Imaging Technology Provides Public Detailed View of Fires

RIVERSIDE, Calif.—The U.S. Forest Service is providing online infrared imagery depicting the intensity and location of the Poomacha, Rice and Harris Fires burning in San Diego County.

Current images can be seen at http://www.fireimaging.com

Firefighters use the information to observe fire activity and plan suppression efforts. The images were taken with specialized equipment called FireMapper developed by scientists at the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station and engineers at Space Instruments Inc. of Encinitas, Calif.

FireMapper uses modern night-vision technology and is unique in its ability to accurately measure bright infrared light from wildland fires. It can be viewed as a shaded relief map, using Google Maps. Three-dimensional images can be seen using Google Earth, which can be downloaded for free at http://googleearth-now.com/

Fire managers routinely used FireMapper this summer to direct firefighters on the Butler II, Zaca and Pines Fires in Southern California.

In 2003, users logged onto the website more than a million times to monitor the hour-to-hour progress of the Old, Grand Prix, Cedar and Paradise Fires, which destroyed thousands of homes in San Bernardino and San Diego Counties.

“FireMapper is providing us a window to observe the behavior and environmental effects of large fires,” said Dr. Philip Riggan, a Pacific Southwest Research Station scientist who helped to develop FireMapper. “It allows firefighters and the public to safely view current fire behavior.”

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