

# Burning Issues



*The NIFC Newsletter*

*July 2000*

## Wildland Firefighters Monument Dedicated

The drone of approaching firefighting aircraft — a C-130 and a smokejumper DC-3 — brought a hush over the crowd assembled for the dedication of the Wildland Firefighter Monument on May 25. The sound, familiar to everyone in the wildland firefighting community, evoked a flood of memories of life on the firelines, of camaraderie that lasts a lifetime. But on this day, as the planes passed slowly overhead, it wasn't a shower of retardant or parachutes that dropped from the bellies of the planes; instead, they released a cluster of purple streamers which drifted gently through the sky, coming to rest amid the colorful spring wildflowers in the new Monument at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).

Firefighters, their families and friends, came from across the nation to dedicate this monument in honor of America's wildland firefighters and the people who support them. Interagency hotshot crews, Native American firefighters, smokejumpers, representatives of state and local fire, rescue and emergency medical teams, pilots and military support staff were present. Families and friends of those who had lost their lives, and firefighters who will long be remembered for their courage and commitment, were also in attendance. The audience listened intently, as representatives of all of the wildland firefighting community paid tribute to the efforts and sacrifices of wildland firefighters.

Carolyn Terteling-Payne, Boise City Council president, started the ceremony with welcoming remarks. John Reynolds, the Regional Director of the National Park Service's Pacific West Region, spoke of the army of people it takes to manage wildfires and suppress prescribed fires when they go beyond their limits. In reference to recent fires, he said, "It is an anguish that each of us must bear. We carry the responsibility to do it right every time."

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## Dedication...

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Jim Kurth, Director of Refuges for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, talked about the agencies' guiding principals to be stewards of the land. Wildland firefighters past, present and future, he said, "have touched countless lives." He noted that the people whose names appear on engraved bricks throughout the monument serve as an inspiration for everyone in the wildland firefighting community.

Bureau of Land Management Assistant Director, Nina Hatfield, focused on the importance of interagency cooperation, exemplified by wildland firefighting efforts. "The yellow shirts cover the agency identifiers," she said. "The spirit of the monument lives in the many volunteers and contributors who came together to make it a reality." Hatfield related the yearly renewal of the monument's native vegetation to the annual commitment of the firefighting community to protect natural resources.

Department of the Interior Under Secretary Sylvia Baca, representing Secretary Bruce Babbitt, and Department of Agriculture Under Secretary James Lyons, representing Secretary Dan Glickman and Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, presented the Pulaski Award to the employees of the National Interagency Fire Center. Baca remarked that the Pulaski, a unique tool used in wildland firefighting, is like firefighters themselves, "strong, durable, and self-reliant."



*The NIFC Directors accept the Pulaski Award.*

Accepting the award on behalf of the NIFC agency directors, Dennis Pendleton, Forest Service Director at NIFC, stated that the award was earned by all of the employees at NIFC, representing all aspects of the fire management program. "It's the collective energy of you, NIFC's employees, that made this award happen," Pendleton said.

Retired BIFC director, Jack Wilson, recognized the many NIFC employees who contributed countless hours of volunteer labor to building and maintaining the Wildland Firefighters Monument, especially Hugh Carson, Al Carriere, and Bill Mitchell. He also recognized NIFC employees Laurel Simos, Mike Apicello and Tory Majors for their commitment to the monument from its inception in 1995 through 2000.

Lanny Allmaras, a member of the wildland fire support community, summed up the essence of wildland firefighting when he spoke of the importance of cooperation and coordination.

As the ceremony drew to a close, Mike Apicello, NIFC public affairs officer, former smokejumper and firefighter, gave a brief benediction, followed by a moment of silence.

BLM's Boise Smokejumpers then opened the monument and ushered visitors along walkways lined with commemorative markers and colorful native wildflowers.

In the heart of the monument stands three eight-foot bronze statues of firefighters, each carrying a tool of the trade. Sculptor Larry Nowlan began working on these heroic size figures while he was artist-in-residence at Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in New Hampshire. He completed them in his Vermont studio early this spring. They now reside permanently in the monument.

Surrounded by wildflowers, the statues stand in silent tribute to all wildland firefighters. The rustle of aspen leaves and peaceful sound of water cascading over rocks, make the Wildland Firefighters Monument a perfect place to stop and reflect on the natural beauty of our public lands, and the dedication of those who toil tirelessly amid smoke and flames season after season to protect them. 🌿

## Cerro Grande Fire, Bandelier National Monument

I would like to take a moment and offer my sincerest thanks to the folks who work at NIFC. Your invaluable assistance and sincere words of encouragement during Cerro Grande were most appreciated. The National Park Service truly knows what it means to be a part of the larger interagency community because we were the beneficiaries of that good will, spirit of cooperation and willingness to help.

Thank you.

Sue Vap  
NPS Fire Director

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### Cerro Grande Fire: A Brief History

The Cerro Grande Fire at Bandelier National Monument began as a prescribed fire on Thursday, May 4, 2000 and was declared a wildland fire on May 5, at 1:00 p.m. On June 7 at 6:00 p.m., the fire was declared 100 percent contained. Total acreage noted for the fire was 47,650 with 235 structures lost. At the height of the firefighting effort 1,289 personnel were assigned. Fire personnel continue to manage the fire and will continue to mop up and patrol the fire until the expected control date of July 9, 2000. Additional information can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/band> and <http://www.nps.gov/cerrogrande>.

### Department of the Interior, National Park Service Programmatic Actions

An Interagency Investigation Team was established by the Secretary of the Interior on May 11, 2000 to investigate the circumstances surrounding the planning and implementation of the Cerro Grande prescribed fire up until the time the fire was declared a wildfire. The investigation was completed on May 18, 2000.

On May 12, 2000, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced a 30-day suspension of federal prescribed fires west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian, and required increased level of

approvals for prescribed fires managed by federal land management agencies.

On May 16, the General Accounting Office began a review of the events leading to the wildfire in and around Los Alamos, New Mexico. Three areas were to be addressed: 1) what happened, 2) why did it happen, and 3) what can be done to prevent this type of event in the future. The review was jointly requested by Senator Frank Murkowski, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; Senator Jeff Bingham, Ranking Member of that committee; Congressman Don Young, Chairman of the House Committee on Resources; and Senator Pete V. Domenici.

On May 17, Secretary Babbitt named an Independent Review Board of fire and management experts to examine the findings presented by the Interagency Investigation Team on May 18, 2000.

The Investigation Team concluded that federal personnel failed to properly plan and implement the Upper Frijoles Prescribed Fire, which became known as the Cerro Grande Prescribed Fire. Throughout the planning and implementation, critical mistakes were made. The executive

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## Cerro Grande...

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summary of the team's report cited that Government officials failed:

- To utilize the correct National Park Service complexity analysis process.
- To provide substantive review of the prescribed fire plan before it was approved.
- To evaluate conditions adjacent to the prescribed fire boundary with regards to fire behavior, fuel conditions, and public safety in the event the fire crossed the planning boundaries.
- To complete and document the onsite review of critical conditions identified in the prescribed fire plan prior to ignition.
- To provide adequate contingency resources to successfully suppress the fire.
- To provide any wind predictions in the three to five-day forecast for the periods of May 7 to May 9, 2000.
- To follow safety policies for firefighters and the public.

The Investigation Team stated that it believes that the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy is sound; however, the success of the policy depends upon strict adherence to the implementation actions throughout every agency and at every level for it to be effective.

On May 26, 2000, the Independent Review Board concluded that the findings and recommendations contained in the Cerro Grande Investigation Report are logical, valid conclusions – with the exception of the recommendation under Finding F. The National Weather Service **did** comply with existing policies and working agreements in providing weather information, contrary to the conclusion drawn from Finding F in the report.

The Board developed additional recommendations in six categories that support the findings of the Investigation Team. The recommendations address safety,



*A view of the Cerro Grande fire from the road.*

management oversight, communication and coordination, prescribed fire planning and plan review, contingency planning, and weather.

The Review Board believed that applying fire to the landscape is an essential tool for good resource management and at the same time is one of the most significant decisions resource managers make. For it to be successful, it must be planned and implemented in an open, collaborative manner and approached with the seriousness and attention this type of inherently dangerous situation deserves.

On May 26, 2000, the moratorium on prescribed burning west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian was lifted for all federal agencies, **except** the National Park Service. All other bureaus within the Department of the Interior were advised to review their own prescribed burn programs to ensure that they were adequate and in full compliance with safety standards.

Secretaries Glickman and Babbitt jointly reconvened the interagency workgroup that developed the Federal Wildland Fire Policy in 1995, and asked the group to recommend improvements.

Additional actions that were initiated on May 26, by Secretary Babbitt include:

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## NIFC Gears Up for an Active Fire Season

“The La Nina weather event (cooling of the tropical Pacific waters) has been the biggest factor influencing the 2000 fire season,” said Rick Ochoa, fire meteorologist for the National Weather Service. A warmer and drier than normal winter has covered most of the southern tier of states from southern California to Florida. In the grip of its third season with this weather pattern, much of the South is experiencing extreme fire conditions and has reported above normal fire activity.

This wide spread activity kept dispatchers busy at the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) at NIFC, filling orders for firefighters and equipment to assist with suppression efforts throughout the South. “This has been a busy fire season so far,” said Neal Hitchcock, NICC Manager. “We were stretched pretty thin when significant activity occurred early in the season from coast to coast and our strength of force was only at about 80 percent. Preparations for fire season are wrapping up, however, and we will soon be at full strength and ready to respond to the demands of the upcoming activity.”

Weather patterns indicate a warming trend over most of the country, with below normal rainfall for much of the West. Some relief is anticipated in the South, however, as seasonal rain showers are expected in the Southeast and monsoon rains should begin in July in the Southwest. The amount of activity in the West will largely depend on the occurrence of thunderstorms that produce dry lightning, which is the number one ignition source for western wildland fires. Overall, conditions indicate an active fire season if these weather patterns persist. 🌿



*The Outlet fire at Grand Canyon National park forced road closures as activity increased on June 4.*



*The head of the Viveash fire in the Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico as it nears Elk Mountain on June 6.*

## *A Work of Healing*

The blackened and charred trees stood as sentinels to the volunteers among them raking the burned soil or scattering seed and straw by hand. The mood was solemn; voices quiet; heads bent to the work.

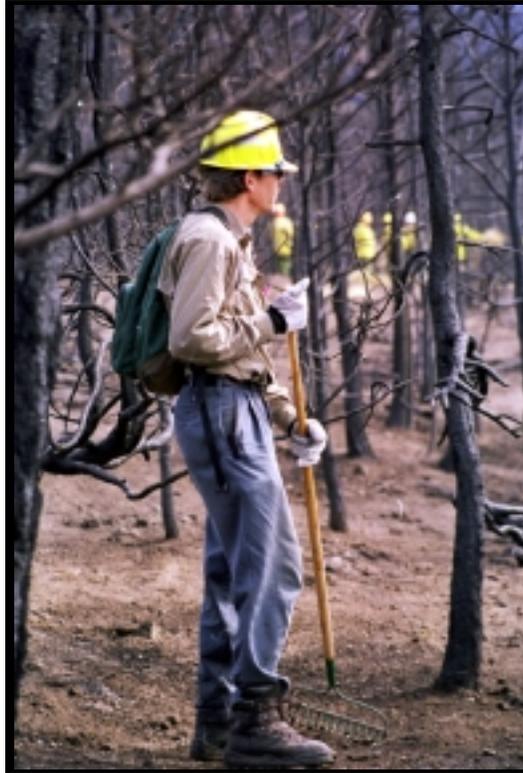
The healing had begun. But this recovery was not just for the land, ravaged by a wildfire that ripped through thousands of acres of thick forest. This mending was also for the residents and friends of Los Alamos, White Rock and Espanola, the small New Mexico towns located on the periphery of the devastating May 2000, Cerro Grande fire.

A prescribed fire blown across control lines by erratic and powerful winds, the Cerro Grande fire burned more than 45,000 acres before it was controlled weeks later. Tragically, more than 400 families in Los Alamos lost their homes to the unforgiving blaze.

Yet, within days, these same residents were rallying to begin a restoration effort that would not only help heal the forest surrounding their towns, but, at the same time, give them an opportunity to offer each other support and comfort, and use the work to soothe their aching spirits.

"It's fabulous, all these people..." Anne Davis, a Los Alamos resident, murmured as she waved her arm toward the dozens of volunteers waiting to board a bus headed for raking and seeding.

On this day, nearly 500 volunteers showed up for work—just as they had since May 27, and would every weekend for the next month. Some came with friends, others with family. Many arrived alone. All came toting



*A volunteer helps with the rehabilitation efforts after the Cerro Grande fire.*

shovels, rakes, gloves and water bottles, and wearing the required long pants and work boots.

The tasks were simple, but the effort complex—and on a scale many could not begin to contemplate. Firefighters were assigned to the rehabilitation effort, but would have to work nearly day and night to complete the tremendous reparation challenge before them: reseed thousands of acres of burned hillsides before the seasonal monsoons began in less than a month; build sandbag walls in flood-prone areas

in preparation for the heavy run-off from the rains; and remove debris from canals and drainages.

In the meantime, managers and staff of the City and County of Los Alamos were well aware of the small window of time, and the huge restoration effort that must take place to stabilize the hillsides before the rains came. Sensing the growing volunteer interest and desperate need of residents, neighbors and friends to do something, Public Works Director Dave Riker rallied his staff.

"We have a strong volunteer legacy here that started with the Manhattan Project in the early 40s," Riker said. "Volunteerism is part of the culture of this community."

Working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Santa Fe National Forest, and the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) team, Riker and his staff put together a plan.

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## Healing...

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“Several of us had experience with disasters, and were familiar with the planning efforts and what could be done to recover,” Riker said. “What’s more interesting is that one of the key people involved in developing the plan, Wayne Kohlrust, actually lost his home to the fire.”

And so the work began. Volunteers arrived in waves at the predetermined sign-in locations, boarded buses and went in several directions to accomplish their tasks. Less than a month later, nearly 34,000 sandbags had been filled and used to build retaining walls; several miles of canals and drainages had been cleared of debris and vegetation, and hundreds of acres of burned hillside around Los Alamos had been raked, seeded and mulched.

“I think one of the most astounding aspects of this effort is the number of hours volunteers have given this past month,” said Al Toth, a Los Alamos police detective who had been assigned as the volunteer rehabilitation effort director. “Think about it: at least 300 volunteers each weekend working four to six hours per day. That must be at least 10,000 hours!”

The numbers are, indeed, staggering. As of the last volunteer day on June 24, a recorded 3,313 volunteers gave 11,314 hours (of which 8,469 were worked on national forest lands). In addition, 100 Los Alamos National Laboratory employees worked 4,200 hours on projects on national forest lands.

Both Toth and Riker credit the partnership of the City/County, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the BAER and the Santa Fe National Forest for the success of the volunteer effort.

“The response has been tremendous. And if you want to get a feel for how much work’s been done, just look at how the straw has climbed up the mountain weekend after weekend,” Riker said, referring to the straw mulching. “When the rains stop us, *if* they do, we’ll know we did all we could.” 🌱



## BLM GOES TO OSHKOSH

This year, for the first time, BLM will join the other interior agencies, Department of Agriculture, and other national and international partners in the Federal Pavilion for the



Oshkosh Air show, also known as EAA AirVenture 2000, July 26 through August 1. Oshkosh, Wisconsin, has long been known as the premiere showcase for aviation throughout the world, second only to the Orly, Paris, Air show. The Can-Am government partnership is comprised of 14 Canadian and American government agencies who are working together to increase awareness of BLM programs and missions. More than 750,000 people and 12,000 airplanes participate in this week-long salute to aviation. Typically, about 2,800 show aircraft participate at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, including homebuilts, antiques, classics, warbirds, ultralights and rotorcraft. Aviation leaders and NASA researchers conduct more than 500 forums. About 70,000 people toured the exhibit area alone in 1999. The public affairs and aviation staff have collaborated to create a new full-size display for BLM Aviation which will debut in Oshkosh, along with handouts, and useful items bearing safety messages. BLM's theme – Rapid Response – fits in nicely with this year's EAA theme – Speed! 🌟

### Just in Case It's Unclear...

The following instructions were found on products to help those consumers who fail to figure out the very basics:

**On a camera:** This camera only works when there is film inside.

**On a chainsaw:** Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands.

**On a mirror for a bicycle helmet:** Remember, objects in the mirror are actually behind you.

**On a steering-wheel lock:** Warning - remove before driving.

## Canada Hosts Urban Interface Conference

Larry Hamilton, BLM Fire and Aviation director, Jay Thietten, BLM Washington Office liaison, Pat Durland, fire prevention and BLM wildland/urban interface specialist, and NPS Fire Director Sue Vap attended the "Interface Fires 2000 Conference," May 7-10, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The conference featured an array of international speakers concerned with the loss of life and cost of structure loss in wildland/urban interface conditions, an issue of growing concern world-wide. Canada and the United States recognize that a cultural change is needed to make a difference between a public that takes responsibility for its actions, and catastrophic losses of structures that are devastating both financially and emotionally. "Many of the pictures we have seen in the media lately really put the situation in perspective, "burned" structures surrounded by "unburned" vegetation!" notes Durland. "People are living in homes more flammable than the surrounding wildland vegetation!"

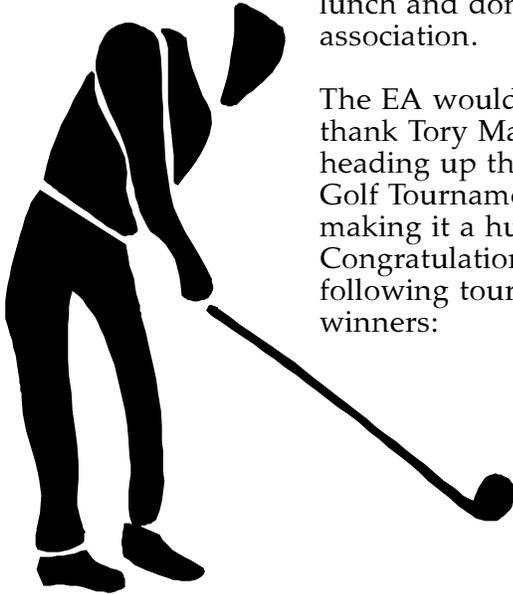
The success stories come from those areas where community stakeholders (public officials, homeowner, developers, etc.) work as partners with fire and emergency management agencies, and wildfire risk to civilians, firefighters, property and the wildlands have been mitigated and this loss-cycle is broken. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries are also recording successes by shifting emphasis from response management (firefighting) to mitigation (prevention) efforts. "It was clear from the speakers at the conference that communities throughout the world will remain at risk from wildfire until people begin to plan, build and landscape "firewise" communities and stop believing that firefighting agencies are well enough equipped to "save" them from an oncoming disastrous fire front," Durland said. 🌟

## Kudos From NIFC Employee Association

The NIFC employee association (EA) would like to thank all the volunteers who helped with our two lunches held in April and May for the Wildland Firefighters Monument Clean-up days. The EA officers really appreciated the support from

everyone who purchased lunch and donated to the association.

The EA would also like to thank Tory Majors for heading up the NIFC 2000 Golf Tournament and making it a huge success. Congratulations to the following tournament winners:



### 1<sup>st</sup> Place

Jim Glenn	\$25.00
Roger Trimble	\$25.00
Chuck Bate	\$25.00
Aitor Bidaburu	\$25.00

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Mike Hartwell	\$20.00
Mike Morcom	\$20.00
Randy Eyre	\$20.00
Ron Rembowski	\$20.00

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Sheila Valentine	\$15.00
Carl Gossard	\$15.00
Larry Tripp	\$15.00
Carey Christ	\$15.00

### Longest Putt

Randy Eyre	\$25.00
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### Closest to Pin

Mike Hartwell	Putter
Vicki Adams	Putter

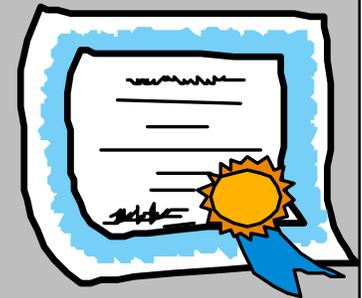
## Y2K Heroes

While many offices hosted only a skeleton crew during the holidays on the last days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those on BLM's Year 2000 Program were fully staffed, working long hours into the evenings and weekends. They were busy preparing for the information age meltdown that so many felt was inevitable. It was almost a let-down when the electricity worked, faucets ran clear with fresh water, and computers booted up without a glitch.

While the Year 2000 Program representatives may not be able to take credit for running water and lights, they can certainly feel good about their contribution to our computer systems' smooth transition into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Don Lee and Shari Shetler received awards for their participation as BLM/NIFC's coordinators to the Year 2000 Program. Lee

and Shetler received letters signed by Director Fry and Year 2000 Executive, Robert Doyle, and were presented with the BLM's Year 2000 Team portfolio and briefcase. Don also received a limited edition President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion Medal.



"These were well-deserved awards for extraordinary efforts by Don and Shari," said Lee Englesby. "I am very grateful for their hard work and dedication in ensuring our continued smooth operations."

## Great Basin Restoration Work Moves Forward

When 1.7 million acres burned in the Great Basin last summer, it seemed like an ending to some people.

But others, many of whom work at NIFC, saw a beginning.

They saw the chance to begin restoring the natural ecological condition of the Great Basin.

The greatest threats to the Great Basin are exotic annual grasses and noxious weeds. They carry wildland fire with devastating effectiveness, and thrive in disturbed areas, particularly where fires burned. They're the catalysts in the annual species/wildland fire cycle: fire follows annual grasses and annual grasses follow fire.

Annual grasses and exotic weeds now dominate an estimated 25 million acres in the Great Basin. At risk is the natural ecological condition of the Great Basin.

Teams of specialists met in August and November of 1999, and again in early June in Boise. The result of the first two meetings were reports, *Out of Ashes, An Opportunity*, and *The Great Basin: Healing the Land*. The first report illustrated the ecological problems facing the Great Basin and how resources are affected. In the second report, guiding principles for restoration are identified and strategies are outlined to help move the work forward. Both reports are available in the external affairs office.



In the June meeting, the Great Basin Restoration Team began to sort through issues and set priorities for the work.

"It's time that we sit down and answer the question, 'If money becomes available, how will it best be used?'" asked Mike Pellant, a rangeland ecologist with BLM's Idaho State Office and member of the restoration team. "We want to have a plan in place

when funding materializes."

Restoration will take years, or more likely, decades. The hope of the team is to get a permanent account authorized by Congress, which would allow long-term planning, research and monitoring.

"That's essential," Pellant said. "We can't approach funding on a piecemeal, year-to-year basis."

The Great Basin has been altered, much of it perhaps permanently.

Nature may heal the Great Basin on its own, researchers say, but even then, it could take up to 300 years and there are no guarantees.

"After all, 75 million acres of public land in the Great Basin are at stake and the clock is ticking," wrote BLM Director Tom Fry, in *The Great Basin: Healing the Land*. "The time for us to move forward is now." 🌲

## Cerro Grande...

Continued from page 4

- Requesting the National Academy of Public Administration to conduct an independent, comprehensive review of the implementation of prescribed burning policies by the National Park Service and to make recommendations for correcting these problems.
- Directing the National Park Service to initiate the appropriate administrative procedures to determine whether personnel actions should be taken in regard to the way this burn was conducted. A Board of Inquiry met the week of June 26.

On June 15, 2000, a memorandum from Director Stanton, addressed the Prescribed Fire Program Status for the National Park Service, in light of the moratorium established on May 26, 2000.

### **BAER Team:**

The burned area emergency rehabilitation (BAER) team arrived in Los Alamos the week of May 15 to assess burn conditions resulting from the Cerro Grande Fire and to make recommendations for emergency rehabilitation projects to help reduce further natural resource damage. This is the largest BAER effort in the southwestern United States and may in fact be the first truly interagency/inter-organizational effort of this magnitude in the nation operating under an accelerated time schedule. For more information on the BAER rehabilitation effort visit the website at:

**<http://www.baerteam.gov>**.

Due to the size and complexity of the Cerro Grande Fire, the BAER team is comprised of approximately 100 resource specialists and support staff. The fire encompasses lands owned/administered by Santa Clara Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, both the city and county of Los Alamos, Santa Fe National Forest, the Department of Energy, Bandelier National Monument, and Los Alamos National Laboratory. The BAER team has also coordinated assessments and treatments with the U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resource Conservation Service, New Mexico State Forestry and Department of Game and Fish, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Fire crews and community volunteers will continue to assist the BAER team in the fire area rehabilitation efforts. Crews are completing tasks that include contour tree falling, construction of log erosion barriers, mulch spreading, seeding, and hazardous tree removal.🔥



*Volunteers line-up to assist with rehabilitation efforts.*

## From the Bench to the Tower-and Beyond!

This program has perks they can't resist: first-hand experience, on-the-job training, and work outdoors. And there's more: a job placement rate of 100 percent at the end of the program, job stability, a family-oriented attitude in the workplace, job diversity, and, yes, work outdoors.

The Student Cooperative Education Program (SCEP), managed by the Incident Communications Support Unit and Infrared Operations at the National Interagency Fire Center, offers many advantages for students working toward an electronics degree.

"I love it!" smiled Guy Prather, a student with a graduation date just nine months away. "It gives you a head start, a foot in the door, and helps you know exactly what you're going to be doing."

Prather is one of seven students currently enrolled in the program. He attends ITT Technical Institute full-time while working and training 20 hours per week in the National Incident Radio Support Cache, where the SCEP trainees are located. There, said Shannon Tippett, the SCEP's training manager, the students learn basic radio programming, hand-hand radio maintenance, basic wiring, microsoldering, tower climbing and antenna maintenance, troubleshooting and terminology.

"Then, in the summer we send the students to national forest offices where they receive full-time training in everything from telephony to radio to networking," Tippett said.

Tippett, herself, graduated from ITT and the SCEP in 1996. She completed her journeyman training the following two years on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Oregon. Tippett returned to NIFC in December 1998, and was hired to lead the training program in April 2000.

Most of the other graduates move on to national forest offices located throughout the United States. "We've had 30 graduates since 1988 when the program started, who've stayed with the government and are in the field, in nearly every geographic region, including Alaska," she said.

One to two students graduate each year as new enrollees come on board. "We have students from one to four years, but we try to hire them when they first begin their electronics program at ITT or Boise State University," Tippett said. The program can handle up to 10 students per year. Graduates are hired in field offices as General Schedule 5 electronics technicians or telecommunications specialists. However, they can also be hired by private companies, and a few graduates have taken that route.

But Brandon Diemer, another student currently in the program, sees it this way: "I could go to Micron, probably get more pay. But in the big corporations, it seems like you're just a number."

Tippett touts the job diversity. "This job is different every day, from wiring to computer stuff. Compared to places like Micron where you're inside all day, our work is never boring."

Besides all that, she grins, "I get to work outside!" 🌲

### New Personnel Officer Joins NIFC

NIFC welcomes Sue Varallo, the new human resources manager for the Office of Aircraft Services. Sue came from the Bureau of Reclamation in Salt Lake City, Utah,

where she worked for nine years. She has had extensive experience in the personnel field during her career with the Defense Nuclear Agency, NASA, Census Bureau and the Department of the Army.

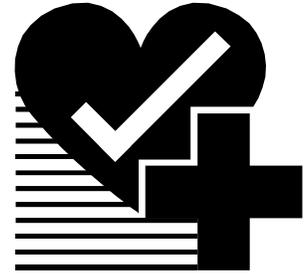
Sue likes Boise and appreciates the fact that she no longer has to pay for parking! Her hobbies include horseback riding and water sports of any kind. She also enjoys golf, tennis and reading.



## Here's to Your Health!

In support of the Department of the Interior's National Safety Day, the National Interagency Fire Center sponsored a health screening for all employees on April 10 and June 8. More than 150 employees participated in the screening, which included a lifestyle questionnaire, and having their blood drawn (ouch!). A few weeks later, a briefing was held for the groups, with explanations of their health indicators provided by the Health and Fitness Coordinator from the YMCA, which handled the screening with a contract from Treasure Valley Labs. "I want to emphasize that this screening was confidential, for the employees' use

only," said Stan Palmer, NIFC safety manager. "Some of the results of the screening prompted a few individuals to follow up with their personal physicians, and make some changes to their lifestyles." Palmer said all the NIFC agencies supported the health screening. "We are considering making it an annual event, the responses from the screening have been very positive," Palmer said. For questions about health screenings call Stan Palmer at 208-387-5507. 🌿



## Beat the Heat Stress

A cool drink and a beach umbrella is probably the best way to cope with summer heat, but for those whose jobs don't give them a choice, knowing the warning signs can hold off the effects of heat stress. Wildland firefighters, especially, work long, arduous hours in weather that is hot and dry, and proximity to the fire increases exposure to heat. Heat disorders can manifest themselves in several ways; heat cramps can cause involuntary muscle contractions, heat exhaustion is characterized by weakness, fatigue, nausea, headaches, and wet, clammy skin. Heat stroke is a medical emergency caused by failure of the body's heat controls. It can lead to mental confusion, and loss of consciousness.

So what can you do? Most of us can find a cool spot in the shade, wildland firefighters, however, fight heat stress through prevention. Aerobic fitness is one of the best ways to protect yourself against heat stress. The fit worker has a well-developed circulatory system and increased blood volume; both are

important in regulating body temperature. Acclimatizing to the heat takes five to 10 days and can increase sweat production, improve blood distribution, and decrease the heart rate which lowers the skin and body temperature. Most of all, drinking liquids to replace lost fluids can avoid dehydration, which can cause a rapid heart rate, weakness, excessive fatigue and dizziness. Continue to replace fluid losses even after work – Thirst always underestimates fluid loss. These tips, and other information about heat stress are available from a publication of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, PMS 303-1.



## BLM Attends BALTEX 2000

Larry Hamilton, BLM Fire and Aviation director, and Tom Frey, international program coordinator, went to Kuopio, Finland, in early June to attend BALTEX 2000, an international wildland fire seminar. Participants from around the world gathered to discuss the use of fire in ecologically sound forest management, address the impacts of forest fires on modern industrial society, and identify strategies for sharing information and technology. "It was an opportunity to observe, learn, and discuss how numerous other nations are dealing with similar fire management issues," Frey said.

Specialists from several countries talked about how they handle fire management issues. Finland, for example, has a very low fire occurrence. "We were struck by the small number of fires and acres burned in fuel types that during certain conditions could easily burn with high intensity," Frey said. Finland fire managers attribute their



*A single-engine airtanker makes a water drop during a demonstration fire in Kuopio, Finland.*

low fire occurrence to good fire detection systems, flat topography, numerous lakes and rivers, and well-organized fire suppression capabilities.

During the seminar, Hamilton and Frey talked about the BLM international exchange program, and shared ideas about how to establish international support for countries with severe wildland fire activity. 🌿

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## Base Maintenance Update

The NIFC grounds looked beautiful for the Wildland Firefighter Monument dedication thanks to the Base Maintenance staff. The staff put in new curbs, gutters and sprinkler systems around the monument site. They also covered graveled areas with topsoil and hydroseeded.

Base maintenance will soon complete landscaping at the southwest corner of the parking area behind the monument and on the long parking island north of the Jack Wilson building.

Crews will be working until mid-July putting in a new heating and air conditioning system in the radio cache. Tune up and cleaning of the heating and air conditioning system will



*The NIFC Base Maintenance crew.*

begin in the administration building upon completion of the radio cache project.

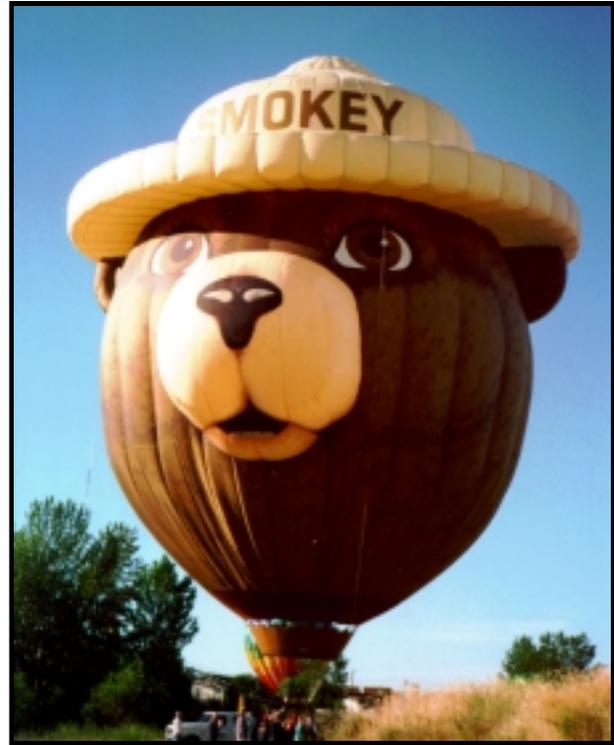
Two temporary electricians were added to the staff to replace light fixtures in the OAS offices and assist with other electrical projects on base. 🌿

## Prevention Messages Spread at Festival

Wildfire Prevention Week was a hit at the Boise River Festival this year. NIFC partnered with the BLM State and District offices and local fire departments to promote wildland fire safety. Larry Hamilton, BLM Fire and Aviation director, joined the staff at the booth to give away hundreds of posters, magnets, and trading cards. "I had no idea we could reach this many people," Hamilton said.

High overhead each morning, the Smokey Bear balloon helped spread the fire prevention message. A great crew of volunteers worked together to get Smokey in the air and then safely back to the ground. "It's a crew like this that makes my job so fun," said Bill Chapel, balloon pilot.

The external affairs staff would like to thank everyone who helped make the booth and the Smokey Bear balloon a success.



## NIFC Employees Receive Length of Service Awards

### 30 years

Barry Mathias  
Donna Burch

### 20 years

Richard Smith  
Bruce Moyers  
Linda Wemhoff  
Jim Glenn  
Ted Tower-BIA  
Laurel Simos-BIA

### 10 years

Katy Madrid  
Dennis Terry  
Luther Arizana-BIA  
Leigh Ann Squires-Kazimir  
Rodney Robbins  
Robert Swofford  
Delecia Mavencamp  
Leland Black-BIA  
Louie Leezer  
Sheila Barry

# Congratulations!



## ON COMMON GROUND

Today we dedicate our Monument.  
We invoke all good spirits...those in our hearts, minds,  
and in our souls,  
to bring to this site an eternal bond of  
healing...reflection...tranquility and peace.

There is no better way to anoint this monument than by  
uniting the spirits within us today.

Shoulder to shoulder, with those out on the lines,  
in the camps, and in the sky,  
united we stand; together,  
one extended family as a single point of contact –  
with those that are with us, those that are gone, and  
those yet to serve.

In all its essence and being,  
We are the wildland fire community.

As we prepare now for a moment of silence,  
let each and every one of us bestow our best memories,  
hopes, and prayers  
– as a single common bond –  
upon this special ground.

\* \* \*

Michael G. Apicello  
National Interagency Fire Center  
Wildland Firefighters Monument  
Dedication Day  
May 25, 2000