

**DISASTER:** Sisters company worked tirelessly for weeks

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wildland firefighting crews across the West (including the Milli Fire here in Sisters) and set up multiple base camps in Texas and Florida in response to Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma. At those camps, they fed, slept and showered thousands of first-responders. In addition to the large-scale operations, they conducted dozens of small response missions across the disaster zones.

With the dust just starting to clear from an intense summer, GFP Response and Eclipse Global founder Don Pollard sat down with *The Nugget* last week to describe how a company based in Sisters reaches out into distant regions of the country in their moments of acute need.

The companies hold contracts with states in the Gulf Coast region, including Texas and Florida, to respond to disaster events, providing distribution warehouses, full-service base camps and other

critical services to support first-responders. The companies provide mobile shower units; laundry facilities; toilet and garbage service; dining tents and kitchens; lighting; generators and more.

Pollard recalled that he had several wildland firefighting crews committed when GFP Response spun up in August to respond to Hurricane Harvey, which was bearing down on the Texas Gulf Coast. Harvey hit Texas with a hammer blow, dropping unprecedented amounts of rain.

“Texas around Houston was pretty bad,” he said. “A lot of flooding.”

GFP Response conducted some 208 separate response missions. Some were as small as providing a shower unit to a rural church, where the local community could gather and take care of their needs. Others were on a massive scale, like constructing a base camp for 1,500 first-responders in Beaumont, Texas.

In the midst of firefighting and responding to Harvey in Texas, Hurricane Irma slammed into the Florida Keys and ripped up the peninsula’s west coast. Again,

GFP Response hit the scene, constructing seven large, full-service base camps. Their efforts won accolades from William G. Estep, incident commander of the State of Florida Incident Management Team:

“The entire IMT (incident management team) wishes to compliment the superior job performance of GFP, their staff and leadership. If we were going to hand-pick a base camp provider, GFP and this particular team would be it.”

Pollard attributes some of his team’s proficiency to an up-close-and-personal understanding of the needs of first-responders.

“They are, themselves, first-responders, most of them,” he said of the GFP Response team. “So they’ve got a natural empathy for the people they’re serving.”

The scope of the multiple responses tested GFP Response with the most intense pace of operations they have ever faced.

“I’d say it was the first time I started thinking our capabilities were starting to get pressed to the max,” he said.

Pollard said that the demands of multiple missions meant GFP quickly “blew through” the equipment that they own outright, which meant that he had to rely on an assiduously cultivated network of subcontractors. Pollard calls them allies. Having built that network and having agreed-upon prices for equipment is vital to both a timely and effective response and to a company like GFP staying healthy in the midst of



PHOTO COURTESY HARRY POLLARD

GFP Response reaches out from Sisters to help across the nation.

a massive demand.

And it all made for long, long days at the GFP Response Emergency Operations Center in the Sisters Industrial Park as the team worked out intricate logistics and timetables.

“There was about 10 of us, and we didn’t sleep much for the first two or three weeks,” Pollard said.

He relied on Sisters Market and The Depot Café to keep his team fueled.

“We had them catering every day, because we couldn’t leave the office,” he said.

Many of Pollard’s team hail from Sisters and Central Oregon, and they deployed to

set up and operate camps. The work is ongoing. Though the effort in Florida was expected to wrap up this week, Pollard expects to have missions underway in Texas until some time in November. While the work is extremely demanding, everybody who works for and with GFP Response has the satisfaction of knowing that they have made a significant difference in people’s lives when they need it most.

“It’s pretty rewarding when you can do so much for the public good,” Pollard said.

For more information visit <http://ellipse-global.com/emergency-support/gfp-response>.



PHOTO COURTESY HARRY POLLARD

A GFP Response base camp has a big footprint.



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Sleeping tents serve first responders working in disaster areas.

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