

# NEWS

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Date: May 25, 2005

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## THINNING IMPROVES SCENIC VIEW OF MT RUSHMORE

**Custer, SD**--Tourists traveling on the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway in the Black Hills National Forest will see an improved view of Mount Rushmore this season.

The Custer-based 20-person Tatanka (tuh\_TONK-ah) Hotshot fire crew has thinned trees to improve the view of Mount Rushmore from the tunnels on Iron Mountain road, which Peter Norbeck envisioned.

“There are vistas out there where you can see Mount Rushmore through the tunnels, and over time they have become overgrown. We’re coming in and doing a little bit of maintenance to open them back up,” said Stephen Keegan, forest landscape architect.

Ken Wulfskuhla, a touring motorcyclist from Pennsylvania, stopped to see the thinning work in progress and liked what he saw “because people need to see different things from different perspectives. And believe me, it (the thinning) won’t hurt the woods. We’ve got plenty of wood here, and it will just help it. The open area will also be a good fire line,” said Wulfskuhla.

The Tatanka Hotshot crew is using this time to prepare for another busy fire season.

When the hotshots are not doing work to thin trees or reduce fuels at home, the crew is often asked to help in other forests and parks. They could be called at a moment’s notice to fight fire anywhere in America.

One Hell Canyon Ranger District firefighter is a new member of the hotshots and anticipates new experiences. “I’m looking forward to some good experiences in a lot of different country. My intentions are to see a lot of different fuel types,” Chad Cullum said.

Cutting trees and brush in advance of a wildfire is an art and a science. Developing expert sawyer skills can take several years, and professional fire crews are just the place to learn. Physical training toughens the crew members for the work ahead, and experienced leaders teach them to work as a team.

In addition to sawyer skills, crew members learn to be experts with a variety of specialized tools like a Pulaski (Pull-ASS-keys), a tool with an axe on one side and a hoe on the other. The Hotshot crews also study fire theory in the classroom.

The Black Hills National Forest formed the Tatanka Hotshot crew in 1999. Their crew superintendent, Pat Laeng, and his assistant crew leaders are veteran firefighters whose jobs are to keep the crew safe and put out the fire.

The Sierra Hotshots from northern California are working in the Black Hills near Spearfish (SD) while they wait for a fire call.

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## **Sound Bites:**

### **1) Stephen Keegan, Forest Landscape Architect, Black Hills National Forest**

“Here today we have one of the vista that you can see Mount Rushmore through the tunnels, and over time it has grown in and we are coming through and we are doing a little maintenance out here opening that back up.”

**2) Chad Cullum, Tatanka Hot Shot, Black Hills National Forest**

“Yes I’m looking forward to some good experiences in a lot of different country. That’s what I’m looking for I guess. My intentions are to see a lot of different fuel types I guess and fight fire in a lot of different areas in the country.”

**B-roll:**

- 1) (WS) Mount Rushmore after thinning
- 2) (MS) Mount Rushmore after thinning
- 3) (CU) Stephen Keegan talking on a radio
- 4) Misc. Tatanka Hot Shot crew members working

**Videographer/Reporter: Gary C. Chancey/Black Hills National Forest**