

Burning Issues

Fall 2001

I n d e x

- 2 Restoration Work Pushes Ahead
- 3 Hall Gets Chief's Award
- 4 RSFWSU Employees
- 5 Hanks Gets GSA Award
- 6 New Faces in NPS
- 8 Scouts Get FireWise

Firefighters everywhere are connected. It really doesn't matter if you work as a volunteer in a small community, as a wildland firefighter, or if you pulled on your gear and answered the call on September 11th and headed to the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. Firefighters share a common bond that has a lot to do with helping others, the chance to make a difference, and as we all realized again, the necessity of sometimes risking life itself.

"It's my job," is what one exhausted, ash-covered New York firefighter told a news reporter just before heading back in to the rubble. Here at NIFC, we knew what he meant and felt.

The reporter later tried to get in touch with that firefighter. She couldn't find him.

We join with hundreds of millions of others around the world who mourn the malicious destruction of life in New York City, northern Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Words cannot begin to capture the dimension of our sorrow. Nor can they adequately express the respect we feel and honor we give to the firefighters, police officers, emergency workers and civilians



In cooperation with the National Wildland Firefighters Monument, NIFC sent 8,000 pins with this graphic to New York City.

who heroically entered doomed buildings to perhaps save just one more life.

Their heroism will be a beacon to all firefighters of this and future generations. Their sacrifice will not be forgotten. Honoring them is something we will do each time the fire call comes. It's our promise to them.

We understand. Remembering what happened on September 11th is now part of our job as well.



Restoration Work Pushes Ahead

The concept of restoring rangelands took root during the difficult 1999 fire season, when 1.7 million acres burned in the Great Basin.

A meeting in Boise, hosted by NIFC, was held even before some of the big fires in Nevada and Idaho were contained that year. The purpose of the meeting, and several other subsequent gatherings, was to begin work on a restoration effort that would help reverse the downward ecological spiral of the Great Basin. The effort has become known as the Great Basin Restoration Initiative, or GBRI.

The main culprit in the Great Basin's deterioration is annual weeds, primarily cheatgrass. Cheatgrass is a highly flammable weed that was introduced to the West from Eurasia more than 100 years ago. It's an aggressive plant that thrives on disturbed land, particularly burned land. Cheatgrass, along with other non-native plants, is a key element in the invasive weeds and fire cycle: the more cheatgrass, the more fire. And the more fire, the more cheatgrass.

A team composed of resource managers and specialists has been dealing with the problem for two years, providing guidance to field offices and promoting the principles of restoration.

Progress has been made on restoring burned land. In a soon-to-be-released report, "The Great Basin Restoration Initiative: A Hand to Nature," several restoration projects are summarized. Also, a GBRI coordinator's position, to be located in the Nevada State Office, has been advertised and is expected to be filled this fall.

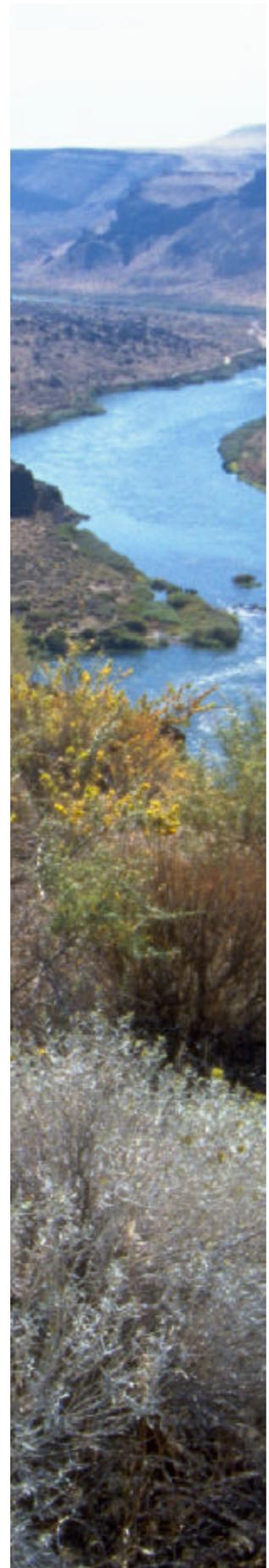
Bob Abbey, the Nevada state director, and BLM's management

representative on the team, wrote in the report that, "GBRI is alive and well, and we're just getting started ... Restoring the Great Basin is probably one of the most significant challenges any of us will face in our careers."

NIFC will continue to have a role in restoration. Several people who work at NIFC are members of the GBRI team, and others will continue to provide support for the project. Resolving how GBRI ties into the National Fire Plan and other fire strategies also will keep restoration and NIFC linked.

The GBRI team has produced a new poster available from the NIFC external affairs office. A new, work-in-progress GBRI website also has been "soft-launched" at www.fire.blm.gov/gbri/

"GBRI is important to all who care about this unique region of our nation," Abbey wrote. "Restoration can serve as an umbrella effort for much of the good we want to do in the Great Basin."



Hall Gets Forest Service Chief's Award

Barbara Hall, Aviation Safety Specialist at the National Interagency Fire Center, was the recipient of the Forest Service Chief's Award for Excellence in Safety and Health. Her award was presented at the USDA Forest Service Awards Ceremony held in Arlington, Virginia on June 4, 2001.

The Chief's Award is presented annually to one of the 33,000 Forest Service employees for an individual's notable achievement. Hall was commended for her creative and consistent approach to highlighting safety as a core value in interagency aviation at the National Interagency Fire Center. Hall increased the critical safety information in the field by 400 percent which includes the monthly summaries which contain aviation safety information.

"Her keen and innovative insights, coupled with tireless persistence were pivotal in achieving outstanding operational effectiveness in safety and serve as historical benchmarks," said Tony Kern, National Aviation Safety and Training Manager.



Hall has worked in aviation safety for one year. She has worked at the National Interagency Fire Center for 22 years. Before her aviation safety position she worked at the National Interagency Coordination Center.

Smokejumper Leadership In Place

Grant Beebe is the new chief of BLM's Great Basin smokejumper branch. He replaces Sean Cross, who earlier accepted a position as chief of preparedness/suppression standards in the fire operations group.

Several other changes in the smokejumper leadership have also recently occurred. The current leadership group includes:

- Eric Reynolds, operations chief.
- Hector Madrid, assistant operations chief
- Ken Franz, training supervisor
- Eric Walker, assistant training supervisor
- Mike Tupper, crew supervisor
- Al Seiler, assistant crew supervisor
- Jon Curd, air ops supervisor
- Emil Magallanes, assistant air manager
- Jim Olson, loft manager
- Marty Adell, assistant loft manager
- Bob Hurley, prescribed fire manager
- Kasey Rose, assistant prescribed fire manager



New Employees in the Remote Sensing/Fire Weather Support Unit

by Phil Sielaff

In the past 18 months the Remote Sensing Fire Weather Support unit has hired six new employees. Each newcomer brings electronics expertise combined with various skills and diverse backgrounds. The new employees are Robert (Robbie) Swofford, Corey Prescott, Jesse Gray, Rudy Rodriguez, Dave Brogan, and Brandon Diemer. Swofford and Corey were hired as lead technicians in the Field Section and Gray, Rodriguez, Brogan, and Diemer joined the Depot Section. All come to the unit with journeyman-level experience in electronics from various quarters of government and private sector.

Swofford was born into a military family at the Norfolk Naval Base in Virginia. He started his professional career in the Air Force as an meteorological navigation aid technician. After being honorably discharged, he worked for Schlumberger Incorporated, an oil exploration company out of the Evanston/Rock Springs, Wyoming District. His civilian field experience has contributed significantly to the Field Team. He and his family moved to Meridian, Idaho, after selling their home in the Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Rodriguez came to NIFC from Simplot Corporation in Caldwell, Idaho. He and his family have lived in Nampa, Idaho, for a number of years. Born in Cheyenne, WY, Rodriguez and his family have traveled around the west while he served with the National Guard. He currently holds the rank of Sargent First Class and is very active in the Idaho National Guard as a combat medic. Rodriguez's diverse background and working experience (medic and safety) along with his electronics skills make him a valuable asset to our organization.

Prescott is an Idaho native, born and raised in Twin Falls. After serving in the Air Force as a radio maintenance technician, he returned to Idaho and worked for Hewlett Packard for two years. Prescott came to us via Spears Manufacturing Company in Jerome, Idaho. His private

sector experience has been utilized on several unit review in his short time with the unit. Prescott and his family relocated from Twin Falls and now call Meridian home.



Brogan came to the unit from Ratheon Aircraft, Atlanta, Georgia. Brogan was born and raised in Pensacola, Florida, and worked for Florida Highway Patrol after graduating from high school. He gained valuable experience while serving in various aviation assignments in the Navy and he took that knowledge to Ratheon Aircraft. After accepting a position with the BLM at NIFC, he and his new bride live in Garden City. Brogan is well on his way in transitioning into our specialized field.

After serving in the U. S. Air Force for almost eleven years, Gray went to work for the Department of Defense (DOD) as a civilian technical advisor and technician. He had one assignment in Europe, then he and his family settled in Boise and he continued to work for the DOD at Mtn. Home Air Force Base. Gray, from Wahiawa, Hawaii, (a small town on Oahu), holds an associate's degree in Avionics Systems Technology, a bachelor's degree in Professional Aeronautics, and an master's degree in Aeronautical Science. He brings an excellent background and experience level to the Depot Team.

Diemer came to the unit from the USDA Forest Service. He was employed in the Coop Education program here at the Fire Center. He attained his bachelor's degree in Electronic Engineering Technologies in 2001. Born in Batesville, Arkansas, he moved to Mountain Home Air Force Base with his family, and lived there most of his life. After graduating from high school, ITT Technical Institute, and accepting a position with the BLM at NIFC, he recently married and lives in Boise. Diemer's education and knowledge brings new and current insight to the unit. His experience in telecommunications technology is a vital asset to the new Fire-RAWS deployment efforts.



Hanks Honored by GSA

Ron Hanks, aviation program evaluation manager with the Office of Aircraft Services at NIFC received the prestigious Federal Aviation Program Award in Washington, D.C. on June 25, 2001. The deputy Secretary of the U.S. General Services Administration presented Hanks the award for his exceptional contributions to the Department of the Interior's (DOI) aviation program during 2000 and his dedication to improving the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of all federal aircraft operations through many years.



Hanks proudly displays his prestigious award.



"I'm greatly honored to be recognized by an executive-level agency," Hanks said.

He is responsible for working with aviation programs in eight DOI agencies. He said it is challenging work because each agency has a different mission, although they all operate under common safety and Federal Aviation Administration regulations.

"The DOI is the only organization in the world that uses aircraft for so many different projects," Hanks said. "I love my job."

GeoMAC Puts Wildland Fires in Perspective

Put those overlays in the trash. You know, the ones that show where wildland fires are located in relation to towns or roads? Go ahead. Put them in the circular file.

Now: load up the internet and go to www.geomac.gov. Click on Wildland Fire Maps in the Public Server box. This is where GeoMAC puts wildland fires in perspective. Actually, it can put wildland fires in many different perspectives. With the simple click of a mouse, one can overlay a wildland fire with information on topography, wildland-urban interface areas, communities, roads, waterways and water sources, fuel types, aircraft hazard maps, and weather data. With this information, users can manipulate map and wildland

fire information, at various scales and detail, to help them make decisions on how to manage the fire. Wildland fire managers have special access to GeoMAC to ensure the program is always available and works quickly for them.

Many agencies and partners worked together to create the GeoMAC web site, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and private corporations including ESRI, ERDAS, Sun Microsystems, and IBM, all of which have provided mapping software applications, computer hardware and technical expertise. GeoMAC is sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's Geospatial Task Group.



New Faces and Places in the National Park Service

Tina Boehle is the new Fire Communications and Education Specialist and FireNet webmaster for the National Park Service at the Fire Management Program Center. She arrived in July after transferring from Whitman Mission National Historic Site, Walla Walla, Washington.

While at Whitman Mission, she was able to go out on several incidents as a fire information officer. In addition to acquiring skills and knowledge of fire, Tina also learned such valuable skills as spinning, adobe brick making, Dutch oven cooking, and website design. Previously, she worked as an interpretive park ranger at Mesa Verde National Park where she led tours to prehistoric cliff dwellings and as a volunteer at Grand Canyon National Park, where she interpreted the majesty of the canyon.

She recently bought her first home in Boise and is excited by all that Boise and the surrounding region has to offer. Tina grew up in Illinois and still has family living there, whom she hopes to visit several times a year.

Tina Davidson began her job as the Administrative Clerk (Receptionist) for the National Park Service in April 2001. She previously worked for 12 years in the Administrative Division of the Small Business Administration. She is a native of Boise, is married and has two children.

She spends her spare time, keeping involved with children's activities. Tina volunteers as Cookie Manager for Girl Scouts, Activity Planner for Cub Scouts and Craft Mom for AWANAS, a youth group. She enjoys spending time at home with family and friends.



Chad Fisher arrived in Boise in early August to fill the vacant Fire Management Training Specialist position for



the National Park Service. He previously worked at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Gatlinburg, Tennessee as the assistant leader and leader of the Great Smoky Mountains Fire Use Module. The module was responsible for prescribed fire planning and implementation in National Park Service units throughout the Southeast Region as well as wildland fire use management operational capabilities. Chad began his career with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina. He has worked on the Payette National Forest as a district crewmember and crew leader as well as on the Asheville and Alpine hotshot crews before becoming a smokejumper in McCall. Chad detailed to the Lolo National Forest as a helitack foreman on an interagency crew with the Lolo and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in 1997. Before going to the Smokies, he worked on the Lewis and Clark National Forest's Rocky Mountain Ranger District.

Chad received an A.A.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management from Haywood Community College and a B.S. in Resource Conservation from the University of Montana. He says he's still going through withdrawal from grits and sweet tea but if things get too bad he brought his own stash of both!

Al King is the new Wildland Fire Safety and Prevention Specialist with the National Park Service. This is a new position working with Paul Broyles, NPS Fire Operations Program Leader. Al is responsible for ground fire safety as well as the operational aspects of fire prevention. He is a 23-year veteran of the National Park Service and moved to Boise in early July with his family (Nancy and Matt).

Al has purchased a home in Boise and spends his free time with his family and pets. He enjoys skiing, mountain biking, camping, hunting and fishing.

Stephanie Lounsbury is working in the STEP program with the National Park Service. This is a Stay-in-School program that allows her to work part-time during school and full-time during breaks. She started in January 2000 as the Mail/File Clerk and was recently promoted to Supply Clerk. She is a junior at Boise State University, majoring in communications. This past summer she completed an internship with NPS, which allowed her to focus on her career field of communications. During her internship she traveled to Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks in California to participate in their Interpretive Training program and learn more about their fire management program, and then was off to New Mexico as a team member in a Fire Entrapment Investigation. She also assisted at the NIFC booth during the Boise River Festival. These experiences have helped her see how she can apply her communications major in several areas. She plans on graduating within the next two to three years and to continue working for the National Park Service.

Stephanie lives in Nampa with her husband, Bob, and dog, Gremlin.



New NPS employees (from left to right) Pat Quinn, Tina Boehle, Tina Davidson, Stephanie Lounsbury.

Carolyn Rogers has been with the National Park Service since November 1999 as the Administrative Assistant. She departs on September 22 to return to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and the position she held prior to moving to Boise. As much as she has enjoyed her job and friends at NIFC, the call of the “Islands”, the interaction with various seabirds and sealife have called her back to Midway. She wishes to say “Thank You” to friends and all the help from the NIFC family. She also says “I really did have my picture taken with Harrison Ford at the Green Knoll Fire. Thanks for opportunity to experience a fire assignment.”

Mike VanHemelryck and his family (wife Kim; son Jacob; dog Shooter) moved to Boise in August from Grand Canyon, Arizona. He is the new Fuels Program Assistant with the National Park Service at NIFC. His wife Kim is the State Fuels Specialist with the BLM and Jacob is a 4th grader at Seven Oaks Elementary School in Eagle.

He spends the majority of his free time hunting, fishing, participating in outdoor activities, training with and coaching his son for wheelchair track and field competition, and spending time with his family.

Moving On... One employee is leaving the Fire Management Program Center to return to her previous home in the south Pacific.

Coming and Going...

William “Pat” Quinn, Chief of Operations, came to NIFC from Petrified Forest National Park to assist with the Wildland Urban Interface portion of the National Fire Plan. As the Chief of Operations he has responsibility over the functions of Resource and Visitor Protection, Emergency Operations, Law Enforcement, Maintenance, Concessions, Safety, and Fee Collection. Pat began his temporary assignment (120-day detail) as the Acting Wildland Urban Interface Coordinator on June 10 and his detail will end on October 7, 2001. Pat has work in many different park areas, including time at a Regional Office. He has a varied background beginning his seasonal career in maintenance before taking positions in operations, concessions and management.



Scouts Get Firewise

Removing debris from the roof, using fire resistant roofing materials and placing landscape plants a safe distance from your house are all good firewise practices. They are also some of the lessons learned by Boy Scouts at the BLM Firewise Challenge at the 2001 National Boy Scout Jamboree.



John Owens talks to scouts about a FireWise house.

The 2001 Jamboree was held at Fort A. P. Hill from July 22 to August 1. Located outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia, the Jamboree was host to over 20,000 Boy Scouts from across the nation and 26 foreign countries.

Along the Conservation Trail, as part of the Bureau of Land Management exhibit, was the Firewise Challenge. Using posters, and an interactive session, scouts learned about Firewise practices, and put those lessons into use.

Developed as an outreach and educational tool by NIFC staff, the heart of the Challenge was a model house with replaceable roofs, artificial grass, tile and landscaping plants that could be moved. Groups of scouts were given two minutes to put Firewise techniques into practice around the house. Among the methods emphasized during the exercise were using grass and tiles to create fuel breaks around a home, the location and spacing of plants, putting screens on chimneys and burn barrels, and selecting fire resistant roofing materials. A smoke generator inside the house was used if the house did not pass inspection.

Posters explaining firewise principles, the role of fire in nature, fire prevention and living with fire combined with the house activity to create a great learning experience. After an introduction, groups moved on to the main activity - to make a house survivable using Firewise techniques. After the exercise, the scouts were asked to explain why they

made certain choices like roofing materials and plant locations.

The messages and the hands-on exercise really connected with the scouts. Groups were going through the exhibit up to the last minute of the last day. Some scouts came back with their friends and went through a second time.

The Firewise exhibit was staffed by employees from the National Interagency Fire Center, and BLM offices in Arizona, New Mexico and California. BLM employees working at the Firewise exhibit included Tom Lund from the Arizona Strip field office, Nancy Guerrero from the Phoenix, Arizona, field office, Chuck Robbins from the Barstow, California, field office and Kitty Mulkey from the New Mexico state office. Those from NIFC working at the Firewise Challenge included Pam Johansen, Stan Legg, Sheri Ascherfeld, Venetia Gempler and John Owens.



Venetia Gempler explains the Firewise Challenge to a group of Boy Scouts.



NIFC Fire RAWS

by Bob McCormick

Fire RAWS (FRWS) are portable Remote Automatic Weather Stations that provide an incident or fire with site-specific near-real time fire weather information. This information includes: average wind speed and direction; maximum wind speed and direction (gusts); relative humidity; air temperature; fuel temperature; fuel moisture; solar radiation; and accumulated rainfall. This data is collected and transmitted hourly through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration GOES satellite. It can then be reviewed by a fire behavior analysis (FBAN) and Incident Meteorologist (IMET) for fire weather and fire behavior applications.

In addition to the hourly weather observations taken, the FRWS can be accessed via a hand-held radio and will generate a voice output. This voice provides weather information including average wind speed and direction, air temperature, relative humidity, and maximum wind speed and direction. Division supervisors, field observers, and safety officers monitor and periodically interrogate the FRWS to get real-time spot weather and to track the changes in weather throughout the operational period.

Depending upon the size of the fire/incident, two to four FRWS can be installed on-site. These FRWS are typically installed on ridge top and mid-slope locations near or on the fireline. "ALERT" conditions are also programmed into the FRWS. The ALERT criteria can be set to a variety of different parameters including relative humidity, air temperature, or wind speed levels. For example, if a relative humidity ALERT is programmed into the FRWS at 10 percent, when the humidity reaches 10



A NIFC Fire RAWS set up at an incident.

percent, the FRWS will broadcast "Warning, warning relative humidity is 10 percent."

During the 2001 Fire Season, the NIFC Fire RAWS Team supported thirteen Type I fires, one prescribed burn, and on "fire use incident." During the height of this fire season, the Remote Sensing/Fire Weather Support Unit (RSFWSU) had seven FRWS Teams on assignments. This was possible only due to the personnel support the unit received from the Great Basin Smokejumpers and the USDA Forest Service. The RSFWSU plans on making some changes to the FRWS which include 30-minute GOES transmissions and repackaging the FRWS for lighter, easier installation.

