

Burning Issues



The NIFC Newsletter

Spring 2001

National Fire Plan - The Big Picture

Background

Seasoned fire managers expected the worst the summer of 2000, and their fears were realized early in the season when waves of thunderstorms began steadily rocking the West. Meanwhile, Southern states had still received little or no rain to end its season. The result was widespread fires that were erratic, intense, and explosive. They not only threatened people and firefighters, but destroyed property and damaged natural resources.

In early August, President Clinton visited the Burgdorf Junction Fire, near McCall, Idaho, to get a firsthand look at the fire situation in the West. During that trip, President Clinton asked the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop recommendations on how to reduce the impacts of fire on rural communities and ensure sufficient firefighting resources for the future. Their response is contained in "Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000," which is also known as the "National Fire Plan."

The National Fire Plan focused on five key points: 1) Firefighting - ensure firefighting resources are adequate; 2) Rehabilitation and Restoration - restore landscapes and rebuild communities; 3) Hazardous Fuel Reduction - invest in projects to reduce fire risks; 4) Community Assistance - work directly with communities; and 5) Accountability.

The National Fire Plan also recognized the importance of treating many hazardous fuels areas prior to the fire starting rather than relying on

suppression efforts alone, and that accomplishing this task would be a long term process.

Congress responded to the President's Report quickly and decisively by meeting the budget requests of the Forest Service and Department of the Interior wildland firefighting agencies. In all the agencies received almost \$2.9 billion (\$1.9 for the Forest Service and \$979 million for Interior).

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Implementing the National Fire Plan

Firefighting Preparedness

The 2001 appropriation provides 100 percent of the funding necessary for firefighting agencies to respond to fires at their most efficient and safe level while achieving resource management objectives, and minimizing the cost of suppression and resource damage. Through conversions of temporary positions to permanent status, hiring additional seasonal employees, and hiring new permanent fire personnel, federal wildland agencies can meet staffing needs. Additional people will also be needed to implement hazardous fuel reduction and restoration activities, including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and required consultation with agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Some of these needs will be met by the private sector through contracts.

Fire Facilities Maintenance and Construction

Adequate fire facilities are critical to efficient and safe fire operations. Funding was provided in the 2001 appropriation to construct and repair air tanker bases (tankers are critical to initial attack), crew facilities, engine houses and helitack bases. In all, Interior received a little more than \$52 million for work on 50 facilities, and the Forest Service received \$44 million for work on 111 facilities and 10 air tanker bases.

Equipment

Funding was also targeted for additional equipment such as wildland firefighting engines, bulldozers, tractor plows, water/foam tenders and to contract more helicopters. This equipment will be positioned across the country, with the majority of it located in the West.

Fire Science Research and Technology Dev.

The 2001 appropriation targeted \$26 million in funding for Forest Service research and development in firefighting, fire and smoke prediction, rehabilitation methods, fuels treatment effectiveness and effects, and community

impacts and protection. This research will help firefighters make critical safety decisions; guide deployment of firefighting forces to increase efficiency; and reduce damages to resources, people and property.

Funding was also doubled to \$16.6 million for the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP). Half of this funding comes from the Forest Service and half from the Department of the Interior. Since 1998 the JFSP has been developing science-based, interagency approaches in fuels inventory and mapping, evaluation of fuels treatments, scheduling of fuels treatments, and monitoring of treatment effects and effectiveness.

Rehabilitation and Restoration

Total funding for rehabilitation and restoration under the National Fire Plan is \$247 million. Of that, the Forest Service will apply \$142 million toward 500 proposed projects in 14 states, and Interior will use \$105 million for projects on 1.4 million acres in 14 states. Short-term rehabilitation projects will help prevent further damage to ecosystems and communities as a result of fire. Long-term restoration projects will help improve land unlikely to recover naturally from fire, prevent invasions of noxious weeds and exotic species, and reduce disease and bug infestations.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction

About \$401 million has been provided for fuels management and reduction to address dense forest vegetation resulting from decades of wildfire suppression and fire exclusion on federal lands. Activities will focus on wildland-urban interface areas to reduce the risks of fire to people and property. These projects will help support local communities by using local contractors and assistance. Treatments are planned on about 3.2 million acres (1.8 million on Forest Service and 1.4 million on Interior lands). An additional 395,000 acres of non-federal land have been targeted for treatment by state and local fire organizations using funds appropriated through the National Fire Plan to the Forest Service State Fire Assistance program.

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National Fire Plan...

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Community Assistance

Rural, Volunteer and State Fire Assistance

Safe and effective fire suppression in the wildland-urban interface demands close coordination among rural, local, state, tribal and federal firefighting agencies. The 2001 appropriation earmarked \$10 million for a Department of the Interior rural fire assistance program. This funding will enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments through training, equipment purchase and prevention work on a cost-shared basis.

The Forest Service has had similar programs in place for many years. The 2001 appropriation for the Forest Service targets \$75.5 million for its state fire assistance program; \$13.3 million for its volunteer fire assistance program; \$12.5 million for Economic Action Programs; and \$35 million for community and private land fire assistance.

Fire Prevention and Education

A critical element of the National Fire Plan is to help the public understand wildland fire and the challenges it presents where wildlands intermingle with urban and suburban lands.

This is where FIREWISE comes in. FIREWISE, through an on-line web site, publications, videos, and training events, provides educational programs and materials to help people create wildland fire resistant homes and communities. Through the National Fire Plan, \$7 million has been targeted for development and delivery of a national series of FIREWISE workshops.

Communities at Risk

In the 2001 appropriation, Congress directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to work with individual states and tribes to develop a list of communities in the wildland-urban interface at high risk from wildfire. This list of about 4,200 communities was published in the Federal Register January 4, 2001. The criteria for listing varied from state to state, and included communities with ongoing fuels treatment projects and those with projects planned for fiscal year 2001. Since then, four more states have submitted their lists and the total number of communities has grown to 23,000. The next steps are to 1) refine the list based on common criteria such as fire behavior potential, risks to social, cultural and community resources and fire protection capability, and 2) prioritize the list so that treatment priorities can be established and fuel reduction projects begun.

Accountability

In the 2001 appropriation, Congress listed a schedule of reporting requirements to ensure current, accessible information on the status of the national fire plan implementation to legislators, the administration, states and the public. In January 2001, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior submitted to Congress an Action Plan – how they plan to meet the goals of the National Fire Plan – and a Financial Plan – how they plan to spend the funds appropriated under Title IV of the appropriation. National Fire Plan leads brief Congressional members regularly on the status of the implementation. 🌿

Interagency National Fire Plan briefing papers are available on the web at www.na.fs.fed.us/nfp.

Just go to this main page and click on Interagency Briefing Materials.

NIFC Helps OFDA

Bill Laspina, the Great Basin Cache Returns Warehouse manager, provides unique support to the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Working with OFDA's logistics office, and using knowledge and experience gained in building a variety of kits used for firefighting over the past several years, Laspina helped design and build several kits used by OFDA staff on international disaster response incidents. Tom Frey, BLM International Program coordinator said, "I used one of the Office Supply Kits in Rwanda in 1996. The materials in the kit made it much easier to set up, organize, and run an office in a remote area."



Heather Lonigro and Tom Frey look at the Remote Location Pack.

The Remote Location Pack is the newest version of individual support kits used by OFDA staff send to disaster sites throughout the world. It provides food and shelter for an OFDA disaster relief worker for several days. Weighing in at 47 pounds, the Remote Location Pack can be pulled along on rollers on smooth surfaces or carried over the shoulders like a backpack in rougher terrain. The contents of the pack include a tent, a sleeping bag, a water purification kit, MREs, a flashlight and numerous other comfort items. The pack gives a OFDA relief worker more options as to the types of missions he or she can take on near a disaster site.



Bill Laspina shows Frey the contents of the pack.

The Returns Warehouse builds the packs from component parts that are either purchased locally by the cache or sent to Boise by OFDA and then ships the completed packs back to OFDA. Each assembled pack costs \$938. The costs to BLM are recovered through a reimbursable agreement with OFDA through the Forest Service.

With these kits, Laspina continues to make the lives of OFDA relief workers just a bit more comfortable when they are called upon to provide assistance in some of the most demanding circumstances and locations on earth. 🌿



Laspina and Frey put the pack back together.

Williams Heads F&A Management

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service recently announced Jerry Williams will head the Fire and Aviation Management staff. Williams most recently served as director of Aviation, Fire, and Air staff in the Northern Region headquartered in Missoula, Montana. He replaces Jose Cruz who retired earlier this year.

"This position is critical in assuring that the Forest Service and the other federal and state agencies are prepared for the fire season," said Acting Forest Service Chief Phil Janik. "Williams will do a first-class job protecting people and resources and promoting safer, healthier forests and grasslands. I'm glad to have him in this position."

Williams began his Forest Service career 32 years ago as a firefighter, serving as a smokejumper for seven years. He has served in fire management positions at district, forest, regional, and national office levels. Additionally, he has broad experience in fire suppression, fire use, and the wilderness fire program. Before becoming regional fire director in the Northern Region, Williams served as Assistant

National Fire Director for Operations in Washington, D.C.

"I'm anxious to take on the responsibilities of the assignment," Williams said. "I am looking forward to working with state, federal, and local partners to protect people and resources and being part of the team implementing the National Fire Plan."

In 1999, Williams co-lead development of a national strategy designed to protect communities, watersheds, and species at risk in fire-adapted ecosystems. The strategy became a basis for the National Fire Plan. He holds a master's degree in fire sciences from the University of Washington.

Williams and his wife, Greta have been married for 27 years. Their daughter, Sarah, is a student at the University of Virginia. Their son, David, attends the University of Montana. 🌲



Base Maintenance Stays Busy

Just like the upkeep that we all do in our homes and yards, the Base Maintenance staff continues to make improvements at NIFC. Some of the upcoming work projects include:

- New curbs and gutters
- Paving at the west end of the base
- New roof for OAS B Barracks
- Replacement of the boiler in the Smokejumper loft
- Aircraft ramp re-surfacing
- Installation of proximity card systems
- Paving on Krumm Road
- New sewage lift station pumps
- Water/wastewater redesign
- Basewide landscaping project

The Radio Cache extension is now complete and includes an expanded co-op training area, a conference room, additional offices, and an engineering lab. Presently under construction on the

north side of the Returns Warehouse is the Small Engine Repair/Saw Shop. This project should be completed by June 1, 2001. 🌲

For all you trivia buffs, did you know that the NIFC has

- 53 acres of grounds
- 20 acres of airport ramp
- 19 buildings
- 6,000 linear feet of fence
- 300,000 square feet of office space

- 700 doors
- 64 toilets
- 600 sprinkler heads
- 15 major sprinkler zones
- 3 generators
- 4 uninterrupted power systems

NIFC Welcomes Puppy in Training

Yes, that was a puppy in a green cape that you've seen in the Jack Wilson Building. His name is Daytona and he's a four-month-old Golden Retriever. Barb Sivey, the new employee relations specialist in the BLM Human Resources Office is raising Daytona for a very special purpose. Sivey comes to NIFC from the Forest Service where she worked for several years in the personnel field.

While living in Oregon, Sivey and her daughters were involved in the Guide Dogs for the Blind Program through 4-H. When she moved to Idaho to work for the Boise National Forest, she started the program here. She is now associated with New Horizons Service Dogs and is volunteering her time to train dogs to assist the disabled.

There are many factors to consider before selecting a puppy that will become a New Horizon service dog. Hunting breeds do especially well because of their willingness to work. Temperament is very important and the dog should not be shy or fearful, as they must be confident in any situation.

Volunteers like Sivey house-train the pups, teach them basic obedience and good manners, and most importantly, socialize them to the world. The dogs are exposed to grocery stores, malls, public transportation, schools, restaurants, offices, etc. Idaho law allows these dogs access anywhere for training and socialization purposes as long as they are clean and well-behaved.

As part of Daytona's training to become a service dog, he accompanies Sivey to work several days a week. As her constant companion, he attends meetings, learns the proper way to interact with her co-workers, and does some traveling. The work environment is where Daytona will probably spend much of his time when he's placed, and it is important that he feel comfortable in any office setting.

Preparing Daytona for the work place takes a lot of training and requires a huge commitment. He will be taught to turn lights off and on, open

and close doors (refrigerator and cupboard too), put laundry in the washing machine, pull wheelchairs, etc. He will also learn object and word association and will fetch objects on command.



Daytona poses for a picture.

After a year of training with Sivey, Daytona will have six months of "higher education" at a school in Connecticut. During this training phase, at-risk youth assist professional dog trainers in fine tuning the dog's skills. This part of the program has proven to be a win/win situation with the kids helping the dogs and the dogs helping the kids turn their lives around.

The trainers make sure every service dog graduates from the program. After graduation, New Horizons provides a service dog free of charge to someone on the long list of waiting recipients. Once a dog is matched with a recipient, they undergo training and learn to work together.

Because every situation is used as a learning opportunity, Daytona needs to be corrected to learn. So when you see Sivey and Daytona, please ask her before you pet him. Also, please don't be offended if she corrects him in your presence - you haven't done anything wrong! "All the different situations that Daytona encounters are helping him to become a very valuable service dog for someone," Sivey said. And finally, if you see a person with a service dog, be sure to acknowledge the person as well as the dog. "Too many times, the dog is the source of all the attention and the owner is totally ignored," she said. 🌿

Forest Service Aviators Log Record-Setting Safety Year

For the first time in history, the USDA Forest Service achieved a mishap rate of less than 8.0 in a fire year that exceeded 90,000 flight hours. In 2000, Forest Service aviators flew 111,854 hours, the second most flight hours in Forest Service history, and suffered four accountable mishaps in this period for a rate of 3.57. Mishap rates are a global measurement of aviation safety calculated as an average number of mishaps per 100,000 flight hours.

In a recent report released from NIFC, the Forest Service data shows the mishap rate for over 90,000 hours flown was dramatically reduced from 8.42 mishaps set in 1994, to 3.57 in 2000. The five-year average is 10.92.

Forest Service National Aviation Safety and Training Manager Tony Kern outlined the significance of this accomplishment: “90,000 hours is used as a benchmark because flying that much in a single fire season means we are using all of our available resources, including the military and in some cases, international cooperators. We’ve had better mishap rates in slower years, but nothing close to this in a big fire season. It is a clear indicator that we have some of the finest professional aviators in the world.”

Kern also tempered his reaction to the data by adding: “This is a terrific accomplishment but even one accident is too many. There is an



increased awareness of the need for standards and flight discipline in a comprehensive safety system, which is especially important for fire fighters. We fly in the most challenging flight environment on earth, and if we don’t know our limits, we can get in trouble in a hurry. The Forest Service strives for a mishap rate of zero and in aviation you are only as good as your last landing.”

Bob Martin, Assistant Director for Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management, also acknowledged that efforts towards effectiveness and safety are becoming evident. “Our aviators do a superlative job in supporting the ground fire fighter and they consider pushing themselves too far at times to get the mission accomplished. The low number of mishaps means that they are putting safety first, and that is right in line with our core values.” 🌿

Safety News...

The Federal Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FFAST) at NIFC is made up of interagency safety representatives who oversee and monitor national fire and aviation safety practices and make recommendations to improve safety and accident prevention. This team has several safety initiatives that have or will be implemented on an interagency basis—watch for “Six Minutes for Safety” coming this summer.

“We want to get the word out and let people know how to reach us,” said Michelle Ryerson-Grett, BLM Safety Specialist.

If you have any safety concerns or initiative ideas, please contact one of the following team members: John Gould, Team Chair-BIA, ext. 5177; Paul Broyles-NPS, ext. 5226; Rod Bloms-FWS, ext. 5599; Rick Jensen-BLM, ext. 5710; Michelle Ryerson-Grett-BLM, ext. 5175, USFS position currently vacant. 🌿

Where Were You in the Summer of 2000?

by Gini Broyles

As the fires raged in the West during summer 2000, so did the phones at the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) with thousands of callers from around the world. Thanks to several national news reports, the word soon quickly spread, “the nation was out of firefighters, fires were out of control, and there was no help in sight.” I remember hearing this report broadcasted on ABC evening news and within minutes the phone was ringing as if it were malfunctioning! NICC receives 10 incoming lines, but it seemed like fifty were ringing! The noise level went up ten-fold, and Neal Hitchcock looked at me over his glasses, as if to say, “Fasten your seat belt.” I pressed my patience button to “high,” grabbed water and braced myself for the unknown.

When I heard the national news reporters say, “National Interagency Fire Center” I knew we were in for a ride. As each part of the world began their day, we were hoping to end ours. We didn’t take into account when it was 4:00 a.m. in Boise it was mid-day in Europe and the calls poured in. One was from a woman at the Embassy of Ireland. She said they had people to send and asked me, “What airline do you want them to use?” I thought and I said, “ACNE Airlines Inc. will do.”

Calls were coming in from the United States, Canada, Australia, England, and New Zealand. The outpouring of support moved me. There were people from all walks of life including cowboys, ranchers, students, ham radio operators, truck drivers, cooks, photographers, pilots, and retired firefighters. Each person had something they wanted to offer. They had water tanks, big and small, irrigation equipment, sprinklers, and all manner of foolproof methods to put out the fires. They convinced me they could haul and fly anything; including “any sized animal out of the wilderness, as long as it was sedated.” I was relieved. I understood that my callers didn’t want any buffalo or elk to perish in the fires.

I wondered if some calls would have been prevented if Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings with national news media had said, “**EXPERIENCED** firefighters needed.” A call came in from a young man working at Wal-Mart in Wyoming who explained he could drive up to Montana and fight fire if



Doug Shinn, NICC coordinator, shares information with a caller.

someone could meet him there. He was working in the garden section and knew what a shovel was and could lift 40 pounds of bagged dirt. He thought that qualified him enough. Another caller with a deep, gruff voice had just been released from prison in Oklahoma and was having a hard time finding work. He said he could catch a bus and travel as far as Albuquerque and asked, “did we have any fires there to fight?” I told him to stand by. And I also took a call from a young man in Caldwell near the end of my more than 12-hour shift. After giving him what I thought was useful information, he finally interrupted and said he was from “Caldwell, New York.” He didn’t have a clue where Boise was.

August 6, 2000, we had reached a point of activity that I felt couldn’t be surpassed when we received word that President Clinton was coming to Idaho to visit the troops on the Burgdorf fire. The phone calls increased beyond imagination. The President arrived August 8 and by now I could safely respond, “Call the White House at 202-222-2222.” I also noticed by now that Neal quit passing my desk. My seatbelt was now a shoulder harness!

It amazed me how many people gave thought to how to put out the western fires. We had as many calls from folks with ideas how to put the fires out as wanting to be firefighters.

One caller said, “Hello, Ma’am I have an idea how your folks out there can put those fires out. Instead of loading up that red stuff, fill the planes with snow and drop it on the fires, that will put the fires out

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Summer of 2000...

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like a match.” I’m sure he had a vision of Smokey Bear at a campfire in his head and I was wondering where he thought we could get snow in August. When I received the call from a gentleman pleading, “Please don’t hang up on me,” I was cautiously alert. I don’t have much time with each phone call but this one had my attention. He went on to explain he had invented a “portable dam.” It was 50 feet by 25 feet and was proven useful in blocking ponds, irrigation ditches. He felt if he could install his portable dam on a river in Montana it would dam up the water so that firefighters could fill up their engines. I drastically tried to visualize what kind of material his portable dam was made of and how he transported it. He was as serious about his offer as the Cache Coordinator was in asking for any nomex in the country to be sent

to NIFC. After all, we had signs posted everywhere of Uncle Sam pointing his finger, “We want YOUR nomex.”

On August 21, 2000, a total of 98 large fires were reported burning, 30,000 firefighters and support personnel were deployed, four Area Command Teams were established, six military battalions were on line, firefighters and equipment from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were on assignments, and we had reached more than 52 days at Preparedness Levels 4 and 5. Do you remember where you were summer 2000? Maybe, like me, you were trying to find a parking space at the National Interagency Fire Center at 6:00 a.m. to do it all over again. 🌿

From Excess to Bargain

If you’re looking for a used helicopter, riding lawnmower, backhoe, or an office trailer, Property Management Specialist Del Starnar is the person you need to talk to. He knows all about excess property and where to find it.

Starnar shares his finds with all the wildland fire agencies. In the past, he’s provided several of the fire crew quarters with gym lockers, riding lawnmowers and dishwashers that he’s found on the excess property lists. He helped the Missoula Technology and Development Center locate a Huey helicopter body that is perfect to use for their equipment stress tests.



Items like these that are on the excess property list are free and the receiving agency pays for the transportation costs only. Some of the items Starnar has located in past years include:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Our Cost</u>
Field Packs (2,623)	\$104,000	\$2,500
Tent Stakes	6,000	225
Ramp Equipment	565,869	3,000
2 ½ Ton Truck	56,832	1,500
Loader	58,890	2,700
Mobe Center Trailer	16,000	2,500



If you’re looking for an item, remember excess is the first source of supply before you buy. Let Starnar know what you’re looking for and chances are he will find it for you. 🌿

NIFC Employees Association News

What a busy year it's been, not just for firefighting but also for the NIFC Employee Association and all of its wonderful helpers. By the time the year 2000 ended, the Association was just about wiped out – literally!

Now we need your help. It's that time of year when the Association recruits new officers to fill those whose terms are expiring. With the current total number of employees here at NIFC breaching 600, the Association is putting out a call for officers and for new agency representatives. Last year the Association operated with only three officers; however, with highly motivated volunteers – folks like Pam Johansen, Betty Percival and the NIFC maintenance crew – we made it through one heck of a challenging year.

But before you vote, or join as an agency representative - here's a sampling of what the NIFC Employees' Association does for you:

- Organizes special events: like the annual Easter Egg hunt for NIFC families
- Sponsors off-campus events: such as the annual golf tournament, and holiday gathering.
- Works to keep the Wildland Firefighters Monument a showcase and a special place.
- Merchandizing NIFC materials: this is one economy that is doing well! The Association has added many new items and is looking at special things such as a NIFC belt buckle, NIFC fleece vests, and other new sales items. With regards to helping the Association, Betty Percival, Doris Barnes and Jill Weaver deserve special recognition for all of their help with merchandizing this past summer – now the NIFC emblem is globally recognized due to their efforts in supporting last summer's "international" sales requests!

But the biggest gift the Association brings to NIFC is its commitment to helping people. The Association recognizes people in need, and in special cases offers support in many unseen ways: cards, flowers, food drives, donations to needy families – and the annual food drives and barbeques! This year, the Association is planning to have more Barbeque-Monument clean-up days.

KUDOS this month go to Tim Murphy, BLM deputy director, who is helping the Association get much needed storage space and a new lobby display case. Murphy sums up the Association very nicely: "Many hands make light work." Indeed.

The terms of the existing officers are expiring and now it's time for your help. If you wish to throw your name in the hat – please let any one of the officers listed below know you are interested.

Please indicate what duty you are interested in, or if you would simply like to be an agency representative or a volunteer). At the next Association meeting, new officers and agency representatives will be selected. The Association will meet in April and will announce the results shortly after. Please get your input in to any of the officers listed below by May 4. 🗳️

President:	Mike Apicello (FS)
	Ext: 5460
Vice President:	(Vacant)
Secretary:	Maggie Moran (BIA)
	Ext: 5370
Treasurer:	Kary Mavencamp (FS)
	Ext: 5749

Please clip and vote:

Enter Name of candidate for:

President

Vice-President

Secretary

Treasurer

Agency Representative

Volunteer

Please return this form to any of the officers listed above by May 4!

NIFC HELPS FIRE PREVENTION SOUTH OF THE BORDER

A team of NIFC specialists visited Mexico on a week-long technical assistance trip in late January as part of Mexico's National Fire Prevention and Restoration program.

The team was led by J.P. Johnston, the Forest Service National Helicopter Program manager, other team members were Forest Service National Helicopter Standardization Pilot Morgan Mills, NIFC National Contract Specialist Rick Willis, Mike Amicarella from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Central Region Office, and Isidoro Solis of the Sequoia National Forest.

Pilot training was a major portion of the seven-day technical assistance mission. This training was under the direction of the Secretaria De La Defensa Nacional (SEDENA). Secretaria De Medio Ambiente Y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT), Fuerza Aerea Mexicana (FAM), and the USDA Forest Service. Air and ground school were given at Santa Lucia Air Force Base near Pachuca, Mexico. Sixteen Mexican Air Force pilots received a tactical ground school consisting of fire behavior, communications, tactics and safety. Following ground school, the Mexican pilots spent time flying with the American pilots as they developed their skill with aerial water buckets.

The primary aircraft used in the training was the Russian built MIL mi-17 helicopter, manufactured by Moscow Helicopters Plan, and used by 50 forces worldwide. This helicopter can carry 24 troops, and is capable of carrying 3,000 kg (6660 lbs.) as external cargo (about 800 gallons of water).



The MIL-26 helicopter is capable of carrying 20,000 kg of external cargo, or about 5,500 gallons of water.



Graduates of helicopter water bucket training, January 26, 2001, pictured with Mike Amicarella (4th from left), Morgan Mills (5th from left), and J.P. Johnston (8th from left). The MIL-17 helicopter is capable of carrying about 800 gallons of water.

Orientation flights were also flown in the MIL mi-26 helicopter, which is billed by MIL as being the helicopter with the world's largest payload. The MIL-26's maximum external cargo load of 20,000 kg translates to about 5,500 gallons of water. It can also be configured to carry 80 passengers.

While our pilots were training with the air force pilots, Willis and Solis worked with Mexican officials to establish a system to contract civilian operators and aircraft for use in wildfire suppression in Mexico. Willis and Solis worked closely with the Secretary of the Environment, National Resources and Fishery (SEMARNAT) to develop a system meeting their needs.

The General Forestry Directorate plans to add helitack and rappelling to the Mexican fire program in the near future. NIFC Aerial Attack Systems Specialist Jon Rollens is providing guidance, so the Mexican Government will have a helicopter program compatible and modeled after the safe and successful Forest Service Program. 🌿

Boise Smokejumpers Welcome New Hires

There was little let-up for the Great Basin smokejumpers in the wake of the long fire season of 2000. When the flames finally died down last fall, it only meant a different kind of work was beginning.

The increased fire budget allowed 20 new smokejumpers to be hired, according to Mike Tupper, the acting assistant operations chief. That only tells part of the story, though.

“We were actually down 11 smokejumpers because of attrition and that the rookie class was canceled last year,” Tupper says. “So we actually have hired 36 new jumpers in Boise.”

Seventeen of those jumpers are transfers from the Forest Service, 16 are rookies, and three are jumpers who left the job but wanted to get back in the profession.

“It’s the biggest hiring year here by miles,” Tupper said. “We’ve been working on hiring from October through yesterday.”

The role of smokejumpers continues to expand. Fuels reduction work involves many of the same skills needed for suppression activities. That makes the smokejumpers a great source of expertise when lessening the load of fuels is needed.

“We’ve had people on the road since January 4th, when we sent some jumpers to New Mexico to work on fuels reduction projects. Right now, we have people in Montana, and we have several more prescribed fires planned for later this spring,” says Tupper.

Along with completing the fuels reduction projects, the Great Basin smokejumpers take care of NEPA requirements, write burn plans and take on any other task associated with the work.

“It’s one-stop shopping,” Tupper says.

While there’s an influx of new faces, a few familiar faces will be missing this year. Sean Cross, the smokejumper manager for the last seven years, accepted a position on the fire operations staff as chief of preparedness and



suppression standards. Eric Reynolds will act as the manager until the job is filled permanently.

Also, Tom Romanello, formerly the assistant operations chief, accepted a position with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Lakeview, Oregon, last fall.

While changes are part of the Great Basin smokejumpers’ lives this year, one thing remains constant: anticipation about the upcoming season, which could rival last year’s in terms of work and intensity. All the jumpers are looking forward to the challenge ahead.

“That’s absolutely the case,” Tupper says. 🔥





Larry Hamilton, Pat Hicks, Frank Frymire

Hicks Gets Award

When President Clinton visited the Burgdorf Junction fire camp last August, he asked the incident commander what he could do to help the firefighters. The answer to that question was to lift the overtime pay cap so that the exempt employees could be paid a full time-and-a-half overtime rate. A few weeks later, the White House announced that they were working with the Office of Personnel Management to provide an immediate and long-term solution to this problem. The immediate solution was to give fire awards to all the exempt employees who had been involved in firefighting duties but had not been paid the full time and a half overtime rate.

After the fire awards were distributed, it was discovered that many employees had not been properly compensated. Investigating this was going to be a difficult and time-consuming process and the BLM needed someone with an in-depth knowledge of the timekeeping system. Pat Hicks, western Oregon benefits specialist, immediately volunteered her assistance. She spent many tedious hours researching discrepancies. With a thorough understanding of the coding system, and the Fair Labor Standards Act exemption/non-exemption criteria, Hicks was able to correctly determine where and why individual discrepancies occurred, and from there compute the needed fire awards adjustments.

On behalf of all the people who offered their time in support of fire, Larry Hamilton recently presented Hicks with an award for her efforts in this complicated task. 🌿

Turning Obstacles Into Opportunity

In ancient times, a king had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock.

Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. On approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded.

As the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the king indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway.

The peasant learned that every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve one's own condition. 🌿

•••••
 • Service Awards •
 • Congratulations! •
 • 20 years •
 • Marvin Morford (BIA) •
 • Natalie Wiklund •
 • Pat Phillips (BIA) •
 • 10 years •
 • Enos Herkshan, III •
 •••••

2001 Wildland Fire Season Outlook

Just the Facts

When it comes to this year's wildland fire season, talk around the water cooler sounds, oddly, much the same whether one lives in Florida or Oregon.

That's because several states from the Southeast north to the Appalachians and west to the opposite end of the country are drier than they've been in decades. In Florida, 2000 was the driest year on record, and 2001 is on pace to be drier still. Florida's current rainfall deficits combined with forecasts of below normal rainfall have set the stage for yet another severe fire season. To date, the state has experienced more than 1,400 fires and burned more than 100,000 acres. Historically, the majority of fires and acres burned occurred in May and June, so fire managers are extremely concerned about what lies ahead for Florida.

And in Oregon, this last winter was the second driest in the past 50 years. Only the winter of 1977 was drier. Nine of the ten worst fire seasons in the past 30 years occurred after a dry June, so if spring rains don't materialize, the wildland fire season outlook for Oregon won't be promising.

The reason for the unusually dry conditions? La Niña. La Niña is a weather pattern characterized by cooler than normal waters in the tropical Pacific, which though it dissipated last fall, returned again this winter. La Niña tends to hold the North American storm track farther north into western Canada and then dipping southward into the Great Lakes and the Northeast. Thus, western and southeastern states have missed out on much-needed precipitation this past fall and winter, and, so far, this spring as well.

Looking Ahead

Winter snow packs and precipitation in many of the country's areas have been below normal so far. For example, in the West, except for New Mexico, the snowpack has been reported in many locations as 40 to 60 percent of normal. This is especially true in the Northwest and Northern Rockies.

With the meager snowpack and an expected warmer than normal spring, the snowmelt will be well ahead of schedule. Depending upon the number, timing and intensity of the spring rains, and the June rains in the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies, the West may experience an above-average fire season.

An above-average fire season is expected in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma and, especially Florida. This is due to the dry, and in many places extreme drought, conditions, continued below-normal precipitation, and the fact that these areas have yet to recover from the previous years' drought conditions.

What It All Means

Although predicting a wildland fire season is difficult, at best, weather patterns such as La Niña, and fuel conditions can be important indicators of the potential for a busy, or slow, fire season. These weather patterns, fuel conditions, and an added unknown factor – spring and June rains – can mean the difference between a few, scattered, small fires, or many, large ones.

Given the unusual behavior of La Niña since its appearance in 1998, forecasters don't hold out much hope right now for relief from spring or June rains.

There is a bottom line and it is this: the potential for yet another long and widespread wildland fire season is very real. Last season was difficult and challenging; this season looks to be no different. 🔥

