



Burning Issues



Fall 2014

FIRE SEASON 2014: A RECAP

Strange, odd, peculiar. However the 2014 fire season is described, it was different than what was seen in the past 10 years. The national picture tells a tale of a slower and more relaxed fire season.

As of September 18, 39,927 fires have burned 3,002,842 acres this year. Compared to the 10-year average of 59,063 fires that burned 6,588,812 acres, the 2014 numbers reflect about 68 percent of the fires burned and less than half the average number of acres burned.

Quick Comparison

2014: 3 million acres-burned reported September 18
2006: 9 million acres-burned reported September 20

But the numbers may be deceiving, as fire season in the Northwest was anything but slow. A lightning storm in mid-July caused a huge spike in large fire activity in the Northwest Area. Fires in Oregon and Washington burned 1.2 million acres, totaling 43 percent of the year-to-date acres burned nationally.

One notable fire was the Carlton Complex, near Twisp, Washington. It became the largest wildfire in state history, at 256,108 acres. Extreme weather conditions on July 17 pushed the fire toward the town of Pateros, where about 300 homes were lost and critical infrastructure was destroyed. In Oregon, the Buzzard Complex burned

nearly 396,000 acres and seriously impacted Sage-grouse habitat. These two fires account for nearly half of the total year-to-date acres burned in the Northwest.

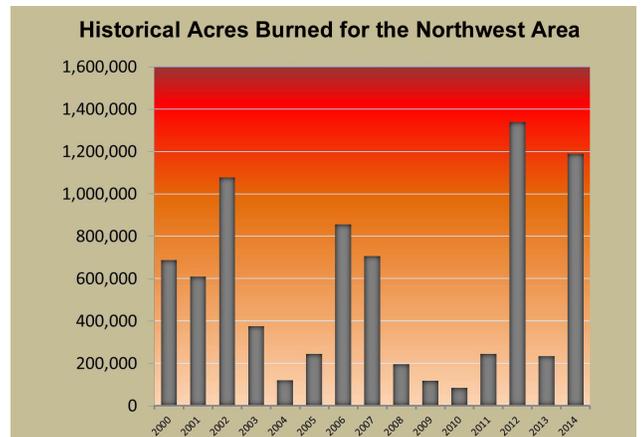
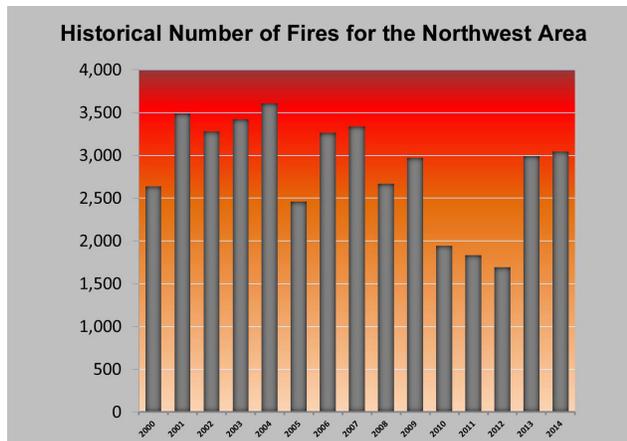
By August, 35 large fires, and complexes, were burning in the Northwest, California and Idaho. Hotshot crews, caterers and MAFFS units were rapidly assigned to ongoing incidents. On August 4, the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group increased the national preparedness level to PL4, where it remained for 15 days.

Large fire activity in California continued in September. The Happy Camp Complex burned about 131,000 acres and the King Fire, near Placerville, is almost 83,000 acres.

The potential for new large fires in California will persist through the fall, as dry fuels and an off shore flow hit the state. Severe drought conditions will dominate California, Nevada, Oregon, and parts of the Great Basin for the next few months.



Smoke column from the Carlton Complex was visible from fire camp.



The national fire season focused on the northwest corner of the country this year. Although many geographic areas hosted large fires, most of the activity seemed to be in the Northwest Area. The graphs are a comparison of the number of fires and acres burned in the Northwest Area.

NIFC FLEET MANAGEMENT RUNS A TIGHT SHIP

NIFC Fleet Management is tucked away on the east end of the base. Recently, External Affairs sat down with Ken Fournier and Brad Taylor, traffic management specialists with the NIFC Fleet Management shop. We wanted to find out who those Fleet guys are and what they do. Here's what we learned...

How many vehicles does Fleet Management (FM) manage?

Fleet Management has responsibility for approximately 130 vehicles and pieces of equipment. This includes cars, trucks, snowmobiles, ATVs, smokejumper vehicles, cache vans, fork lifts, base maintenance trucks, RAWs vehicles and two crew carriers for Alaska Hotshot Crews. At the ramp, we oversee the procurement and disposal of the airplane tugs, the stair truck, belt loader, sweeper and an aircraft fuel tanker.

We also procure and manage the lease vehicle fleet, which amounts to 20 or so vehicles and trailers per year. NIFC vehicles are available for use by any federal employee. We also manage several law enforcement vehicles assigned to the Washington Office located in Washington D.C., Denver, CO, and Boise, ID.

Where do you get the vehicles that comprise the fleet?

Some are owned by the Department of the Interior. BLM provides the funding to purchase the vehicles outright. The vehicles are managed over their lifecycle, and during that time funds are collected from users and placed into the Working Capital Fund.

When a vehicle reaches a certain age or number of miles, we order a replacement vehicle and dispose of the older one. When Interior vehicles are used, we only pay mileage and fixed ownership rate.

We also utilize some General Services Administration (GSA) vehicles; however we have found DOI-purchased vehicles to be far more cost effective. Having a GSA vehicle is like having a rental vehicle. We have to pay a monthly use fee for those vehicles whether they are used or not. So we are gradually phasing out GSA vehicles on base.



Ken Fournier and Brad Taylor from the transportation group at NIFC.

What does the Fleet Management staff do on a day-to-day basis?

The main function of Fleet Management is to provide reliable transportation needs for NIFC units. We also maintain the highest level of fiscal responsibility, so our work involves a lot of planning, preventive maintenance and scheduling.

We also manage credit cards for all the vehicles, plus another 27 miscellaneous credit cards. If a fleet vehicle is in an accident, we take care of the accident report and schedule repairs. Brad (Taylor) and I do quite a few repairs ourselves.

It's a busy job. In fact, during some fire seasons, we have to get extra help into our section to assist with the added work load.

What issues cause you the most stress?

Credit card issues and the lack of consistent guidance from the National Operations Center/Fleet are our biggest sources of stress. We run into unusual problems now and then, and since the national fleet management position at the NOC has been vacant for quite some time, it can be challenging to resolve those issues.

The liability we have on credit cards is substantial. Unfortunately, we've had a couple of cases where a credit card gets compromised. What happens is a crook illegally scans a government credit card, then takes that information and purchases fuel all over the place.

We immediately cut off that card as soon as we become aware of the theft, but unfortunately, we usually don't find out about it until the end of the month on the credit card statement or when the credit card provider notifies us.

We're also responsible for the credit card usages themselves. If we get audited—which will happen—we have to provide documentation that the credit card use is in accordance with BLM policy.

We reconcile the statement with spending to ensure proper and ethical use of the fleet charge cards for accurate billing purposes. This task becomes extremely time consuming during fire season, because of all the charge codes that are used.

How does a government credit card get compromised?

Typically, the card data is stolen when a thief attaches a scanner or a “skimmer” to a credit card reader at or near a gas pump. Be aware if you're fueling up at night and you see someone sitting in a car with a cell phone at their ear. Look for a small plastic box or device attached at the card reader at or near the pump. That may be a skimmer. Some of these devices record data, while other kinds transmit data to a cell phone. If you have any suspicions about the card reading device at a gas pump, notify the attendant if possible and always try to pay for your fuel inside.

What is one thing about Fleet Management that most folks here at NIFC probably don't realize?

Fire season is typically our busiest time. We can receive as many as 400-600 credit card receipts per month, and we oversee seven lease task order contracts. We also do numerous monthly vehicle utilization reports that require data input into FBMS.



Taylor and Fournier inspecting an electric vehicle's battery system.

The Smokejumpers and RAWS units travel all over the country and typically travel in excess of 400,000 miles a year.

Due to mandatory fleet reduction requirements, and mandates in Executive Order 13514 and GSA Bulletin FMR-B-30 to improve fuel efficiency, we are working to reduce our carbon footprint and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The NIFC fleet will see fewer vehicles, but we will do our best to maintain our mission readiness.

Any advice for fleet vehicle users?

Well, first, NIFC motor pool vehicles are not dispatched for individual fire/team assignments. We simply do not have enough vehicles to support folks on teams who will be gone for two, three or four weeks.

Second, because of the reduced number of vehicles we manage, all units requiring a motor pool vehicle should try to consolidate passengers and trips to the same location and utilize the same vehicle. When possible, please use alternative fuels to reduce our carbon footprint and the emission of greenhouse gases. We want to do our part.

What are some accomplishments in Fleet Management over the past few years?

Thanks in no small part to having four hybrids and four completely electric vehicles, we have cut our fuel consumption substantially.

Our fleet review audit two years ago got several compliments from the NOC and D.C. office. They said, “Your office should be a model for the rest of the BLM.” That was pretty cool!

NIFC has an outstanding safety record as well. Over the last seven fire seasons, NIFC folks have driven about two million miles on fleet vehicles without any serious accidents. That's fantastic!

Beyond those accomplishments, we work hard to be efficient. We have drastically reduced our maintenance and repair costs. We've met or exceeded all of our fleet reduction mandates. And, almost all of our vehicles—98% of them—are alternative fuel vehicles.

NIFC EMPLOYEES INSPIRED BY WOMEN LEADERS AT CONFERENCE

Inspirational, aspirational, shero. All were words used by participants and speakers alike during the 2014 Andrus Center Conference on Women and Leadership that was held September 10 – 12, 2014 at Boise State University. This was the second annual Conference on Women and Leadership. The 2014 event focused on the question “What is Success?” Five hundred and seventy-five people attended, which included a small contingent from the National Interagency Fire Center, as well as women and men from the corporate world, non-profit world, and the public sector. The group listened to speakers and networked with each other about leadership and success over the three day conference.

The conference opened with remarks by former Idaho Governor Cecil Andrus, founder of the Andrus Center; Bob Kustra, President of Boise State University; and astronaut / educator Barbara Morgan, who served as the conference chair. Though all the speakers are too numerous to mention, highlights included Admiral Michelle Howard - Vice Chief of Naval Operations in the United States Navy, Dr. Ellen Ochoa - Director of the Johnson Space Center, Deanne Shulman - first female smokejumper in the United States, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor – retired Supreme Court Justice, Carla Harris – Vice Chairman for Global Wealth Management with Morgan Stanley, and Karen Crouse – Sports Journalist with the New York Times. There were also accomplished Olympians, film producers, CEOs, military leadership, and more. All the speakers shared stories of what success meant to them, the concept of being a pioneer in a particular field, overcoming barriers, and paying it forward to the next generation.

The participants from NIFC agreed that the three days were well-spent. Michelle Fidler, Acting Fire Communication and Education Specialist for the National Park Service, summed up the experience well. “It was inspiring to have the opportunity to network with an amazing group of women. As the speakers shared their stories of passion and perseverance, I came away with tangible leadership principles I look forward to putting into practice myself.”

The third annual conference will be held September 8 – 10, 2015. We hope that NIFC will be well represented next year. To learn more about this year’s conference and speakers, visit <http://sspa.boisestate.edu/andruscenter/events/andrus-conference/>. Posts on Facebook were shared by the Andrus Center for Public Policy at <https://www.facebook.com/andruscenter> and tweets were posted under #WomenLead2014.



NIFC NPS attendees at the 2014 Women and Leadership Conference included (left to right) Kelin Staats – Medical Standards; Michelle Fidler – Communication and Education; and Tina Boehle – Communication and Education.

508 What?

Have you ever been asked to put a document you created on a website? Recently, I was, so I contacted my web manager and handed her my file. Then she asked, “Is this file 508 Compliant? It must be 508 Compliant before it can be posted.”

What’s 508 Compliant, I wondered. Are there 508 things I have to do to my file to make it compliant? When I asked the web manager why I have to make my document 508 Compliant, she rattled off this long, complicated definition that didn’t sink in at all. Seeing my dumbfounded look, she made it simpler by summing it up like this:

“508 Compliance is the law and every federal agency is required to comply. It is a web-based standard by which documents, video, multimedia, and websites are developed to allow equal access to information for anyone with sensory impairments. People with visual or hearing impairments use special software to interpret content and provide screen captions or have the content read out loud.”

The web manager also showed me the Guidelines on Creating 508 Compliant Documents/PDF’s for Posting on the NWCG Website. This document provides step-by-step, easy to understand instructions for what I need to do to make my documents 508 Compliant from start to finish. It’s posted on the National Wildfire Coordinating Group website <http://www.nwcg.gov/accessibility/nwcg-procedures-guidelines.pdf>.

Now I use this document to make sure all my files are 508 Compliant, just in case they need to be posted online. I just wanted to thank Tammy Denny and Rhonda Noneman for putting together such a wonderful resource that helped me conquer 508 Compliance!

Sincerely,
A Now-Savvy 508 Compliant Author



NIFC HONORED WITH SECOND BICYCLE FRIENDLY BUSINESS AWARD!



For the second time in four years, NIFC has won the “Bicycle Friendly Business” (BFB) award from the League of American Bicyclists. Not only is NIFC now a two-time winner of this recognition, the

National Interagency Fire Center advanced from the Bronze award level to the Silver award level with this announcement.

“This award recognizes NIFC’s commitment to support employees who bike to work,” said Josh Haney, NIFC’s official bike liaison. “What pushed us from Bronze to Silver this year is NIFC’s bike reimbursement program, plus the workshops and brown bag lunches we’ve sponsored.”

NIFC becomes just the twelfth Idaho business, agency or educational institution to reach the Silver level of the Bicycle Friendly Business award. Criteria for BFB recognition include the organization’s dedication to encouraging bicycle commuting; creating bike-friendly facilities at the workplace; educating employees about

bicycle commuting and safety; and evaluating the organization’s progress toward being really, really bike-friendly.

The Bicycle Friendly America program provides incentives, hands-on assistance and award recognition for businesses, communities, universities, agencies and states that actively support bicycling. The League of American Bicyclists represents bicyclists in the movement to create safer roads, stronger communities, and a bicycle-friendly America.



Josh Haney carries a lot of weight as the NIFC go-to guy for bicycling issues and opportunities.



Pause to Remember...

September 27th was a somber day for the Great Basin Smokejumpers. It's hard to believe, but it was one year ago that veteran smokejumper Mark Urban perished in a parachuting accident near Prairie, Idaho. Mark was an experienced smokejumper who had just completed his eleventh season with the BLM smokejumping program. As he rose through the ranks, he became a senior smokejumper, a spotter, and a rookie trainer. Mark was a well-liked and highly respected member of the Great Basin Smokejumpers. He is missed.