



Nomination: **Central Utah Interagency Fire and Fuels Management**

The Central Utah Interagency Fire and Fuels Management organization began informally in the late 1970s, when the Richfield Fire Center was co-located for both the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service incident support. It began interagency operations in the early 1980s with a memorandum of understanding between the two federal agencies. The State of Utah became a full partner in 1992, when that agency began funding its workload in the fire center.

Since those early fire center days, the program has evolved into a completely interagency fire and fuels management organization. The current participants include: Fishlake National Forest, Richfield and Fillmore Bureau of Land Management Field Offices, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, Capitol Reef National Park, BIA Southern Paiute Agency, and Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge. All entities are signatory to the local Annual Operating Plan.

Central Utah Interagency Fire and Fuels Management is a single fire planning unit. Positions are shared across agency boundaries at all levels, starting with one interagency Fire Management Officer. These shared positions promote integration, enhance information sharing and save tremendous costs in salaries by eliminating duplicate positions which allows more firefighters to be hired. Fire Management Units are designed and operate on an interagency basis. Ownerships are not a driving factor in wildland fire response.

Fuels target accomplishment has increased from about 3000 acres per year prior to the interagency program to about 22,000 acres for FS and BLM offices in 2007. Coordination and collaboration on these projects is simple because most fuels people work for both agencies. Interagency NEPA coordination occurs on many fuels reduction projects since the agencies have similar treatment priorities and shared geographic boundaries. In 2007, most of the prescribed burning was completed using employees from multiple agencies, i.e. the Fish Springs burn was FWS, Clear Lake burn was State of Utah, and multiple burns for FS and BLM. The Service First approach ensured that we had a qualified and experienced burn crew on all fires. The shared workforce saved time and money. This allows more to be accomplished than is possible independently.

The state leads the wildland urban interface protection planning, with assistance from Federal agencies. Through a BLM grant, a Six County Wildfire Protection Plan was completed and implemented in 2007, outlining ten years of WUI projects in the area. Four community wildfire protection plans were also completed by interagency employees working with governments and private citizens in the communities.

The interagency community has fostered better working relations with the local volunteer fire departments and has increased training opportunities to ensure the VFD personnel are qualified and equipped to respond to wildland fires. The state organizes training and interagency cadres provide up to 25 classes per year across six counties. Some VFDs now have qualified Type 4 and 5 incident commanders who initial attack fires, regardless of ownership. Through state and federal grants, many departments have upgraded or received new equipment specifically for wildland fire.

During 2007, three wildland fire use (WFU) projects were managed on the Fishlake National Forest and interagency fire use managers assisted the Dixie National Forest in managing three of their WFU incidents. In 1998, the Fishlake National Forest enacted the first forest-wide wildland fire use plan in the entire Forest Service. Wildland fire use has now expanded onto the adjacent BLM units in appropriate areas, resulting in fire's return to the many fire-adapted ecosystems in the central Utah area. These actions institute the National Fire Plan direction to restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

Duty officers and incident commanders are delegated authority to represent all agencies. This enhances quick resource pre-positioning, initial attack, and more depth in extended attack with all the qualified people available. Interagency local incident management teams managed a number of 2007 multi-agency fires, streamlining operations and allowing efficient use of local resources. Once again, this saves budget, increases productivity and encourages safety.

A single aviation manager is shared among two forests and two BLM offices, creating a single point of contact for this highly technical and specialized component of the program. This creates smooth communication, direction and coordination among all the aviation resource users. This local support has enabled us to use aerial ignition when needed in our fuels programs. In many of our fuel types and rugged terrain, aerial ignition is safer than ground operations.

A 2000 Efficiency Analysis for the Richfield Interagency Fire Program, completed by Gayle Sorenson, Zone FMO, compared independent programs with this interagency program. The almost 12 million-acre evaluation addressed budgets, initial attack response times, perceived customer service, fire training and qualifications, and social impacts as stated by several line officers.

Conclusions:

- ❖ Leadership salary savings over \$230,000 per year (est. \$500,000+ in 2007)
- ❖ Cost-savings through fire resource co-location
- ❖ Initial attack fire response time quicker by almost 20 minutes
 - Faster response times on moderate days means a 41% IA cost savings
 - Faster response times on extreme days means a 33% IA cost savings
- ❖ A 35% increase in fire training attended providing a better qualified and safer workforce
- ❖ All equipment consistently met minimum standards
- ❖ Increase in positive customer service comments, both internally and externally
- ❖ Increase in availability of critical skills and capabilities.

The current organization has over 75 appointed positions and more than 50 seasonals. Thirty-nine positions are FS, thirty-seven are BLM and ten are State of Utah. This demonstrates a well-integrated, collaborative organization among these agencies.

Shared Positions

Fire Management Officer
Zone Fire Management Officers
Fire Operations Specialists
Public Affairs Officer
Prevention, Education and Mitigation specialists
Aviation Manager

Forest Fire Planner
Fire Ecologist
Fuels Planner
Multiple Fuels Program Managers
Multi-staffed Engines
Training/Trespass Officer
Multiple Fire Center positions

A former Fishlake Forest Supervisor commented:

"...both agencies have been able to pool resources to expand their capacities to manage their fire programs. The taxpayers have been well served by the efficiencies and cost effectiveness gained. Fire fighters and managers are used freely across agency boundaries: equipment and other resources are shared, and a more holistic ecosystem based approach is generated."

Central Utah Interagency Fire and Fuels Management is committed to long term integrated, streamlined and efficient fire and fuels management operations. The 2007 interagency program endorses the Fire Operations Doctrine by providing better equipment, training, and more knowledge and skills to implement this complex program. The improved customer service, operational efficiency and enhanced natural and cultural resources management in fire and fuels have inspired the FS and BLM to create more shared positions in other resource areas, including a public affairs officer, a safety officer, range management specialist, and fisheries specialist. This integration has strengthened working relations and general knowledge among the participants, leading to a more effective, productive organization. Employees are extremely proud of the cooperation, efficiency and effectiveness that exists with this Service First operation.