

Burning Issues

Fall 2012

2012 FIRE SEASON – MEASURING THE SEVERITY OF A FIRE SEASON

The 2012 fire season has proven to be challenging in its severity and fire conditions, but it is more consistent with the past decade than it is an anomaly. Since 2002, with only a couple of exceptions, fire seasons have tended to be more active, with larger acreages burned and more severe conditions than any other decade since accurate records were first kept in 1960.

Quantifying fire season severity, and comparing one year with another, depends entirely on context and what is measured; whether it is the number of fires, acres burned, length of season, homes and structures lost, team mobilizations, or fire-related fatalities. For most in the firefighting community, the number of fatalities is the most critical measure of a fire season's severity.

To date in 2012, well more than half way through the Western fire season, there have been 13 firefighter or fire-related fatalities. That surpasses the number of fatalities in all of 2011 but is well below the 10-year average of 18. In the period between 2002 and 2011, fatalities peaked in 2003 at 30, and there were 25 in 2008; 24 in 2006; 23 in 2002 and 20 in 2004.

The number of acres burned is a less a measure of individual fire season severity as it is a long-term indicator of fire conditions, fire growth and trends on the landscape. As of September 25, 8.7 million acres have burned in 2012. In the 10 years since 2002, the 8 million-acre mark has been surpassed five times, and twice surpassed nine million



Seeley Fire, Utah

acres, reaching a peak in 2006 of 9.88 million acres for the year. In the 10 years prior to 2002 (1992-2001), only one year saw 7 million acres or more burn; and six years in that period saw fewer than 3 million acres burned.



Eastern Montana Complex

Structure losses may be another measure of fire season severity and for the 346 homeowners who lost their homes to Colorado's Waldo Canyon fire alone, 2012 is arguably the worst fire season ever. To date in 2012, with likely two months remaining in the fire season, 2,125 homes have been consumed by wildfire, well below the yearly average losses of 2,600 homes. By comparison, a single fire in 1991 in the hills of Oakland, California, burned more than 3,000 homes.

Another potential method of assessing fire season severity is in considering the number of resources mobilized to respond; particularly in incident management teams, which are deployed for the more complex, longer-duration fires. To date in 2012, Type 1 teams – the most highly trained and experienced teams – have been mobilized 45 times. This is well below other "severe" fire seasons, including 76 mobilizations in 2006 and 85 mobilizations in 2002.

2012 has been and continues to be a challenging, active and severe fire season with more than 19,000 people assigned to fire incidents at the peak in early August. It is even shaping up to finish out as overall among the more severe seasons historically but is consistent with the trends since 2000.

So if the question arises: Is this the worst fire season in history or even recent memory? The answer is "no," not by any of the conventional measures used to judge the severity of a season.

MONUMENT FENCE GETS BOOST FROM BOY SCOUTS

On a warm, sunny Saturday day in September, the split-rail fence at the National Firefighters' Monument got a badly needed boost.

About 20 people affiliated with Boy Scout Troop #315 turned out to support Michael Schone fulfill one of the final requirements needed to obtain the rank of Eagle. Each Eagle Scout candidate must develop, organize, oversee and complete a project that benefits the community before receiving the honor.

Michael's project came in two stages: First, prep the fence by pressure-washing one week, and then staining it the next.

Gaining approval for a suitable project by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) organization was one of the more difficult chores for Michael. The BSA has strict standards for Eagle Scout project proposals and Michael approached several community organizations, none of which had a suitable project for him.

"Just finding a project was a challenge," he says. "We got turned down a lot."

In fact, the fence facelift was the sixth try at locking down a project that would meet with BSA's approval.

When the word of approval came through, Michael says, "It was relief that I finally got a project." And after the reality of how much work and organization it would take, he remembers his next reaction. "And then it caused me a lot of anxiety because I got a project."

He learned of the need through a circuitous route. First came Michael's dental hygienist, Brian Halle, who was aware of the need for an Eagle project. Next came one of the dentist's patients, Tim Murphy, BLM assistant director at NIFC. That led to a call from Tim Murphy to Einar



Boy Scout Troop #315.

Norton, NIFC's supervisory engineer. The discussion in the dentist's chair was the catalyst for Michael getting in touch with Einar. After that, the dots connected quickly.

Behind every Eagle Scout is usually a determined mother. That was certainly the case for Michael.

"It feels wonderful to finally complete this journey toward the Eagle; I'm very proud of him,"

says Noel Schone, who

modestly described her role as, "Keeping him focused and reminding him. I'd call it 'gentle persuasion.'"

The project was a family affair. Along with his mother, Michael's father, Ryan, brother Steven (also an Eagle Scout) sister Heather, uncles, cousins and grandparents all supported him. Michael's troop is sponsored by the Centennial Ward of the LDS church.

Overall, he estimates about 153 hours of work were needed to rehab the 1,065-foot fence. The fence was in need of help. The last time it was pressure-washed and stained, it's believed, was in 2004, when another Eagle Scout candidate took on the chore.

At first, Michael wasn't sure "staining a fence" would be a "cool" project. He was still grieving over the loss of his pet dog and he initially wanted to serve an organization that worked with animals, but couldn't find a group willing to accept his service.

"When Michael and I came to NIFC and met with Einar, we walked around the monument," Noel recalls. "I struggled to keep my eyes dry as I saw the names of the men and women there who have sacrificed their lives fighting fires. It's very humbling and I'm grateful this monument exists to remember these heroes. We knew then that this was an amazing project, not just staining a fence."



Michael Schone working on the fence project.

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Einar Norton agrees that the work was worthwhile.

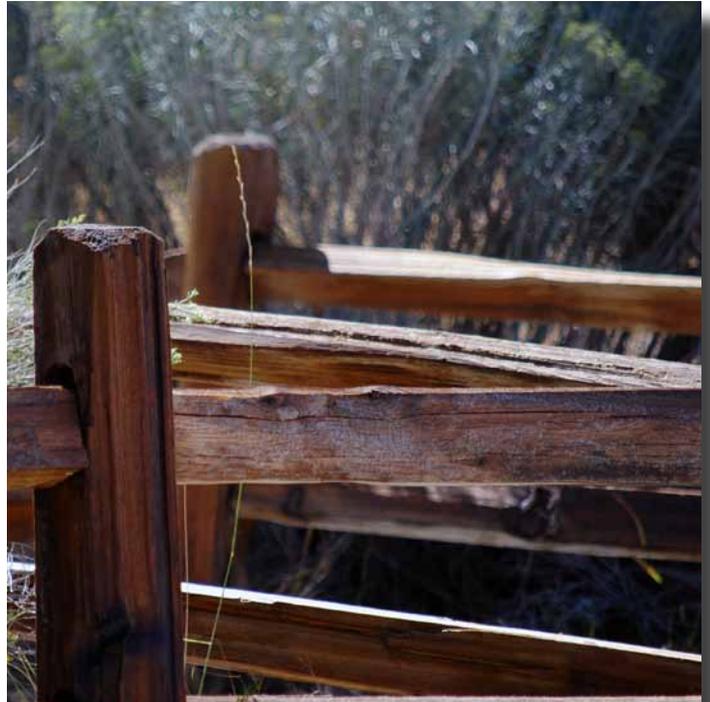
“Michael’s Eagle project is not only a great way to spruce up the firefighter monument’s appearance, but it is also a very positive way to connect with the local community and bring awareness to the individuals who have lost their lives while serving the public,” he says.

The NIFC Employees’ Association provided treats for the volunteers. NIFC campus maintenance supplied the materials.

Michael is a freshman at Centennial High School. Among his interests outside of scouting are music (he plays the trumpet in the marching band) and art (he wants to be an animator someday and make children’s films.)

“He loves art,” says Noel. “He’s happiest when he has a paintbrush in his hand.”

And in that sense, Michael Schone’s Eagle Scout project was a perfect fit for him.



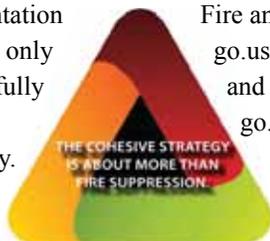
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE COMMUNICATES COHESIVE STRATEGY TO STAKEHOLDERS

On a daily basis, the National Park Service (NPS) Division of Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) works with interagency counterparts and other stakeholders to facilitate implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. The Cohesive Strategy (CS) is an ongoing effort by federal, tribal, state and local government agencies as well non-governmental organizations to address growing wildfire challenges in the United States. For more information, visit the Forest and Rangelands website.

Since the inception of the CS, NPS FAM has learned many valuable lessons about communicating the CS effort. First and foremost, effective implementation of the Cohesive Strategy will only occur if the NPS has successfully communicated the CS tenets clearly to the NPS community.

Good communications is inherent in the mission of the NPS. As part of the strategy of open communication, FAM collects success stories focused on how units implement the Cohesive Strategy at the local level. This is done using the existing chain of command; from the park unit to the region where the material is reviewed and subsequently submitted to NPS FAM.

In the spirit of a national, multi-agency, multi-stakeholder approach to Cohesive Strategy, the NPS success stories are shared with all interested parties via the National Park Service Fire and Aviation website (at <http://go.usa.gov/rsVj>) and the Forest and Rangelands website (at <http://go.usa.gov/rsdF>).



The central message of the Cohesive Strategy is: “The Cohesive Strategy is about more than fire suppression.”

Harrison Ford Helps Get the Word Out

This summer, the Teton interagency fire prevention/ education staff worked with Harrison Ford to record fire prevention PSAs. They were posted on the front page of www.tetonfires.com, and available to any radio station that wanted to use them. They are also available on the PIO Bulletin Board at www.nifc.gov/pio_bb/psa.html. The group said Ford was great to work with, and the PSAs turned out really well!

WHAT'S UP WITH THE NUMBERS???

Decrypting the Sit Report and the National Fire News

The Predictive Service's Intelligence Section produces the Incident Management Situation Report (IMSR) – also known as the Sit Report – daily during fire season. The Sit Report provides a synopsis of national wildland fire activity that occurred the previous day. The National Fire News — <http://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/nfn.htm> — is updated by the External Affairs Office. The National Fire News provides another source for wildland fire information with fires broken out by state and additional links and contact information regarding the incidents.

So, where do the numbers come from? The Intel Section derives information from S-209s that were submitted the day before. External Affairs then uses the numbers from the Sit Report. There are a few numbers that differ between these two reports.

The Intel Section draws a number out of a hat, which is the number used for “Uncontained large fires.” External Affairs refers to the number on the Magic 8 Ball for the “Number for active large fires.” Make sense?

All joking aside, these two reports will typically have different totals for large fires, but the acres burned is the

same. The Sit Report's large fire count is the number of large fires under suppression efforts. This number also includes individual fires being suppressed within a complex. The National Fire News counts every large fire reported on the Sit Report regardless of whether or not the fire is being suppressed, monitored, managed, confined or controlled. A complex is counted as one incident.

Here's an example:

| | Sit Report | National Fire News |
|----------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Complex of 3 fires | 3 | 1 |
| 20 suppression fires | 20 | 20 |
| 5 managed fires | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 23 fires | 26 fires |

The Sit Report is a bit more complicated with its reported information. For more information regarding the Sit Report, Understanding the Information Provided in the National Incident Management Situation Report can be found at - http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/Reading_the_Situation_Report.pdf.

Clear as smoke?

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE FIRE AND AVIATION WEB PAGE UPDATED

The National Park Service Fire and Aviation Program is pleased to announce the launch of its updated website, located at <http://www.nps.gov/fire>.

The new look and feel of the website will enable users to find information traditionally provided, along with enhanced information about the aviation, structural and wildland fire management programs within, the National Park Service. As the NPS approaches its second century of service and stewardship, the website is one tool out of many that will help share the Fire and Aviation Management program's connection to the NPS mission.

Visitors to the site will find the layout more streamlined, with improvements in readability, printing capabilities, and a wealth of information.

“The information contained on the website highlights our strengths in leadership, safety, and collaboration. Our programs go well beyond the boundaries of emergency response and into the areas of science and ecology, structural fire prevention, social media, environmental compliance, and planning,” says Tom Nichols, chief of the division. “Whether your interest is history,

photos, leadership development, safe practices, operational procedures, activities for kids, success stories, or policy, there's something for everyone on the site, and our connection to other programs in the NPS will be more apparent.”

Additional information, including social media connections, will be added in the future. Suggestions, ideas and new links are welcome, send your feedback to: NIFC_NPS_Webmaster@nps.gov. Webmasters are encouraged to check and update their sites for links to maintain the continuity of information. Visitors who discover broken links or are looking for information previously bookmarked or linked may also contact us at the address noted.



The new home page of NPS Fire and Aviation website highlights the three operational areas of aviation, structural fire and wildland fire.

NPS DIVISION OF FIRE AND AVIATION MANAGEMENT WELCOMES NEW EMPLOYEES



Social media (Merriam-Webster definition): forms of electronic communication (as web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)

Social media (Wikipedia definition): includes web- and mobile-based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among organizations, communities, and individuals. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."^[1] I.e. Social Media are social software which mediate human communication. When the technologies are in place, social media is ubiquitously accessible, and enabled by scalable^[clarification needed] communication techniques. In the year 2012, social media became one of the most powerful sources for news updates through platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Social media (External Affairs definition): a whole lotta web stuff used 2 touch base n pass along the 411, pics n vids 2 peeps everywhere by FayBaying, tweetin and UTubin.....LOL!

We do want your feedback on how we're doing on the social beat. We will be more than happy to post YOUR information on NIFC's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube sites. Please pass along your material to the External Affairs staff!

Check out the NIFC Social Beat!
Facebook: www.facebook.com/BLMFire
Twitter: twitter.com/blmnifc
YouTube: www.youtube.com/BLMNIFC

September 2012 – **Brandi Browning selected as Customer Service Representative for Medical Standards.** Brandi comes to NIFC from the Department of Defense Operation Warfighter internship program located at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Brandi retired after being wounded while serving as an army EMT in Afghanistan and put her service and skills to work with Operation Warfighter. As the customer service representative, Brandi will assist the four DOI agencies and their personnel with medical standards issues.



August 2012 - **Mark Koontz selected as new NPS Wildland Fire Operations Program Lead.** Mark now oversees the NPS wildland fire operations program, which encompasses wildland fire preparedness and response, fuels treatments, workforce development and training, fire prevention, fire equipment management and construction programs.

Mark started his career in fire in 1988, working for NPS; later he moved on to be a smokejumper for the US Forest Service in McCall, Idaho and BLM in Boise. Mark returned to the NPS in 2003 as the NPS wildland fire training specialist and was subsequently promoted to serve as the NPS wildland fire training program manager in 2007.

August 2012 - **Heather Sanders selected as the Human Resources Assistant for the Division of Fire and Aviation Management.** Prior to her selection, Heather worked at NIFC as a customer service representative for the wildland firefighter medical standards program. Previously, Heather was a member of the US Air Force for ten years. Heather is currently working on her undergraduate degree in human resource management from Columbia Southern University, which she plans to complete in 2013.



July 2012 - **Eric Anderson selected as NPS Structural Fire Training Specialist.** Eric has worked as a wildland firefighter, law enforcement ranger, and collateral duty structural firefighter in parks across the nation since 2000. Eric is now working on training and development for the NPS branch of Structural Fire.



April 2012 - **Christine Peters selected as the NPS Incident Business Specialist.** Christine now serves as the national subject-matter expert for incident business management for parks and regional offices and with interagency partners. Christine was hired as the NPS Fire and Aviation Management administrative officer and incident business specialist in 2007.

BROTHERHOOD OF THE VEGAS VALLEY HAND CREW

The Vegas Valley Hand Crew consists of a diversity of backgrounds. The members represent different military branches including Army, Navy, Air Force and the Marines and are originally from all over the country.

Kari Boyd-Peak and Jennifer Smith had the opportunity to visit this crew at the Red Rock Fire Station in Vegas. These firefighters all believe they are serving their country in a different light, replacing their military equipment with a Pulaski and shovel. After visiting the crew and speaking with several individuals, it became apparent that the impact this line of work is having on those involved will leave a lasting impression, not only offering the chance to define an individual work ethic but create a sense of camaraderie and accomplishment that can only be derived from teamwork under stressful and challenging conditions.

“You have a larger purpose with yourself. You’re a part of the effort. Feels good,” said Kevin Mesch who was a machine gunner for the Marine Corp and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Vets feel lonely. This has helped.” He also talked about the crew’s experience on the West Mary’s Fire where the crew was flown in to replace smokejumpers. “It was our own personal fire and we got to put it out.” Kevin would like to make a career with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Joel Kloosterman has also enjoyed his fire service experience. Joel didn’t know what to expect when he signed on with the crew three weeks after leaving the Marine Corp. “The job suits me. It’s been a fun, fast-paced fire season.”



Vegas Valley Hand Crew



Vegas Valley Hand Crew

Lauren Stoler, who served the Navy for five years, wants to make a career with the BLM and continue work past his term employment on the hand crew. “I’m looking forward to next season. You have to get your foot in the door.” Lauren felt a sense of camaraderie from the start of the crew, and was comfortable around the others. “It’s about performance. You want to lead... You want to do better.” He feels that everyone has a place on the crew. “You have to be accountable for yourself. Look at the positive and go with it. It’s a Zen thing.”

Johnny Islas has always had an interest in wildland firefighting. “This job has been physically more demanding than being in the military.” Johnny has really enjoyed hanging with the the crew. His tool of choice is the super combi.

These rookie firefighters have had a whirlwind of a season. They started out as a Type 2 fire and fuels crew and have bumped up to a Type 2 initial attack fire crew. The crew has assisted with fuels projects, initial attack and more than 11 fire assignments. The skills and experience gathered from this ongoing job will provide opportunities for those involved that can have far reaching impacts on careers, families and communities. Theses stories stand as testimonials that everyone can control their lives and future. The Vegas Valley Veterans Crew has proven a complete success and everyone involved looks to the future with optimism for this BLM sponsored program.

NORWEGIAN FIRE MANAGERS VISIT TRINITY RIDGE FIRE CAMP

On August 28, 2012, Norwegian government officials Ole Kristian Aagaard, and Torbjørn Mæhlumsveen, were escorted to the Trinity Ridge Fire on the Boise National Forest as a part of their week-long visit to NIFC to learn how emergency response works in the United States.

Accompanied by NIFC External Affairs staff, the group traveled to Featherville, Idaho, where they visited fire camp and toured the Incident Command Post (ICP). Information officers discussed the role of providing information to the public, the media, ICS personnel and firefighters. Ole and Torbjørn commented on how a well-functioning ICP works. “To watch it firsthand is an entirely new learning experience.”

Next they observed burnout operations near Featherville, where they saw helicopters and crews working efficiently together to control the fire’s rate of spread. “Wildfire in Norway is rare,” commented Torbjørn. Rainfall mixed with colder temperatures largely influenced by the North Atlantic coastal climate makes large fire incidents uncommon.

In Norway, the civil service is very different than here in the United States. As a nation with 5 million people, emergency responses to disasters are undertaken at



Norwegian government officials Ole Kristian Aagaard, (District Commander for Civil Defense for Sør Trøndelag) and Torbjørn Mæhlumsveen, (Chief of the Trøndelag Inter-Municipal Fire Department) visit Trinity Ridge Fire ICP to learn about NIMS.

a local level. Townships and counties form their own response teams and there is no equivalent to the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Wildland fire may be uncommon in Norway, but there were many important lessons they took home. Their visit to the Trinity Ridge Fire showed a small, yet important aspect of the overall National Response Framework. Since Norway has no national response system in place, the visit to Boise provided Ole and Torbjørn with a perspective on emergency response at several levels, and helped them understand the different levels of command and how resources are shared.

WILDLAND FIRE LEADERSHIP AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT VIDEOS HELP YOUNG FIREFIGHTERS

In an effort to reach out to young, career-minded firefighters, the National Park Service has produced the “Wildland Fire Leadership and Career Development” video series. Answering questions about their career experiences, mentors and mentoring, Sue Husari, Brit Rosso, Ben Jacobs and Jun Kinoshita from the National Park Service, Jim Cook from the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Chris Wilcox from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Jeff Arnberger from the Bureau of Land Management volunteered their knowledge and experience as a resource for young firefighters looking to turn their summer job into a full-time career.

Brian Lawatch, the NPS Student Conservation Association intern, worked with Jim Shultz, NPS

Training Specialist, on the video series. Jim wanted to produce these videos in order to make institutional knowledge easily accessible for all wildland firefighters. Modern technology makes it possible for fire managers to reach more people than ever, and the opportunity to get them involved in such a project might fade as they reach retirement. Brian conducted the interviews, collected the supplementary photos and footage, and edited the videos for the final product, available online at the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned YouTube channel (<http://goo.gl/TNWrf>). Six videos have been produced, with one more on the way. Additionally, the videos will be used as an interactive tool for the interagency Fire & Aviation Mentoring online platform.

NIFC INTERN'S EXPERIENCE RECOUNTED ON NATIONAL PARK SERVICE BLOG

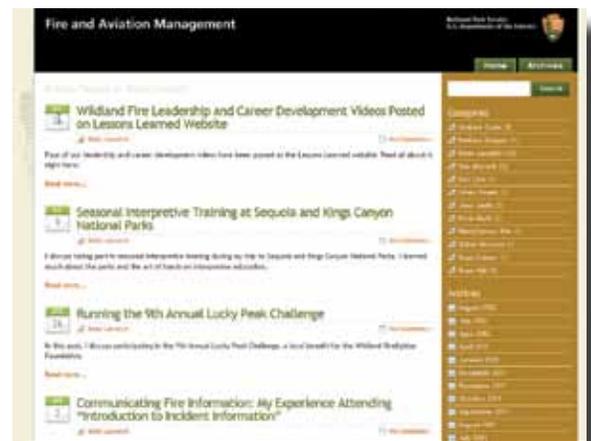
Do you remember those first experiences that shaped your future in fire management? Many at NIFC started on the fireline as seasonal firefighters, but my first experience in fire management started this past year as the Student Conservation Association intern working for the National Park Service Communications & Education Team. My year-long internship started in October 2011 and came with many requirements and opportunities; one which was contributing to the NPS Fire and Aviation (FAM) blog. Located on the FAM website, I recount my past year, telling the story of my many experiences—the work I did and the lessons I learned, the challenges I faced, and some funny highlights that completed a fulfilling and educational time at NIFC.

My entries show how I immersed myself into the world of wildland fire. I produced a video series that educated firefighters about career mentoring, created publications for public, interagency, and internal use, and with help from subject matter experts, headed an NPS-wide survey that asked important questions about emergency extraction capabilities for fire and aviation employees working in the backcountry. I learned the history and role of fire in nature and how it affects the NPS mission, provided interpretive tours of the NIFC campus, and lastly, I learned the importance of maintaining a vibrant public affairs program—as doing so helps ensure public awareness of the vital work done here at NIFC.

Now that my year is up, and I look for my next venture, I know and hope to use all that I have gained while working at NIFC. Check it out: <http://goo.gl/11x5D>



NPS Fire Communications Intern Brian Lawatch taking some R&R at Crater Lake National Park.



Blog available at <http://go.nps.gov/famblog>

VETERANS TO FIREFIGHTERS ROADMAP PROJECT

For the past few months, a small group of interagency specialists and the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Office of Wildland Fire have been collaborating on a unique project. The project is called Veterans to Wildland Firefighters Roadmap. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive suite of web-based tools and information for recent-era military veterans who are pursuing wildland fire careers within the DOI. The information and interactive design of the project anticipate veterans' questions and information needs, and provide a pathway for ex-military job seekers to follow.

The primary medium for this project will be a website (hosted on the Department of Interior website). When completed, the website will have three levels of information and guidance.

Roadmap level. The "Roadmap" will form the main organizational structure. It will graphically show the process for a recent veteran to move into wildland fire management in three main phases: Exploratory, Application and Integration. Each Phase will have a drop-down box that provides a list of Key Questions pertinent to that phase.

Response level. When a user clicks on the Key Question, he or she will get an immediate response. Each Key Question is in effect a link,

and clicking on the question takes the user to a clear and crisp response to that question. The responses are mostly text, but most if not all of the responses will include links to sources of more information.

Extra Information level. The links in the information provided in the Response level will take the user to additional information products and sites. The extra information could include samples of resumes and job applications, video clips, testimonials, articles, flowcharts, photos, and other websites.

The website—both main and subsidiary levels—will be designed for clarity, and to help users navigate the site. The site will create rapport between the users and the DOI. Users should feel comfortable using the site, and they will hopefully refer friends who are also recently out of the military to the site.

As more and more veterans leave the armed forces in the post-Iraq/Afghanistan era, the DOI hopes to attract new employees who will bring the skills, training, discipline, and team focus they learned in the military into the DOI's wildland fire programs.



NEW ADDITION TO EQUIPMENT SHOP

Have you wandered over to the Equipment Shop lately? If so, you may have noticed an addition to Building 420, the Returns Warehouse. This new small engine repair shop and test room is a significant upgrade from the one that was used in the past. The new building has state-of-the-art machinery that helps employees test each pump that comes back from the fireline. It also includes several new safety features to protect employees.

“It was a challenge to apply industry standards to a non-standard operation,” said Mark Kirner, supervisor at the Return Warehouse. The small engine repairs and testing that are done in the new shop are unique. Kirner worked closely with Einar Norton, general engineer at NIFC, to examine industry safety standards and design a building that met the specific needs of the Equipment Shop.

The new building has 10-inch thick insulated walls as a sound barrier, explosion-relief panels, better ventilation that removes fumes quickly, and a sump floor to properly dispose of spilled liquids. “This building wouldn’t have happened without Einar’s help,” Kirner said. “He helped us make sure it had everything we needed.”

This new shop has been getting plenty of use this year. The Great Basin cache currently has nearly 700 high pressure pumps, but the pumps can be sent out to the fire and returned many times each summer. “We will likely test 2,500 pumps this year,” Kirner said.



New addition to the Returns Warehouse.



Strolling Down Memory Lane...

Employees at NIFC share their favorite memories from the fireline.

Jeremy Sullens, Wildland Fire Analyst

“I’m surprised I liked working in wildland fire enough that I stuck with it for well over a decade. It took me only three days when I got to college to decide what I was going to do and that was work in wildland fire. And I thought when I graduated from high school I wanted to be an aerospace engineer!”

Nicole Hallisey, Great Basin Area Incident Support Cache Assistant Manager

“My funniest memory was when I was a rookie hotshot crewmember on an assignment deep in the Gila Wilderness and we moved coyote camp every night. One night, we finally reached camp; there were lots of snakes all around us. So, I fell asleep thinking about snakes and how

other crew members were saying to watch out for snakes in the bottom of your sleeping bag. I woke up early, still thinking about snakes, and felt something cold and hard at the bottom of my bag. I jumped out of my bag, while still trying to not wake everyone else, and was freaking out after hearing all the snake-in-bags stories. I dumped my sleeping bag over to shake out the snake, and it was my Leatherman in its case, which had fallen off my belt. The nicknames that ensued were quite memorable.”

Ellen Green, Staff Assistant at NICC

“What I remember as the hardest part of being a firefighter was getting beyond the physical exhaustion and working through the mental exhaustion, too. Working 16 hour days for 14 days and keeping focused was challenging. We had to keep the crew morale up during these times and avoid complacency.”

Tate Fischer, Fire Planning Specialist

“My most memorable fire was the 2008 Paiute Basin Fire in northern California, it went from a raging wildfire to a mudslide in eight days. It is the most memorable because it entailed every operational aspect I could have asked for. We did handline construction, burned out, worked with aerial resources, everything. It started from initial attack to being stranded on a hill for three days because of a mudslide.”

Ken Frederick, Public Affairs

“My funniest memory was teasing rookies about trimming tree tops down by flying a helicopter upside down.”

