

News Release

National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Ave.
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<http://www.nifc.gov>



For Immediate Release: January 22, 2020

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United States Sends Additional Fire Crews to Australian Bushfire Response

Boise, Idaho - As wildfires continue to burn in Australia, the United States is sending additional U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wildfire personnel to assist with ongoing bushfire suppression efforts in Australia. Three 10-person Incident Management Teams and a group consisting of air support personnel have arrived in Australia in recent days.

Additionally, two 20-person hand crews will be travelling to Australia today, January 22. These crews are a combination of DOI and USFS firefighters from throughout the United States. The U.S. has already deployed more than 200 USFS and DOI wildland fire staff to the Australian Bushfire response.

“Recent rains have been a welcome relief to fire crews and communities across Australia, but have not extinguished the risk,” said Stuart Ellis, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) CEO. “We are grateful for the arrival of US fire task force personnel this week. Australia is a large country, and while we have seen generous rain fall in the past few days in some areas, we are still experiencing kilometers of active fire front and a large clean-up ahead of us. We’re halfway through the summer and there are still challenges ahead for us this season.”

U.S. Forest Service Fire Director Shawna Legarza recently returned from Australia in support of the bushfire response. “The large, landscape-scale devastation is unprecedented in terms of its impact on Australian economy, its people and their communities, and the effect to numerous ecosystems and habitats. It was humbling to observe the Australians’ resilience, the response in Australia, and level of support from our agency. We will continue to learn from each other in this complex fire environment.”

Based on requests from AFAC, USFS and DOI wildland fire personnel have been deployed and will continue to provide assistance as requested through the existing agreement. The U.S. firefighters are filling critical wildfire and aviation management roles in New South Wales and Victoria.

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"Though recent rain has helped the situation, Australia is only halfway through their summer season and they're still dealing with unprecedented fire suppression efforts. This recent group of crews will assist with on-the-ground fire suppression, in addition to personnel who've been filling fire management roles. DOI will continue to help our Australian partners in any way we can," said DOI Director of the Office of Wildland Fire Jeff Rupert.

The U.S., Australia and New Zealand have been exchanging fire assistance for more than 15 years. The most recent exchange occurred in August of 2018, when 138 Australian and New Zealand wildfire management personnel were sent to the U.S. for almost 30 days to assist with wildfire suppression efforts in Northern California and the Northwest. The Australian and New Zealand personnel filled critical needs during the peak of the western fire season for mid-level fireline management, heavy equipment, helicopter operations, and structure protection. The last time the U.S sent firefighters to Australia was in 2010.

The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group, comprised of interagency wildland fire representatives, works with the National Interagency Coordination Center based at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, to mobilize resources and distribute Australian assistance requests across interagency partners.

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The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC including, the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Weather Service, U.S. Fire Administration, and the National Association of State Foresters.

