seeing these Colorado units from these towns that you may have heard of because you looked on a map. But then you look out and you see a truck from Manhattan, you know, you see a truck from southwest Oklahoma.

You meet a fireman from southwest Oklahoma that is there to help but with no truck. A lot of those firemen that came in from Oklahoma had stopped in Oklahoma to help with their section of their fires and stuff they were dealing with, found out they had plenty of help, and then they moved on to the next place they knew needed help. That was the type of response we ended up seeing, which was phenomenal, overall.

Diana: Did you spend most of the week in the E.O.C.?

John: Most of my week was spent at the E.O.C. with IMT team. Then we got to the point where me and Millie could start looking at, "Okay, we've got things to a certain point. You need to go home and try to get some sleep. Try to get a break for just a little bit. Let me take over these roles. Then when you get back, I'll catch you up. Then we'll determine if I can go take a break and move from that point and then try to shift it." Plus as far as we had some coverage from dispatch. Brandy, Millie's daughter was there in E.O.C., assisting with radio and dispatch. Let alone running my own dispatch from my own office. Now we alleviate a lot of stress off of that by pushing a lot of stuff to E.O.C.

Diana: When you talk about dispatch, what was the sheriff's office dispatching during the fire, just accidents and stuff like that?

John: Pretty much accidents, calls that come in through 911, if it was something related to or would relate to the E.O.C. for us to send units to. Their main goal was answering 911 stuff coming in and our normal daily activities for my sheriff's office, because I still had inmates at that time in the jail and my dispatchers

do jailer type duties daily as far as maintaining inmates with meals, medications, things of that nature.

I would have to operate my daily business, my daily work, and keep my office floor in like it normally does.

Diana: The E.O.C. was just dispatching fire related?

John: The E.O.C. was just taking care of fire-related issues with the disaster itself. Now a lot of calls came to the sheriff's office, thinking that was part of the E.O.C. and then it would be relayed to them until people got the idea that we had an actual E.O.C. A lot of things were coming in via teletype, the state's messaging system, on our state computer.

Those were going to be relayed to us, relayed to me, via cell phone, text message, and e-mail. I still had my system set up where I was trying to monitor things going on back at my office, as well as trying to monitor what we were trying to deal with at the E.O.C.

Diana: So when the EOC was first set up, what kind of equipment did you have? Media equipment, computers.... Did you have anything?

John: Very minimal. When we got there and started setting up, we went to Millie's room that had radios in it. We had several other 800 radios. We yanked those out of those rooms brought them and set them up.

We had several tables set up in a large rectangular shape with chairs around and we put dispatch on one end. We had my laptop computer I think when we started out we probably had four laptops or tablets. By day three there was probably a minimum of ten laptops.

It became a power issue in the building; we had to consider that. We had cables strung from the outlet on the side of the wall across the table to get power. I operated off a battery pack at one point because I wanted to pull some power off of the grid in our building for risk, thinking of overload. We have a lot of old buildings that we've upgraded over time, but sometimes we don't upgrade electrical. So that was a concern. Okay, what if we start popping breakers and we lose our power? What are we going to do?

The radios we had were electric power only with the converters. But we had, if I remember right, we had, one, two, three mobile radios on base stands with inverters, and we were running two portables to start also. And then by the time we got IMT Squad in with their radios, at one point we had ten portables on a table, with the three mobiles, in trying to keep track of traffic on all those separate radios, whether it be VHF, UHF, 800. That's when it became pretty overwhelming; we had to have a minimum of two people taking care of radios and radio traffic. We had somebody sitting with them, writing and logging.

Those are things people don't really consider, whereas when you've got a system that's set up like my office, all radio traffic coming in and going out, phone traffic coming and going out, we try to log as much as we can on a computer, but it's also recorded.

Whereas this, we had some that we may not have been recording, because we only cover our radio channels within our county. If you've got somebody in on another frequency that we don't normally operate on, I'm not recording it. So we have to try to record that data as much as we can.

Diana: So the officers coming in to help you secure the county. Did they have any trouble with their radios working in our county?

John: A few of them did, because we had like Meade County who operates on UHF for their sheriff's office frequency. Luckily, through the grants that had been out there in the past, they had state-issued Grant radios with Southmost 11, 800 band, which is designed for communication issues and things like this. They could go to that. We could still communicate.

I think there was some small issue with people first initially coming in, till we could get them to a channel or

frequency they knew they could operate on. The biggest fall back on the communications was when we lost the fire repeater. That hurt immensely.

Diana: And that was early.

John: That was early as the fire approached outside of town. And at first, we thought we were fine, of course with a repeater system, if you've got a battery backup system for power or a generator, you may not realize it because you're still operating, until eventually, that goes, and then it's gone. We recovered that and then we finally got somebody to be able to go out to check on it and realized that it had received fire damage.

Okay, we've got to figure out what we're going to do. All these other agencies coming in from out of state, that's why IMT teams with their radios and the State brought in their cow trailer which opens up communications and we can put them all on an 800 hundred channel frequency and get radio communications to bounce back and forth. That trailer can take a UHF channel and convert it to 800 hundred and back for communication, so that people in the field never know what's going on.

To have availability to that type of equipment in the state is fantastic, and it was here within hours after we asked for it to be deployed.

Diana: So where did it come from?

John: Initially, I think it was dispatched to Hutchinson and I can't remember if this was the one that came out of... I can't remember. I know there's one based up around Manhattan.

They separate them out and move them around the state so that they can try to get to places quicker. I don't remember exactly where ours came from, I want to say it was around the Hutch area, but it was because I decided to put it out at the Englewood Junction area to give us our coverage that we thought we were going to need in that area. We did see a little bit of overwhelming traffic on our state tower. It's stationary, and that helped alleviate some of that too.

That was probably one of our biggest helps, as far as communications. But for that thing, it can be deployed within a few hours and be operational in under three, I think.

And the availability is there. It is phenomenal, and a lot of times a lot of people out in the field don't even know it's there, don't realize it's doing the work that their tower was doing. So that was fantastic.

Diana: So besides the loss of the repeater on the fire tower, was there any other equipment loss by your department?

John: By my department? Yes, I lost a patrol vehicle that night. It was the officer that I had pulled back on the service. He was out in a rural area. We were concerned about the winds changing and pushing the fire toward the north and worried about some houses up around the Giles Ranch area, the Giles family. over,

I'm trying to think where exactly he was. There was a small cut off road that's kind of a shortcut/jaunt road. He was trying to get over there to check on them, to make sure they were safe and out of the house. He told me where he was going, and I said okay. There are two wooden bridges out there and they're not really tall bridges, but they're creosote type wood/old style bridges, and both of them are on fire. They had flame underneath them.

He crossed the first one. Everything seemed good. Started across the second one, and no more than barely got the front wheels across on the dirt and the whole thing collapsed underneath it, slamming the truck to the ground. He was engulfed in flat fire. He had enough time to yell at me on his truck radio and say, "My truck's on fire; I've been in a wreck. I'm getting away from my truck," and told me his location.

So I'm trying to send other units I had close to get to him, to figure out what's going on because I don't know if he's completely surrounded by flames. All I know is his truck's on fire. Finally got an officer to him. He did receive some light injuries from that. We got him to the hospital and got him checked out. The truck was a complete loss and it was a newer Tahoe, low mileage, full of equipment. My total loss for the county was almost $80,000.

Diana: Is that something you wouldn't even think about? I mean, you've gone across that bridge forever and you really wouldn't...

John: The officer felt really horrible when he got back from the hospital and checked in with me. He felt really bad. He says, "I shouldn't have done it." And I said, "No, you did exactly what I would have done. You eased across that first bridge when you saw flame underneath it, it was holding. You thought the next one would be fine. I would have done the same exact thing. It could have been any of us."

Part of you is saying, you know, "Did I do this to myself? Was this an accident, the damage an accident to the truck?" He felt bad, because my officers take really good pride in their vehicles, especially this officer in this vehicle. This is the kind of officer that every weekend he was off, would make sure his truck was spotless and clean and waxed up and shined. And it was a black Tahoe, which is hard to keep clean anyway in this area.

But he took extra pride in his patrol vehicle. So it was a big loss for him. He lost his personal phone in the fire. He had some other personal effects in the vehicle that were gone, let alone he knew what kind of equipment we had in the vehicle. That was completely gone. Luckily, while he was waiting for the officer, he knew he was safe, so he took some pictures of the truck. I've got them with the truck fully engulfed in flames and then the aftermath, what was left of the shell.

He was extremely lucky, but he didn't do anything I wouldn't have done myself. A lot of times in our jobs, fire, EMS, whatever, we do put ourselves at risk trying to get to places and make sure people are safe. I've done it my career; I'm sure I'll do it again further in my career. When you look back, "Was that the right call?" You always question yourself. But then you realize you probably did save somebody. He couldn't make it there, but luckily those families were okay. I've had cases where I've done similar things and did get people out of harm's way, and I questioned myself after the fact, "Was that really the smartest move?" Well, no, but I got people out of danger. It was a smart move.

Diana: So do you think there were some other times when people, your officers, were probably in danger?

John: Oh yeah. There were lots of times when they were out, and sudden they thought they had plenty of time when all of a sudden the flame was on them. We've got heat damage to some of the units that we still have that were active that day of the fire, not major damage, but you can see it. If you look close enough, you can see scorch marks and you can see those types of things.

Diana: Is there any way that you can relate this fire to what we usually have as a wildfire or a controlled burn?

John: Not anything close. Like I said, 20 years of working here, we've always been known to go out and assist fire, whether it be making sure they got water so they can cool down and keep them hydrated or traffic control, things of that nature. I've never gotten to a fire and sat there and said, "My God, we're not going to do anything with this fire." I've always had the utmost confidence in our volunteer firemen, of handling any situation they've been involved with. Volunteer fire guys in our area, I think are phenomenal for what they do with the equipment they're operating with, a lot of their equipment is older. They do a job trying to keep it maintained. You know, we've had fire trucks go down with mechanical issues in fires and that's always concerned us. We've had some firemen come close, some smoke inhalation issues or other injuries.

This is the first time when I looked at a fire saying, "Oh my God, are we ever going to stop this thing?" Because initially, till we saw we were starting to get control, I didn't think it was going to stop until we were

past Wichita, the way it was burning. I mean, I just thought it was never going to end. When we initially got in front of the fire to start trying to clear houses along Angle Road, I looked back, and the fire looked like it was two miles away.

By the time I go in to bang on a door to make sure people are out of a house and get back to my truck, and it's less than 100 yards away. I've never seen anything move with that kind of speed and ferocity, let alone the wind was picking it up and jumping it, let alone that the head of the fire was moving behind it.

The roar. You know you hear people describe different types of sounds. I've been around numerous tornadoes and people describe that train sound. This is close, but it's not close. It's hard to explain. It's just the roar of the flame, but it's so big and so immense and you see these tall towers of flames shooting up in the sky. And you feel the wind pushing the heat of the hot air off the flame toward you. You're overwhelmed with the smell of smoke of burning grass.

Diana: What did the smoke look like?

John: The blackest smoke I've seen in my life. I mean, you would have these thick plumes of black and gray, with the sun basically blocked out for a while. It was so thick, which almost felt like you were in the middle of the night or an eclipse-type feel. It was a totally eerie feeling in itself because you had smoke and flames climbing in the air blocking out everything else. And you're also trying to talk to other firemen that are running down the line with you trying to get people out.

And I know for a fact, coming up Angle Road, we were overlapping each other because we couldn't communicate with each other fast enough, saying, "I've already been to this house." But I'm glad we did that to make sure somebody was out. We were leapfrogging each other. If there had been a camera, you'd have seen the trucks zooming every which way but you would have seen us basically leapfrogging out in front of each other on down trying to get people out. And a lot of that was done without really any communications too.

Diana: Did you see them? Could you see anybody in the smoke? Or were you pretty much...

John: Not until they were right up on you. Even with lights on, emergency warning lights, it was extremely hard to see at points. I've never experienced those conditions, even in the thickest fog we see in Kansas.

Diana: What's your most vivid memory of the fire? Something that will stick with you?

John: That feeling of helplessness in the command center, that and everybody working the way they did. But I also know with past events with all of us working together, we do it. And that's the thing I love about rural emergency services. You can be pissed at each other about something personal, on a personal level outside of work. But when it comes to dealing with the event at hand, where there's an accident or a fire, you name it, that goes out the window. And even if it's something you want to bring back later, but at that point, we all clear the slate, do our jobs, get it done.

You're worried and concerned for everybody involved for fear of danger and them getting hurt doing something. And I know if one of us were in danger at a scene, a fireman, if he's there and could render help, they would do it and vice versa. I'm not a firefighter but I've told the firemen any time, if they feel they need an extra hand or something on a truck or anything else, I'll do whatever they need. I don't care. It's one of those things. But I think a lot of that's a rural thing. I don't think we see that in areas where they do have full-time fire, EMS, and law enforcement because that's their discipline and they can't step out of the discipline. No, you can't do that. Out here? It don't matter sometimes. You do what you've got to do. The feeling of being overwhelmed or helplessness is one of the biggest things for me to try to cope with.

And then after you get through the major event itself, then you look at the big picture of how much loss is actually there. And I still don't think we have a whole scope, a full scope of our total damage even to this day. I'm talking to several citizens now.

I was concerned immediately about the fire, EMS and law enforcement with issues dealing with stress and dealing with the fire. So we started bringing in mental health resources. I also was worried about our citizens too, because I knew that was going to start sinking in. All these farmers that lost cropland, farmland, cattle, homes. Homes that have been here for generations and properties; that hasn't all completely set in, I don't think. We've all got to the point we're dealing with insurance, trying to get things worked out, get fences built back up, get cattle moved back in. But I think the overall still hasn't sunk in. And that still concerns me, when I talk to landowners that are now starting to slowly develop signs of PTSD type issues. And I want to make sure they get to the right places to get resources. And it's a hard thing for people in this area to do, is admit they need some help. It's an issue period, the whole fire, let alone their mental health. We'll step it up, we'll tighten our belts, we'll get it done and we'll get out and work and we'll do what we've got to do. And we block off that part of our mind until we have time to sit and start thinking about it, and that's when it kicks back. But I'm starting to see some of that.

Diana: We had volunteers really quickly. Do you think that helped people deal with the fire?

John: I think for the time frame we worked with, it was quick. It didn't seem like it at that point, but that definitely helps. When you've got fire crews out for 30 plus hours fighting fire, until you can get other crews in to try to get them some off time. But you have firemen that know they've got a job to do, and don't want to step off that truck to try to get some rest and relief. But the minute they do decide to step off the truck and rest, they now realize they've got their own things to take care of in their personal life, whether it's on their property or lost cattle.

So you've got to make sure you've got resources there to help with that. Fish and Game was instrumental for us in that capacity, and my point when I had their assistance coming in, because I had firemen and landowners that were out trying to put cattle down, that they had to. It's one thing for a cattle owner to shoot to a cow or two a year, or 12, because of a sickness. But when you've got an entire herd down and then you have to go put down the rest because and they're not going to survive because of their injuries. I had farmers and landowners and cattle owners that couldn't pull the trigger anymore. My fish and game officers from the state stepped in to alleviate that for these owners. You know, it's a hard thing to do. And that's a hard thing for a lot of people to understand. And I've still had a hard time trying to explain that to people that aren't familiar with farm areas.

I'm not a farm kid; I'm not a farmer, but I've learned enough being here to try to explain that to these people, and they still just can't fathom it. To them, it's just shooting a cow. Well, to these farmers, it's a cow, it's generations of cows they've raised. It's their livelihood. Every time they pull the trigger that's more money that they've worked hard to produce. It's gone. So fish and game stepping up in that role for us locally, I think was an excellent thing. Having them with the ability to do it, and it even started weighing on them.

Because it was registering with them what, you know, what they're trying to do and it's not their cow. They have no stake in that cow. They have no ties to it. But eventually, it starts getting on you. And that was one of those things, you know, having the resources come in as fast as we could get them in was a good thing.

But then you've got those other pieces involved, and there's a lot of things a lot of people don't realize. Firemen. They think other firemen showed up and they got to go home and sleep for a 24 hour period. That didn't happen.

Diana: On the same vein here, who were some of the people and agencies that actually helped?

John: Law enforcement, Kansas Highway Patrol and Kansas Wildlife and Parks. Meade County, Ford County sent down some officers to help, Comanche County and law enforcement. I hate to misquote and not remember somebody. Fire departments, we had not only local agencies around, but surrounding areas that finally came in to try to help. We had trucks from the Manhattan/Kansas City area. We had some trucks from the Kansas City side. Some of the fire departments at Oklahoma that we usually work with, Harper, Beaver, Woodward Counties. The fire department that stuck out to me, was the fire proof from Granite

Oklahoma, because I grew up down in that area in Oklahoma. And when I see them show up with Granite, Oklahoma, fire crew, I'm just like, wow. Because that was the earlier response, but then you see these Colorado crews coming in and you see these rigs they're bringing in that are designed to fight forest fires. And that's the majority of what these guys fight and the gals that showed up. And they're here, "What do you want us to do, where do you need us at." You know, and then to form up their squads here, then going out and working and doing things. Even some of those guys that fought forest fire most of their career said that this was a different animal for them in some ways. They were used to fighting fire, but having a prairie-land grass-type fire with conditions and winds and things we had, they said, "This was bad." But those crews, I know there are still several crews to keep in contact with some of my officers, that formed bonds.

And you know, those are things that are going to carry on from this. But it... I can't remember all the instances.

Diana: Then we had the people coming with the hay and the donations.

John: The donations from that aftermath, wow.

Diana: Were there any problems that created for your department?

John: Not really, the biggest thing was our population, I think, probably doubled, if not tripled, for the town of Ashland, once resources and stuff start flowing. You'd see different things. I mean, you've got people coming in with equipment. They're out doing their work trying to help farmers and stuff do what they got to do.

You've got lots of people in the area you don't know. But we never really had any issues with anybody that came in, from a law enforcement stance. Everybody that came in here was fantastic. The local resources that stepped up with the local church camp, opening up the school and becoming a place for housing people. The biggest issue was, I think, the overall biggest issue I saw was we were flooded with so many resources, just as far as clothing and things. Those were a big issue, which I think not only from the fire. I've seen in other natural disasters; everybody wants to help in some way shape or form, even though they don't realize the help they're giving may be causing a hindrance at the places trying to relieve issues.

The biggest thing I can say, whenever there is a disaster is, some of that stuff initially is needed, but sometimes monetary donations can help a lot more in the long run. Trying to get that word out is hard when you're still getting truckloads of clothing and truckloads of all kinds of stuff that we don't need anymore. You don't want to say, "No," when you're getting help, but it gets to the point you kind of have to in some instances. I think finally we're getting down to where, you know, where we are in October I think finally all of our extra water resources are finally... Are we still not done with all of them?

Diana: There's a bunch of pallets still at the firehouse.

John: Okay, I knew some of our other resources, but I've tried to get those... I've got a pallet at my office now just so I've got a backup supply. They had some here. The water is not going to go bad.

I mean, and I know dealing with what we deal with we're going to use it. But I've tried to find places, okay, if we can get water out, let's get it. I got one of the last pallets from Feed and Seed, because we're going to get a pallet to pick up there. I said, "Can you drop me off a pallet, I'm down to half a pallet." So it's one of those things. Now I have the ability to tell my crew when they go out, "Make sure you keep a couple of packages of bottled water with you."

It's come in really handy, after the fact of the fire. I've dealt with people, transients, coming through. I can now say, "Hey, we have water. Instead of you going on some farmer's property trying to get water out of a well, and then you get called for trespassing, here you go." And give them five or six bottles of water, so I make sure they're taken care of. It's still giving down the road. I mean, it's still going to keep handing out. I know some resources we've tried to shift other places where we know they need assistance. Things of that

nature. But as far as any issues with the resources, that was the biggest thing I saw that was overwhelming. We had so much of certain things we didn't really need anymore. Management of those things was a problem.

Diana: What effect did the fire have? Was it physical, financial, or emotional? Or is it kind of a combination?

John: Right now, I think we're still in the financial, as far as financial impact. I think within the next six months to a year we're going to see the psychological is probably going to be the biggest impact. Initially, of course, you have property damages. Then you start getting together total losses. Then you look at financials, on how much money loss was there. But then you have people that are dealing with that issue that now are dealing with insurances. One of the things that hurt me the worst, is seeing farmers and people that thought they had proper insurance coverages on their properties and then come to find out they didn't. So the items that they had, they lost, they thought were covered, now aren't covered.

They're never going to try to get items like that back or try to get some of that resemblance of their life back. That was a big impact. That's what I think you're going to see now, is the mental side and psychological side. You know some of that alleviates when you do get into your new house that got built, or when you bring in a new house. But it's never going to be your house that you had prior to the fire, that you've spent years and decades of building up those memories that you're never going to get back. That's definitely one of the biggest things I see. Are we as a county and community going to grow from the fire? Yes. I've already seen it. We're already changing up things, the way we've done things. I think we're going to see lots of changes there. Are we going to be the same community and county we were before? No.

Diana: Can you perceive anything positive that came from the fire?

John: Yeah. Lot's of positives, it's hard to describe them all. Like I said before, when it comes to emergency services, about those personal issues between victims that was put to the side because of a disaster. I've seen people that had longstanding issues, which since the fire those issues have gone away because they knew they'd work together.

I've seen more of a cohesiveness between citizens, and that's my own personal view on some things and it's things that I thought before that, you didn't know what the actual issue was, but you knew those two never got along. Now since the fire, they get along and they're working on things together. Those are all things. Communications, of course, you can always expand on that. We've seen some expansion of that with the fire departments looking and trying to move closer to the 800 system. That's a hard adaption for everybody. It was a hard adapt for me. But once you get to it, and you realize the availability and the capabilities of that system and what you can do with it and how far you can go with it definitely helps, but it's a hard thing to do and transition to. And I understand that. So that's why I've tried to work with the fire department and EMS. You know, "Hey let's get some equipment. Let's start trying to work toward this." I'm not saying we've got to give you the equipment or shut the other off, let's go. No, I understand we're transitioning to new technologies. But it is part of the things we've got to adapt to. I think we're kind of forced to adapt some, because of the fire, more than what we wanted to. But I understand that's still our change. That doesn't mean there won't be a change that's told to me for law enforcement that I'm not going to like, that I know I've got to start working towards, because it happens. I've seen so much of it.

I think there are things coming down the road to offer better availability to notify our citizens of things. Social media was a big role, I think, in helping try to get the word out to people.

But I think we've got some things coming as far as updating our emergency plans, our emergency warning systems and the technology's been there. It's just one of those things that we had other priorities to deal with because of the amount of money it's going to cost to take care of that. Luckily, some funds have come available to hopefully work toward these goals for the countywide.

Up until the event of the fire, the biggest disaster risk I thought we would ever see for our community and

our county would be tornado risk, period. Because of our volunteer firemen that go out and deal with these grass fires all the time, when we ask for help we get it. We get it taken care of. That wasn't something I thought I would ever see, that we wouldn't have the response we needed when we needed it, and we had to deal with it on our own to become what it was.

Like I said, I thought the biggest danger for our county was a tornado risk. But like every big disaster, when it happens, just like Greensburg. They've evolved from that. I think Clark County definitely will evolve down the road.

Diana: So what can you, or have you, done to prepare for another event like this? And what can the community need to prepare?

John: The biggest things are we've pushed the IRIS system even more. I think they've had a pretty good response to people signing up for it.

But I know I have looked at several other things. You know, I've purchased radios to get out to the fire departments to look at slowly upgrading the 800 system. That's something those fire departments can't afford. The county hasn't been able to afford it. I luckily have the funds available. I've taken steps to do it, because I think down the road, eventually, once we get communications across with each other again, it's going to make life easier if something else happens. I've been known for giving equipment to the fire departments and EMS, to try to get equipment out. If I don't need it anymore and they can use it, it's theirs. Part of that's the working together.

You've got to do that. When vehicles are done, if the fire departments or one of them want them, I am more than happy to fork those vehicles down to them. It's still a county vehicle, still in use with the county. I don't care; somebody's got to be using it. If not, I'll turn around and sell it, recoup some of that money, and go build another car.

But I think part of that, you've got to work with each other. You have to. Like I said, I'm not a firefighter. I don't plan to be a firefighter, but if I'm ever called to action to do that, I'll do it. Just like I know, when I've needed assistance, whether it be for traffic control or whatever, the fire department's there to assist me and they will. All I can do is ask.

And I think that's the biggest thing you see with the rural departments. We aren't afraid to ask each other and work on those things. We've seen some equipment improvements. I think with fire and with my department, a little bit, overall, it's going to keep evolving.

Are there things that I wished we'd had the availability to do and the technology before the fire? Yeah. I think life would have been easier if we had GPS on every one of the fire trucks and my cars. But that's something you got to work towards, and it's not cheap. Technology is awesome, but you've got to find the funds to do it and get it done.

Diana: So there was the EOC that was taking care of the fire stuff, then there was a group of actual citizens that got together and formed committees to help with some of the things that needed to occur after the fire. Like taking care of volunteers coming in, the extra hay...

John: We had church groups that were stepping up to do those roles. We had local businesses that kind of became liaisons or agents to help distribute hay, fencing,,. You know, they stepped up to those roles. I don't think they were asked or forced into those roles.

Diana: Do you think that's something that should be in place for any emergency that we have? A way to take on volunteers? Should that be part of the emergency preparedness plan?

John: That is part of the updates and some of the emergency plans, is trying to get to that point. But part of building that plan is, we've got to have people willing to step to that role. And then also have backups in

case that person is not available for some reason and keeping everybody on the same page. I think we're going to see some of that changing, because that was a big factor. Those businesses that stepped up, Ashland Feed and Seed, I know they were extremely overwhelmed in doing what they did, and I applaud everything they did. The groups that came together after the fact, I was part of a committee to help gather resources. It took a couple of people in that committee to say, "Hey, there's an app we can get for our phones where we can share Google documents with each other. We'll start a file that shows: this is who needs help, this is who lost their houses, this is who has hay available, this who has fence available, and this is who has fence builders available. We'll get all this information on this document that we can share and update as we need and pull from whenever we need it."

And that was phenomenal. And I don't remember exactly who started it. I want to think it was Kelli McCarty. Kendal brought it up and having that availability, not to mention a chat messenger behind it. So if somebody got information, we could put a message out. "Hey, I got a call from this person offering this type of help. It's not on our list, but where can we put them in here, and who do we need to get them to, to make sure that resource is available and used. Those things were awesome. The churches have stepped up to feed people. I know they all dealt with their struggles, dealing with that. But I think we're going to have to see that change in our operations and our plans. But once you get those plans in place, you've got to stay on it; you've got to keep them up to date, because we do have pastors that are here and only here for a short period of time, from a couple of years to five years. If they leave, is a new pastor going to accept that role? Or do we need to move it to another pastor? Whatever that capacity is, we have an aging community. We have people that were willing to help during this fire, but five years from now may not be physically or healthy enough to maintain that role. We've got to have somebody willing to step to that role. We need to know who those people are. We need to keep it up to date, so that when this does happen again, we know who we're contacting and get those people involved from the beginning.

You know, we learned that the E.O.C., we thought we had everything in place for people that needed to be there. We figured out, the appraiser was one of the biggest pieces of that puzzle that we didn't bring in from the get-go. We brought him in, down the week. And we're glad they did. But they didn't have the resources initially available to do the things we needed to do. It took them reaching out to their contractor and other places in the state to get us maps, aerial photos of the properties, so we could start doing these damage assessments and things of that nature. In one of our our meetings toward the end, I think we had three, three-ring binders; I'm going to bet they were at least six inches tall. You could scroll through and see everything from the physical description of the land, prior photos, after photos. You know, it was just phenomenal the amount of work and time that went into that, that I know is going to help down the road. But it was one of those pieces that at the time we didn't really consider.

Now we know. You're going to see evolution, and that's the biggest thing. You think you have these plans in place and you think they're perfect to put on paper, and till you put them to true test... I mean, you can experiment and play tabletop games and practice all you want to, but until something really happens, you always find some pieces you missed. That's your chance to put those pieces into the whole picture and then you start practicing again. But I'm sure, if we have another event, we're going to find something else. I don't think there's any such thing as a perfect emergency plan.

Diana: So have all the reports been filed? Has the event come to an end? Or have we still got things?

John: No, I think there's still documentation and stuff going on. You know, Millie just called me two weeks ago, because she'd gotten a call from a state or fed agency about a discrepancy in what we had between some aerial photos and some description we had on where some fire damage was. And we had to determine, she said, "Do you remember?" And I said, "I don't remember. I remember the report, we had a fire damage in that area. But you know, I would say if we had a plane that was up every day doing aerials, I would take that over a field representation we had at the time it was reported in, because we were still seeing the damages. And there is still some of that going on. I think the majority of it's been turned in, as far as trying to take care of those things, but Millie's still dealing with some of those things. She still calls on us and we're still trying to work on, like I said, advancing those plans and protocols down the road.

We haven't had an emergency operations plan meeting since the fire. I think the next meeting we have is going to be a rather long one. I mean we've had a couple of touch-ons, but nothing to the point of now sitting down saying, "Okay these are definite things we've got to get changed, it is what we need to do." So we're working towards... We've got some updates, but I think it's still ongoing. I bet it's going to be at least till next March. We saw from what we were finding out was, they were still actually dealing with issues from the last wildfire in Kansas, which is over in the Barber County area. They were still dealing with things. Now did things operate smoother for us in some of those instances? Yeah, I think they did a lot smoother, but they're still dealing with those effects and weren't seeing monies from state, fed and insurance stuff until almost two years after the fact for reimbursements and things for their business. Well, that puts a strain on your local economy. You know, we had our first meeting with commissioners and said, "We've met. This is what we're looking at. This is the cost we're looking at. We're trying to get everything documented so we can get it covered, but until that point, the county is going to have to foot this bill till we can get reimbursed. That's a big step, when you're dealing with normal everyday activities and then all of a sudden you're dealing with this huge event. And that's an extra stress, because you're worried about financials for the county and everything else, especially when your tax base is shrinking. It is going to have long-term effects.

I think it will be some time before we totally see the full impact, not only on emergency response responders but the citizens of the county. But that was what I didn't want from the beginning, I told Millie. That's why I said, "Get mental health people in here. I don't want to see two years from now, a rash of suicides across the county because people didn't get proper help." And it's finally sinking in, because I've seen it from other disasters and other events nationwide. But I can't force people to go deal with their mental health.

You've got to make it as available as you can and try to keep it there. And luckily our resources we brought in and have in our area, with the Iroquois Center, they're here whenever we need them. It's just a lot of people are afraid to make that call. But it's been... I've had people come to me or I get word from somebody, just people starting to deal with this. I go talk to them a little bit, and I try to suggest, "Hey, here's a number. Would you mind giving these people call? They're willing to help you."

They might be able to help you deal with some of this.

Diana: Do you have some more group programs about the event?

John: The program is talking about it. Part of me has been really hard to come talk today. I've had a couple of times I've had to stop, just to sink it back. Because it's hard to talk, but it's also good to talk. And for some people, it's hard to talk about the event in detail because it does bring back so much memory. On my day to day, I think I'm fine. But the more you sit and think on it, the more it comes back. But then again, every time I've talked about it with people involved or other people, I've slowly gotten a little bit better every time, as far as helping to deal with things myself. I'll be honest, most people that I've been with are more than happy to talk to get some help. I visited a couple of times with people from Iroquois and outside. Had it not been for that initial week when we brought them in and we had a meeting in this room, had I not had a chance to get some things off my shoulders, I don't think I'd have made it past that week. That helped me get myself back on track to do what I needed to do. But it's been, it's been hard.

Diana: I think so too. So do you have any other comments that you'd like to add about this experience?

John: I don't ever want to go through it again. I don't want any community to have to go through it. But I also know currently, with wildfires going on in other parts of the nation, it's going to happen. And I don't think it's something we can blame on global warming and anything of that nature. I think, through history, it's been proven these things happen. The goal is to try to be as prepared as possible for these events. You know, I don't think in Clark County situation it is like the California situation where you're worried about a landslide. You know, if you build your house on the side of a cliff, chances are it's probably not going to stay there. For us, I think the evolution we're going to see in this area is maybe some changes in some habits, as far as how farmers deal with lands. One of the biggest things I see is with the CRP lands that are there. I understand why all that stuff was put into place back during the Dust Bowl, to keep land safe. We would build these beautiful windrows to help protect certain places from wind damage. But these windrows are

antiquated, and by antiquated I mean we have numerous windrows that were built and planted, I don't know when, way back when, that are dead and decayed. That's a fire danger.

And being from Florida, where I was born, I see tree farms that when they come in and cut trees, they immediately replanted so that they can come back later and cut again several years down the road.

Those are programs I'd like to see coming in and removing all the dead wood from these tree rows and replanting hardier trees than what we're initially planting to sustain better in our territory, because those could mean the difference on the next fire. We had windrows that I thought during the fire were going to go up, because of 50 years of tumbleweeds crammed into them, that I thought went up. But yet, I saw where scorch marks had burnt right up to the edge, up to a house near it, and then they were either put out by a fireman or went out by itself. These are still here, and that's a fire danger, and it's always been a fire danger.

Is there a true answer for it? No. Can we experience it again? Yes. I think we're already back in a similar situation. As far as what grass growth we had after the fire and where we're at as far as our conditions. It's something we're going to deal with for quite some time. I don't see a change in our moisture/drought situations.

I don't have an answer for that. I'm not the expert on all that stuff. It can happen again. I hope it doesn't happen in my lifetime.