



# Fire News

## Northern and Intermountain Regions of the Forest Service

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### **Assessment of the effects of the Fires of 2000 is Released**

Missoula, Montana – An Assessment of the effects of the fires during the 2000 fire season, has been completed for the Northern and Intermountain Regions of the Forest Service. The area covered in the assessment includes Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Utah and Western Wyoming. The Assessment and Overview are available on the following website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/pgr/afterfires> and also available at every forest and district office.

The fires of 2000 were historic in intensity and duration -- more than three million acres burned -- an area larger than Connecticut. These fires directly affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, severely disrupted important sectors of the region's economy, and in some locations, caused lasting damage to natural resources. The details are explained in the assessment.

The Assessment summarizes the extent and effects of the fires and provides a broad context for considering the short and long-term rehabilitation and recovery needs, opportunities, and priorities in the six state area. The Forest Service plans to use the Assessment as a framework for prioritizing the rehabilitation and restoration work. Much of the work was funded through the 2001 Appropriations bill, otherwise known as the National Fire Plan. -END-

## What Is the National Fire Plan (NFP)?

On August 8, 2000, following a visit to the Burgdorf Junction Fire Camp, Payette National Forest, President Clinton issued a memorandum of action to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to assess the Impacts of Wildland Fires to Rural Communities. The President directed that within 30 days the Secretaries would prepare recommendations for:

- Taking actions that may be taken to respond to this year's fires
- Reducing the impacts of these wildland fires on rural communities, and
- Ensuring sufficient firefighting resources in the future

Additional guidance included:

- A short-term plan for rehabilitation of fire-damaged ecosystems, including means to minimize the introduction of invasive species. The plan should also address the role of natural restoration processes in these efforts.
- An assessment of the economic impacts in affected areas.

The President's memorandum further directed, "The report should focus on the short-term actions that federal agencies, in cooperation with states and local communities, can take to reduce immediate hazards to other communities in the wildland-urban interface. As part of these efforts, the report will examine how the federal government, in cooperation with state and tribal governments, and local communities, can prepare for anticipated extreme fire conditions in the future, by analyzing fire management planning and firefighter personnel and resources."

As a result of this memorandum, Departments of Agriculture and Interior convened a joint-team to analyze and prepare recommendations based on their findings. The "report" entitled *Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President In Response to the Wildfires of 2000* can be viewed at the following website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/CEQ/firereport.pdf>.

On September 9, 2000, President Clinton accepted the recommendations contained in the "Report" and directed the two Secretaries to implement those actions. *The National Fire Plan for the USDA Forest Service (NFP)*, representing our response to the President's charge and subsequent funding requests to Congress, contains 5 major areas or "key points":

### ● **Firefighting Resources**

This key area deals with being prepared for future fire seasons, relative to people training, equipment and associated facilities needs. Regional Office Fire & Aviation Management personnel and Forest Supervisors and Fire Management Officers (FMOs) determined needs for the Most Efficient Levels (MEL) of suppression resources, including firefighters, engines, aircraft and prevention specialists. In R1, preliminary estimates are that we would need to increase our firefighting workforce by several hundred people.

### ● **Rehabilitation and Restoration**

After the 2000 fire season, Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation teams (BAER) were formed in both Regions to identify necessary emergency projects for protection of life and

property and have been implementing those projects since the fires ended. More information about BAER can be viewed at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/pgr/fireinfo/baer.html>. The next phase is long-term restoration within the burned areas (the black areas). As BAER dealt with emergency needs, the “Black Area Teams” from both Regions are collecting a list of proposed projects from each Forest to submit for funding for continued restoration in the burned areas.

### ● **Hazardous Fuel Reduction**

Working with State Foresters, other government entities and our communities, Forest Supervisors and our fire professionals, communities at risk of wildfire and projects to reduce the potential for wildfire damage in the urban interface will be identified. Combined with projects already identified and analyzed through NEPA, these projects will be our critical program of work into the future. Early estimates are that we will double the size of our fuels program within the next 3 to 5 years.

### ● **Community Assistance**

The NFP calls for working with communities in many ways: consulting to reduce fire risk, public involvement in NEPA for hazardous fuel reduction, creating jobs in restoration and fuel reduction projects and products, providing defensible space information, volunteer and rural firefighting assistance and economic action programs.

### ● **Accountability**

More than just accounting for the money we spend, our commitment to Congress and the public that we can accomplish the critical work in each of the 5 key areas is vital. We have been entrusted with a significant increase in dollars that must be well managed through our accounting systems. Equally important is our commitment to learn and work together with our communities to restore landscapes and reduce fire risks.

## **Additional Funding from Congress**

With the responsibilities of the five key areas of the National Fire Plan, came additional dollars, **nationally**, outside our regular appropriation.

### **Nationally:**

▶ **Fire Preparedness** received an additional \$208M (million) to fund the people and equipment needed to reach the most efficient level of suppression. The Forest Service has \$17M for fire management workforce development, \$4M for the Joint Fire Sciences Program, and \$12M for research and improvements to current fire modeling.

▶ **Fire Operations** received an additional \$500M for suppression, fuels management and rehabilitation and restoration. For the FS, \$179M goes to suppression, \$44M for capital improvements and fire facilities, \$136M for fuels reduction including \$16M for research and development geared to uses of small diameter products and \$11.5M for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning work. Fuels management projects will focus first on the areas around communities at risk/urban interface.

▶ **State and Private Forestry** funds include \$50.5M for State Fire Assistance, primarily on a cost-share basis, including \$4M for prevention education; \$35M for community and private land assistance which includes things like fence replacement, stewardship planning in the urban interface, fuel removal and community firefighting capability planning.

