

News Advisory



The Pacific Northwest Wildland Firefighting Community

2007 Coverage of Wildfires

PORTLAND, OR – The federal wildfire-fighting community -- including the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs, along with the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Washington Department of Natural Resources -- welcomes news media coverage of wildfires in the Pacific Northwest.

A few tips follow to help make your wildfire coverage better, easier and safer.

2007 FIRE SEASON

In the Pacific Northwest, the National Weather Service is predicting a cooler and wetter than average May and June followed by a warmer and drier than average July, August and September. The snow pack in Oregon is slightly below average, while the snow pack in Washington State is slightly above average. Wildfire risk is greatest for the Northwest this year in northeastern Oregon – the Blue and Wallowa mountains and in southeastern Washington. Fewer lightning storms - the cause of most large wildfires – are forecast.

TYPES OF WILDFIRE

Wildfires come in four basic categories:

Fire Use: These fires are actively managed within a prescribed geographic area with a containment plan in place. These fires are not actively suppressed, but contained within the pre-identified management area.

Initial Attack: The first response to a reported wildland fire. Ninety-eight percent of wildfires are small, lightning or human-caused fires suppressed by first responders/local crews.

Extended Attack: Fires that escape initial attack during the first 48 hours and require a larger organization and additional resources to manage.

Large fires: Defined as any wildland fire in timber 100 acres or greater, and 300 acres or greater in grasslands/rangelands,

FIRE FIGHTERS

Initial Attack: Fire crews from the nearest unit such as a Ranger District or BLM Field Office usually on an engine, will respond to new, small fires.

Teams: Incident Management Teams (IMTs) can be either geographic area Type 2 teams that typically work within a state, or national Type 1 teams that respond to wildfire and other incidents on a national basis. There are two national teams based in the Pacific Northwest, known as Team 2 and Team 3 (Team 1 became the Alaska team years ago).

Teams typically have 20 – 50 members that oversee firefighting efforts. Under the Incident Command System (ICS), teams are organized as operations, logistics, finance, planning, safety and information. An incident commander and sometimes deputy “I.C.” are in charge. The team is delegated specific authority to manage the fire by the “host” unit.

Crews: Twenty-member groups led by a crew boss that provide the on-the-ground staffing for building fire lines and other “ground-pounding” work. There are Type 1 crews, the highly trained Interagency Hotshot Crews, and Type II crews. These crews can be either agency, state or contract units.

TO VISIT THE FIRE

First call should be to the Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC) in Portland – **503.808.2763**. A media desk is staffed during the summer wildfire season, sometimes 24-hours if conditions warrant. They have up-to-date information on large fires throughout the Northwest.

If a team has been assigned, it will have information officers to assist you. Please call to let them know you are coming – you will get better assistance if they can plan on your arrival. NWCC can give you their numbers and directions to fire camp (Incident Command Post – ICP). In addition to briefings, information officers often can escort you to the fire for a firsthand account. No unauthorized visitors, including media, are allowed unescorted within the fire perimeter for obvious safety reasons.

TO FLY THE FIRE

Typically, there are intensive aerial fire suppression activities on a large fire. Helicopters, air tankers and support fixed-wing aircraft could be flying. An official FAA-ordered Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) likely will be in effect. To arrange permission for flying within the air closure, call one NWCC or the fire’s Incident Information Office. We will coordinate your flight with the fire dispatcher and get you a radio frequency for contacting the air coordinator at the fire.

By radio, that air coordinator will tell your plane when to enter the air closure, set a direction to approach, and assign an altitude. The air coordinator will also provide directions for leaving the fire area. It is also recommended that pilots contact FAA directly, before leaving their base.

TO GET ON THE FIRE LINE, BRING BOOTS

Current Forest Service regulations require that all persons on the fire line wear fire-retardant clothing with hard hats, gloves, fire shelters and wear high-topped leather boots. We can usually supply everything but the boots at fire camp -- but you must supply your own LEATHER boots. Low cut footwear is useless--dust, hot ash, and cinders may be several inches deep at the fire line. Failure to have high-topped, leather boots will keep you from the fire line and may well waste a long day.

An Incident Information Officer escort will be assigned to take your news crew to the fire line, and can often provide a tour of fire camp.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Visit the NWCC website at: nwccweb.us It's a wonderful site with information about current fires, weather, Northwest fire history, prognostications and more.
- Call the NWCC media desk for experience, friendly and personal help – 503.808.2763
- Visit the National Interagency Fire Center (in Boise) website – www.nifc.gov It contains a wealth of national fire information and related links.
- Check out www.inciweb.org for information about large fires nationwide.

GLOSSARY OF FIRE TERMS

Confused by the IMTs, ERCs and WFSAs? For a glossary of fire terms and acronyms, visit: <http://www.nifc.gov/fireinfo/glossary.html>

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