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Local Crews Head to Gulf States in Wake of Hurricane Ivan

FT. SMITH, AR--In the wake of a recent spate of hurricanes in the Florida and Gulf Coast areas, emergency relief crews from Arkansas and Oklahoma have been mobilized. Five Native American crews representing the Apache, Iowa, Pawnee, Chickasaw and Caddo tribes will be leaving Ft. Smith for the storm torn Gulf States over the next couple of days.

According to Ozark-St. Francis National Forest Supervisor Charlie Richmond, the crews and many forest employees have been preparing for some time to aid emergency efforts. "Emergencies like this really bring out the best in many people," said Richmond. "That's really evident with folks in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Whether it's a wildfire, a hurricane, or some other disaster, they always want to help."

Trained to work as a crew, the typical assignment is firefighting. During this fire season, however, wildfires have not burned in the western states as they have for the past few summers. While the emergency is different, forest officials say the crews are well prepared to shift their focus from building fireline to clearing trees and debris and removing it from residential areas, as well as assisting with evacuee relief needs.

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Media Note: More information forthcoming when crews are scheduled to be mobilized. Travel will be via bus. Expect more information early on Friday morning. For more information contact C.J. Norvell at (918) 567-2326.