

Fire Managers Faced with Tough Decisions

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The interagency group of fire managers, known as a Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group, is working diligently to minimize the number of additional large fires in the Pacific Northwest. Currently, there is a high demand for firefighting resources. The MAC Group is coordinating available resources to ensure they are strategically located, relocated, and utilized to support the number of ongoing, predicted and emerging fire incidents.

Within the Pacific Northwest, many firefighting agencies are losing seasonal and contract workers due to commitments such as school attendance and other jobs. Additional resources are not readily available from other geographic areas in the nation because many fires are also burning in Montana, Idaho, Nevada and California.

The Northwest is experiencing unprecedented dryness levels and many instances of extreme fire behavior. The extended forecast indicates no relief. In fact, unstable conditions will continue and lightning will alternate with windy conditions over the next week. Weather patterns appear more like those in the first week of August, not the first weeks of September.

Managers continually have to revise tactics and objectives as they face new challenges. As they explore the strategies needed to complete the fire season for 2006, they apply realistic approaches based on resource availability. The role of air and ground resources may be limited for some incidents.

The current fire season is forecasted to continue for several more weeks. Many firefighters started on incidents in the spring and have been on multiple assignments since then. Firefighters typically work for a 14-day period, take 2 days off, and are then recycled back into the system for their next assignment. "One critical aspect is the management of cumulative fatigue," said Sue Husari, MAC Chair. "Our highest priority is to assure the safety of our firefighters."

In this critical time public safety and the protection of private property are very high priorities. The safety of the public depends on the safety of our firefighters.

A wildfire prevention tip - Respect fire restrictions. If you are allowed to have a campfire, remember to drown your campfires, stir and repeat until it is cold to the touch. Do not park in tall dry grass; do not throw your cigarette out the window. Call your local fire agency for more fire prevention tips.

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