

# Burning Issues

Summer 2011

## HOW HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT IS THE 2011 FIRE SEASON?

This fire season has had its share of headlines, and the news media has already anointed 2011 as a “record-setting year.” In light of the past three average or below average fire seasons, is the 2011 fire season shaping up to be historically significant? Are we watching history unfold?

Several facts argue in favor of the proposition.

### Wallow Was One Big Fire

The Wallow Fire in eastern Arizona burned over 538,000 acres, which makes it one of the largest single fires in the past century in the Lower 48 states. This one fire burned more than the entire Southwest Geographic area burned in all of 2010.

### Large Fires Have Been Common

The number of large fires reported this year is suggesting that 2011 is a historically significant year. According to NICC, 2011 is likely to rank no worse than third—after 2007 and 2006—in terms of the occurrence of large fires. A “large fire” is defined as one reaching 100 acres in size in a timber fuel type and 300 acres in size in a grass or brush fuel type. At the time of this writing, NICC had recorded just under 1,000 large fires for the year, which is approaching 2007’s mark of 1,283 large fires. The 2006 record of 1,800 large fires, however, seems out of reach.

Speaking of large fires, nationwide we have had 11 fires in 2011 that have burned more than 100,000 acres, and we’re only around halfway through the fire season. The average over the past decade is just over seven of these mega-fires.

### Summer Fire Season Continues

Fire forecasters at NICC continue to say that the summer fire season has not peaked yet. Indications are that Texas will likely continue to burn fairly actively through summer, while other portions of the Southwest gradually succumb to the monsoon rains. The season will continue to move north into the Great Basin, but fire activity is likely to stay confined largely to lower elevation desert and rangelands into August. Intelligence specialists call for a normal wildfire season in southern California as we approach autumn.

On the other hand, several other facts argue against the proposition.



Wallow Fire in Arizona. Credit: Jason Coyle

### Limited Scope of Fire Activity

Although the country had burned a whopping 6 million acres by the end of July, just two geographic areas (the Southwest and the Southern areas) have accounted for over 88% of the acres burned in the U.S. Five years ago, during the record-setting 2006 fire season, the Northern Rockies, Rocky Mountain and Northern California geographic areas were already burning fiercely, and the Northwest was quickly coming into play. Four years ago, the Western Great Basin, Eastern Great Basin, Northwest and Northern Rockies were already very active. Conversely, this year, several normally busy geographic areas (the Northwest, Northern Rockies and North Ops) are barely burning; those three geographic areas *combined* have burned only 13,000 acres this year.

### Lingering Snow up There

The lingering winter snowpack is still putting the big chill on the fire season in upper elevation areas of the West. Snowpack in many places remains above average. Actually, snow is still melting in the high Sierras, the Cascades and the Rockies. Contrast that with 2006 and 2007 (the two busiest fire seasons in recent history with 9.9 million and 9.3 million acres-burned respectively), when the high country forested areas were bone dry and burning by mid-July. The season is going to be significantly delayed in the upper elevation areas—meaning it is going to be short-lived once it does arrive.

## Alaska's Contributions

Alaska has been a big contributor in national acres-burned statistics several times since 2004. This year, however, Alaska has played a minimal role, and its fire season is essentially over. Alaska's annual ten-year average acres burned is 1.9 million, but in 2011, the number of acres burned (so far) in AK is just 280,000.

## Team Mobilizations

For those of you who like statistics (and who doesn't?) here is one more indicator that we are not where we were at in '06 and '07: By mid-July 2011, Type 1 national team mobilizations stood at 27, and Type 2 national (interagency) team mobilizations stood at 34. But by the same date in 2006, 29 national Type 1 teams had been assigned, and a whopping 103 Type 2 team mobilizations had occurred. In 2007, Type 1 team mobes stood at 30, and Type 2 team mobes were at 78.

In spite of the news media calling 2011 a "record-setting year" for wildfires, this year is probably not going to make it into the "Worst Fire Season" Hall of Fame. It has been a busy year with its share of gigantic fires, but it doesn't look like 2011 will put up the stratospheric numbers we saw in 2006 and 2007.

## THE NEW KIDS AT NICC

The daily 10:00 a.m. fire season briefings at NIFC have a different look and feel this year with new National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) staff members Ed Delgado and Jeremy Sullens providing weather forecasts and fuels condition updates.

Delgado replaced Rick Ochoa as the National Predictive Services Program Manager and Sullens replaced Tom Wordell as Wildfire Analyst. Both Ochoa and Wordell, who were longtime NICC employees, retired within the last year.

Prior to joining the NICC staff, Delgado worked as the Predictive Services Program Manager at the Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center in Salt Lake City, Utah for nine years. Since starting his career in 1986 at the USAF Environmental Technical Applications Center in Asheville, North Carolina, Delgado has worked as a journey forecaster for the National Weather Service in Fort Worth, Texas and Denver, Colorado and as a senior forecaster in Raleigh, North Carolina and Greenville, South Carolina.

Delgado is eager to apply his skills and experience to his new position to help advance the science and

## NIFC Seeking Volunteer Tour Guides

Do you enjoy working at NIFC and interacting with people? NIFC gets many requests from the public and other visitors for tours of the base -- so many, in fact, we have trouble scheduling them all. So External Affairs is developing a cadre of employees and retirees to help conduct tours. We will offer training/orientation and a shadowing assignment for anyone who would like to join. For more information, contact Kari Boyd-Peak at x5457.



technology of fire weather forecasting at the national level. "Working at NIFC offers a lot of opportunities to work with a wide variety of partners to further the profession with the ultimate goal of enhancing the safety of wildland firefighters and the effectiveness of wildland fire management," said Delgado.

Developing and adopting new products and methodologies and partnerships are also key to Sullens. He started his career in 2000 as a seasonal with the Oregon Department of Forestry in John Day and worked his way up through the ranks to become Assistant Area Director for the Oregon Department of Forestry's Eastern Oregon Area. This is Sullens' first job with the federal government.

"At NIFC, there are a lot of chances to help find new and better ways to identify and communicate fire potential that can make a real difference on a national scale," said Sullens.

Delgado and Sullens are both enjoying living in Boise. Don't be surprised to see Delgado playing soccer on a local field or to see Sullens carving turns at a nearby ski hill.



## “BUT IS IT A MEGAFIRE?”

With some wildfires gobbling up a huge number of acres this year, we’re beginning to hear the term “megafire” creep back into the vernacular of reporters and the fire community.

That might raise the question, “What exactly is a megafire?”

The answer to that question is deceptively simple and somewhat complicated at the same time.

First, there is no set definition of a megafire. That’s the simple part.

But there are some basic characteristics that can lead to the megafire label. That’s where things get more complicated.

In a 2008 paper, “Mega-Fires: A Leading Edge Indicator of Declining Resilience in Fire-Dependent Ecosystems,” Jerry Williams, a former Forest Service director of fire and aviation, and Dr. Albert Hyde, provide the characteristics of such a blaze.

- They are not defined in absolute terms. A certain number of acres, for example, do not qualify a fire as a megafire.
- They generally burn in areas where fuels have over-accumulated as a result of prolonged fire exclusion. In other words, megafires are often linked to changes in stand structure and species composition that have made a forest more susceptible to large, high-intensity crown fires.
- Megafires aren’t limited to forested ecosystems. Several megafires in recent history have burned primarily in rangeland in the West or wetlands in the South. Invasive annual grasses, mostly cheatgrass, are the primary source of fuel. As in forests, cheatgrass and other annuals represent a change in species composition from native grasses and shrubs.
- Megafires generally feature extraordinary rates of spread and high resistance to control efforts.
- Through numerous burning periods, they exceed efforts at control, often until there is a major change in weather or substantial break in fuels.
- Megafires occur more often when linked to extreme climate events, such as the 100-year drought event recently experienced in Georgia and Florida, or the fires in 2011 in Texas.
- Megafires typically involve more than one fire jurisdiction and organizations beyond the fire community, such as the American Red Cross, FEMA, or the military.
- Control tactics that might work well on a large fire (e.g. pre-existing fire breaks, aerial attack on the head, burning out) are impeded by long-distance spotting, severe turbulence and extreme rates of spread.

Tom Wordell, a former wildland fire analyst at NIFC, added a couple of other characteristics. Megafires “force us to be defensive and reactive,” and “typically exceed what we expected.”

So is it a megafire or not? Evaluate the characteristics described by Hyde, Williams and Wordell, and if most or all of them fit, it’s probably safe to call it a megafire.



## SOUTHWEST FIRE CENTER BATTLES WORST BLAZES IN 28 YEARS

Article reprinted with permission from author, Bob Brewin, at [www.nextgov.com](http://www.nextgov.com) (6/20/11).

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. - At the Southwest Coordination Center, nerve center for federal, state and local response to forest fires in Arizona and New Mexico, managers are using a variety of software programs and information technology tools to help juggle resources to battle blazes during the worst fire season in nearly three decades.

In terms of conditions that spread fires -- drought, heat and wind -- "this is as extreme as it gets," said Bob Leaverton, regional fire and aviation director for the Forest Service. Leaverton said he has never seen such a dangerous combination of dire conditions in his 28 years with the Forest Service. As a result, the Southwest has experienced a series of massive fires in 2011 -- the worst in almost 30 years -- including the 826-square-mile Wallow Fire, the largest Leaverton has experienced in his career.

Now the Southwest Coordination Center, staffed by personnel from the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona State Land Department, and the State of New Mexico Division of Forestry, is managing the response to six active fires in Arizona and eight active fires in New Mexico. The center also monitors five inactive fires in Arizona and another two in New Mexico.

The center has deployed almost 3,500 firefighters and 202 engines to the Wallow Fire, 160 miles east of Phoenix, and intelligence plays a key role in managing both personnel and equipment, said Mary Zabinski, a spokeswoman for the center.

Tonja Opperman, a Forest Service fire applications specialist from Gardiner, Mont., posted here temporarily to run a fire decision support center, said her team uses a software package called Wildland Fire Decision Support System to help make strategic tactical firefighting choices.

The decision support system displays all fires in the region as "big red dots" in a geographical information system that contains relevant information on specific fires, such as wind speed and direction, and hot spot data derived from daily infrared mapping flights over the Southwest by Forest Service aircraft, Opperman said.

The system includes a probability model that helps project a fire's potential spread based on factors such as the type

of timber and vegetation in its path as well as topographic characteristics.

Shortly after the Wallow Fire started, smoke from that conflagration began drifting east, leading to air quality warnings in Albuquerque and other parts of western New Mexico.

Cody Wienk, a National Park Service fire ecologist from Omaha, Neb., said the decision support system includes a modeling program that can predict the probable direction of smoke plumes -- information that can be passed on to local health departments.

Diane Rau, a Forest Service fire technology transfer specialist who started her career as a firefighter on a hot shot crew in Montana, uses another tool in the decision support system for long-term -- seven days out -- fire modeling. The tool forecasts fire behavior by simulating 2,000 fires in a particular area on top of each other, and then determining the probability of their spread.

Rau has high praise for the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, as it was developed by the National Interagency Fire Center based on input from end users, with the system constantly evolving in accordance with continued input.

Opperman said the work of her team is key to the day-to-day firefighting operations, as resources are stretched this season. The team's analyses aid managers on where to allocate personnel and assets on a daily basis.

The hot spot imagery used by the fire decision support center team is collected by the Forest Service National Infrared Program office, also located here. The program operates two aircraft, a Cessna Citation jet and a Beechcraft turboprop King Air, each equipped with the aptly named Phoenix airborne infrared fire detection and mapping system.

Thomas Mellin, the Forest Service's regional remote sensing coordinator, said this system can detect fire hot spots within 4 meters and make that information available to coordination centers and to interpreters located at fire incident command posts through a central computer server. Due to the intensity of the fire activity in the Southwest during the past week, Mellin said both aircraft have operated nightly flight over Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado.



Mellin said once the infrared system collects the data, it's downloaded with a technology available to passengers on Delta, American and AirTrans and other airlines -- an AirCell Inc.-operated aircraft cellular system that can transmit data to the ground at a rate of 1.8 mbps.

Other aircraft -- air tankers or fire bombers, along with helicopters equipped with water buckets -- serve as the big guns of the wildfire battle.

The center has 15 water-bucket carrying helicopters and five fixed-wing air tankers, which drop fire retardant deployed to just the Wallow Fire, with all aviation assets in Arizona and New Mexico managed by Kim Owczarzak, a Bureau of Land Management aviation dispatcher.

Owczarzak, who started her career as a firefighter, uses an Automated Flight Following System that displays the location of all the aircraft on a desktop map, with updates of their GPS-derived location broadcast every two minutes via a satellite communications link.

This system also displays the location of aircraft on the ground, and when she gets a call for an aircraft from one of the 12 dispatch centers, Owczarzak said she can eyeball the display monitor and find one available to handle a particular mission. This fire season, Owczarzak said she has dispatched the largest air tanker in the world, which can drop 12,000 gallons of fire retardant in one pass.

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## TABLE ROCK CHALLENGE — RUGGED 9 MILES

The Table Rock Challenge is a fun run or walk for fire prevention. The Table Rock Challenge isn't a big event, but it's brought participants together for the past 37 years. This year's race is on September 10 at 9 a.m.

This local community event starts and finishes at Fort Boise Park. The course winds 4.5 miles up Shaw Mountain and Table Rock Roads to the top of Table Rock and returns for a total of nine miles.

Is the Table Rock Challenge a real challenge? Oh, yeah. The course gains 1,000 feet in altitude. Is it fun? Most definitely. Smokey Bear is at the top of Table Rock for participants to take a breather and get their photo taken. A

Smokejumpers --- the special forces of firefighting --- also go about their missions with high-tech tools, according to Rocky Ahshapanek, a jumper base manager detailed here from Missoula, Mont. Since smokejumpers operate in remote areas, he said, they carry iridium satellite phones to ensure communications, along with GPS receivers to pinpoint their location and fire lines.

Leaverton said the multiagency fire response system works so well because personnel with special skills from state, local and federal agencies are all trained the same way, meaning they report to a central coordination center or an incident command post and can start doing their job within minutes.

Benjamin Bramwell, a lieutenant from the Denver Fire Department, proves the true utility of the cooperative approach. Trained on National Interagency Resource Ordering and Status System software used to manage firefighting logistics and also used by state, local and federal agencies, Bramwell sat down at a desk in Albuquerque, fired up the software and started coordinating the logistics for forest fires far from home.

"I've been here three hours, and I'm managing resources," Bramwell said.

The coordination center here has operated on a 24-7 basis since May, Leaverton said, and he expects that pace to continue for another three to four weeks, until early summer rains dampen one of the worst fire seasons in memory.

variety of wildland and city firefighters staff the event. There will be engines and crews at water stops along the course.



The race is sponsored by the Treasure Valley Fire Prevention and Safety Cooperative, which consists of the Boise BLM, Boise National Forest, NIFC, Idaho Department of Lands as well as the Boise, Meridian, Nampa and Caldwell City Fire Departments. The Coop includes local Boise companies as sponsors for the event. This race is a true Boise experience.

For more information, contact Jennifer Smith, 387-5456. Online race registration is available at [www.bluecirclesports.com](http://www.bluecirclesports.com).



## LEN DEMS NAMED FIRST RECIPIENT OF RICK GALE AWARD

When you stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon it is easy to understand that great things can happen. Giving someone the ability to grow professionally and personally in the pursuit of great things is a true gift. The late Richard T. "Rick" Gale possessed the traits of vision and empowerment as evidenced by his many accomplishments, not the least of which was serving as a mentor and coach to scores of National Park Service employees during his forty one years of service. Whether these traits grew or matured during his tenure at the Grand Canyon is hard to know, but the metaphor holds true. Great things can happen when the right person is aligned with the right opportunity.

Even after Rick retired as the Deputy Chief Ranger for Fire, Aviation, and Emergency Services, his contributions to the National Park Service as a whole were significant. His ability to recognize capable people and encourage and assist them in accomplishment of personal and professional growth is undeniable.

To honor Rick's legacy, the National Park Service Division of Fire and Aviation Management, in conjunction with Rick's family, established the Rick Gale Award, which will be granted to any National Park Service employee who has demonstrated these traits in the continuation of the NPS mission and the growth of NPS employees. There is

no greater accomplishment than leaving a legacy of helping others to be successful while continuing to protect and preserve America's best idea.

The Rick Gale Award is open to any NPS employee who has demonstrated mentorship / encouragement toward empowerment of individual employees and/or volunteers. In addition, they have a demonstrated vision toward the betterment of the National Park Service, its employees, volunteers, programs, and/or parks; and execution of actions necessary to accomplish that vision.

This past spring, the first recipient of the Rick Gale Award was announced. In December 2010, Len Dems, Fire Management Officer for the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service, passed away due to cancer. When the family of Rick Gale learned of Len's passing, it was their wish that Len receive the first Gale award, because Len possessed so many of the characteristics which they would like the award to recognize. In support of this request, family and friends developed this narrative:

"Len started his National Park Service career on the North Rim of Grand Canyon NP working for Rick as a Fire Control Aid. Rick served as a mentor and supporter of Len throughout his career. Len's significant contributions to the profession of Fire Management, Aviation and Law Enforcement warrant this nomination.



Tom Nichols, Division Chief for NPS Fire and Aviation Management, presented Len Dem's wife, Jenny (third from left) the first Rick Gale Award, while Sarah Fisher nee Gale(second from left), Dems' sons Dylan and Cody, and Cindy O'Neill nee Gale (far right) look on. Not pictured is Beth Spencer nee Gale.

The following are just a few examples of why Len is so deserving of this award:

In his early career, Len served as a front line fire fighter. He understood the complexities of fire fighting duties and consistently focused on fire fighter safety as a priority in all response actions. Len's career path included stints in administration – to achieve career status – and as a law enforcement park ranger prior to focusing full-time on fire management as his chosen profession. Len served as one of the first park based fire management officers (FMO), building a strong program at Shenandoah National Park. He continued to serve in the capacity of a park FMO by leading the program at Grand Teton National Park. Len's abilities were further recognized when he was selected as the Regional FMO for the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service.

Len served as a mentor for countless individuals in the NPS. Those fortunate enough to have worked for Len, including one of Rick's daughters, were provided with Len's guidance and expertise, while given opportunities to grow and develop as individuals within the NPS organization. Len's mentorship extended beyond the National Park Service to the interagency fire community.

Len was highly regarded in the interagency all-risk, aviation, and fire management communities as a leader

and was integral to the professional growth of the NPS in these areas. His dedication to the NPS professional image was evident in his personal work ethic.

He had the ability to quietly influence the direction of programs and his inclusive approach was legendary. Len was a good natured team player who worked well both with internal NPS divisions and interagency partners.

Len's expertise was sought for significant reviews of major fires and incidents. Len's ability to see the big picture and provide skilled advice was essential to improving future actions within the fire management profession.

In Len's personal life, he was also a leader and mentor. He served in numerous capacities to support the Boy Scouts of America, including the support of many young men who pursued Eagle Scout status. Len's family life mirrored his professional life – a caring example of a leader and champion of the growth of others.”

There is no better way to honor Rick and Len, as well as their families, than to bestow the initial Gale award on Len Dems. This will establish a standard for the award that will clearly illustrate the caliber of people the Gale award is intended to recognize, regardless of the location within the National Park Service in which they work.

## NIFC IS BIKE FRIENDLY

On April 21, 2011, an awards ceremony was held at Boise State University to recognize the university as well as three local businesses for being certified as Bike Friendly. Bill Nesper, director of the Bicycle Friendly America Program, came to Boise to present the awards. The recipients included:

- Boise State University, Bicycle Friendly University: Bronze Level (one of only 20 universities in the nation to be recognized)
- Healthwise Inc., Bicycle Friendly Business: Silver Level (First Silver recipient in Idaho)
- National Interagency Fire Center, Bicycle Friendly Business: Bronze Level (first business to be recognized in Boise and Idaho)
- REI, Bicycle Friendly Business: Bronze Level

Considering NIFC is a complex, interagency federal organization with many challenges, it's quite an honor to be recognized as a leader in our community by promoting employee wellness and environmental friendliness.



Josh Haney accepts the Bike Friendly Bronze Level award from Bill Nesper.

## NEW 6 MINUTES FOR SAFETY: "THE DUTCH CREEK PROTOCOL - PINK STICKER FOR YOUR IRPG"

On June 28, 2011, the Incident Management Situation Report 6 Minutes for Safety topic highlighted the Dutch Creek Incident, and the new information to be included in the Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG).

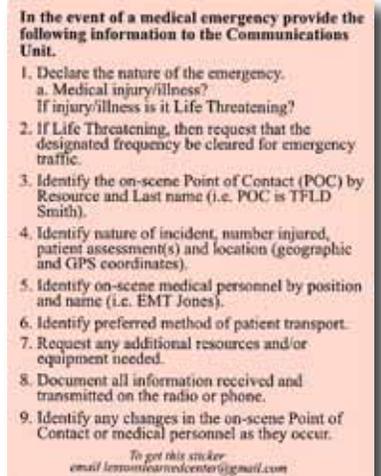
"The Sticker" was developed as part of the response to the Dutch Creek Serious Accident Investigation Report. The 2008 accident, a tree felling operation gone awry, resulted in the fatality of young NPS firefighter Andy Palmer. This tragedy, known as the Dutch Creek Incident, became a red flag, stressing the importance of better planning and preparation for serious fireline injuries.

Under Brit Rosso's leadership, the Lessons Learned Center (LLC) took the lead. Mitch Eskritt, LLC, developed the idea for the sticker, designed to be placed on page 49 of the Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG). Since created, the LLC has distributed around 25,000 hard-copy stickers and innumerable copies have been downloaded from their website.

Kathy Komatz, NPS Structural Fire and Aviation, utilized the topic to create the 6 Minutes for Safety page. This daily safety message is included in the Incident Management Situation Report, which is viewed by countless individuals. Many crews include 6 Minutes for Safety in their morning briefing, and most Incident Action Plans (IAPs) include the topic of the day.

According to Chad Fisher, NPS Wildland Fire Safety and Prevention Specialist, "now, critical information is in the hands of thousands of firefighters".

Check out more 6 Minutes for Safety pages at <http://wildfirelessons.net/uploads/6mfs/home.html>.



## FIRE ADMINISTRATION ISSUES STRUCTURE FIRE REPORTS

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's United States Fire Administration (USFA) has issued a special report focusing on the causes and characteristics of fires in college and university residential buildings that include dormitories and fraternity and sorority houses. The report, University Housing Fires (2007-2009) (PDF, 788 Kb), was developed by the National Fire Data Center and is a part of the USFA's Topical Fire Report Series. An estimated average of 3,800 university housing fires occur each year. Annually, these fires are responsible for 25 injuries and \$9 million in property loss. This report is based on data from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS).

According to the report:

95 percent of university housing fires occur in dormitories or dormitory-type residences, and 5 percent occur in fraternity and sorority houses.

University housing fires occur most frequently in the late summer and fall - peaking in September - and

Article courtesy of NPS Structural Fire

mainly in the early evening hours between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m., when students prepare snacks or cook meals.

Cooking accounts for 88 percent of all university housing fires and is the leading cause.

Confined cooking fires, those confined to the container, account for 81 percent of all university housing fires.

Topical Fire Reports are designed to explore facets of the U.S. fire problem as depicted through data collected in NFIRS. Each report briefly addresses the nature of the specific fire or fire-related topic, highlights important findings from the data, and may suggest other resources to consider for further information. Also included are recent examples of fire incidents that demonstrate some of the issues addressed in the report or that put the report topic in context.

For information regarding other topical reports or any programs and training available at the USFA, visit [www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov).



## CIVIL AIR PATROL VISITS NIFC

Monday, June 20, 2011 – Promptly at 1000, over 125 Civil Air Patrol (CAP) cadets from around the northwest region reported for learning at NIFC, ready to participate in activities that demonstrated all that goes into wildland fire management and operations. Kicking off their week long encampment at Gowen Field with a field trip, these young cadets, ages 12 -17, were eager to hear about the adventures and opportunities in the aviation and fire management arenas.

Organized by Ken Frederick, BLM Public Affairs Specialist, and the rest of the NIFC External Affairs staff, representatives from the BLM Smokejumpers, The Great Basin Warehouse, the National Interagency Coordination Center, NPS Aviation, and the local Boise BLM and USDA Boise National Forest units exhibited, entertained and engaged these energetic young aviators. “We wanted to give each visiting cadet some knowledge of and admiration for wildland firefighting, and illuminate what we do here at NIFC,” explained Ken Frederick.

After receiving a welcoming message from BLM Aviation Chief John Gould, the six ‘flights’ (groups) immediately fell in line, marching in succession to six different stations established around the perimeter of the Jack Wilson Building.

The six stations successfully covered a wide spectrum of wildland fire issues and objectives.

- The diverse range of fire operations could be seen by the presentations and activities from Joe Philpott and Ed Smith of the BLM Smokejumpers, Bob Narus and Engines 1435 and 1436 from Boise BLM, and Jim Traub and Kathy Komatz for NPS Aviation;
- Kari Boyd-Peak, NIFC External Affairs, put her logistics and operations experience to work as she demonstrated fire behavior and answered a wide variety of questions;
- Ellen Dunlap, Prevention Officer from the Boise National Forest, told the story of fire history and how it plays into today’s world of the wildland urban interface and the importance of becoming Firewise.
- Representatives Linda Snow, Returns Warehouse, and Stan Legg, Great Basin Cache, illustrated the importance of wildland fire support and logistics.

“This is a really exciting day for me,” Stan Legg announced to his group, “because I started out just like you in the CAP. I know the skills I learned while I was cadet have helped me through my career.”

The Civil Air Patrol has been organizing skilled aviators and volunteers, committed to putting their abilities to good use since their formation, just prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Originally under the jurisdiction of the Army Air Corps, CAP members were successful in many missions during World War II. The first pilots flew their own private airplanes in protection of coastal waterways. The group’s necessity has continued to be appreciated, as they work to fulfill their primary objectives of emergency service support, aerospace education, and cadet programs – like the CAP encampment.

Each state CAP holds a week long encampment, in which attendance is required to move up to an officer position. This mini boot camp starts promptly every day at 0500; the future service men and women run through physical training, marching drills, attend classroom instruction on first aid and aerospace basics, listen to recruitment seminars for the various military branches, and visit local Air Force bases and other supporting entities, like NIFC.



*Jim Traub, NPS Aviation Specialist explains how rotors create lift. NIFC, Photo by Kathy Komatz.*

Many of the cadets intend to continue on with the Air Force or other military branches, and starting young with the CAP will give them knowledge and experience beyond other recruits their age. Many important lessons are learned during their short stay at encampment, making inspiration easy to come by. Captain John Hezeltine, Idaho CAP Director of Professional Development recalls how a young female cadet harnessed the courage and the basic medical knowledge she learned that week in the CAP classroom to help a fellow cadet caught in a potentially serious medical emergency; and a Marine staying at Gowen Field recalled to the group that one thing that really helped him through basic training was being in CAP. “These cadets really come together as a unit,” John Hezeltine explained. “The gaggle of teenagers that show up on day one is the same group that is marching in line and following orders on day three or four.”

Thanks to the efficiency and energy of both the cadets and all of the organizers and presenters from NIFC and the local units, these students got to run out a 200-foot hoselay from two fire engines, (in competition with another team to knock a baseball from atop an orange traffic cone with the spray of water), help the Great Basin Cache assemble flight, chainsaw and pump kits, create proper defensible space around a model house, fly their handcrafted airplanes and helicopters, practice their Parachute Landing Fall



Team of CAP students spray water after running a 200-foot hoselay.



NIFC organizers and volunteers smiling big after a morning with the cadets. NIFC, Photo courtesy of CAP.

(PLF) technique with a BLM Smokejumper, and predict and then simulate how fast a wildfire can run upslope. “The kids were so attentive, sharp and inquisitive,” recalled Kathy Komatz, an NPS Aviation presenter. “They took their aviation seriously and had pride in what they were doing, as pilots always do. What a promising group of aviators, with an obvious passion for flying. It was an outstanding way to spend the morning!”

And at the end of two hours, these cadets were saturated not only with knowledge, but with goodies as well. NPS Aviation crowned the top paper airplane and plastic helicopter pilots with authentic aviation gear, and NIFC provided a smorgasbord of outdoor and safety gear for the cadets to take with them – commemorating their day of learning and laughing at NIFC.

“The day went really smoothly. We couldn’t have pulled it off without all of the help and participation from everyone involved,” NIFC External Affairs Chief Don Smurthwaite noted. “It was a lot of fun – we are walking away with good memories, with hopes of doing this again in the future.”



Joe Philpott and Ed Smith talked about the equipment BLM Smokejumpers use.

