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## The Capitan Gap Fire, the Taos Snowballs and Smokey Bear

~ Val Christianson, WUI Prevention Specialist - NIFC



The original Taos Pueblo Snowballs in the St. Santiago Feast Day parade in Taos, NM, July 25, 1950, just two months after the Capitan Gap fire.

*PREFACE: Adolph Samora and Paul Romero are the only two surviving members of the original Taos Pueblo Snowballs. They witnessed the events first hand which are spoken of in this brief account.*

There have been numerous tales, accounts, and biographies of the original encounter with the tiny black bear cub that would become Smokey. The Mescalero Redhats are mentioned. The US Army is mentioned. But there has never been any mention in any account of the Taos Pueblo Snowballs. And so here is the rest of the story...

Early Friday morning, May 5, 1950, the Carson National Forest Supervisor's Office, in Taos, New Mexico, received a phone call from the Lincoln National Forest in southeastern New Mexico. The call was a request for assistance in fighting a wildfire that had begun the day before in the Capitan Mountains. The "Los Tablos Fire" was being driven by 70 mile per hour winds accompanied by scouring sand blown in from the southwest. The Carson SO Dispatch contacted seasonal employees Lupe Martinez and Telisfor Trujillo. Lupe and Telisfor, the Crew Foremen, are referred to today as "Crew Reps" for emergency "pickup crews" (EFF) from rural communities in northern New Mexico. They were directed to gather together the recently formed Taos Pueblo "Snowballs" and prepare them to board the old school bus and travel south to the Lincoln National Forest and assist on the 1,000

acre fire. This adventure would be but the second outing for the Snowballs, the first being a wildfire on the Gila National Forest near Silver City the month before.

The Office of the Taos WarChiefs (the local Pueblo Government), under the supervision of Geronimo "Duck" Trujillo (Telisfor's father), was contacted by Lupe and Telisfor, who themselves were both Pueblo members. Since there were no phones in the village in 1950, the only way to communicate an urgent message to Tribal members was via the "Village Crier." The WarChief ascended to the top of the Pueblo massif, four stories in height, and began wailing aloud in the native Tiwa tongue summoning the available firefighters of the village to report immediately. An opportunity for the new Snowballs to go on assignment was at hand. First come, first served, only 25 men would be boarding the bus. They were to assemble in the village plaza and be counted. They must have their own work boots and the emergency personal provisions provided by the Carson. The only helmets that the Forest cache could find for the crew were a box of metal, wide brimmed hardhats painted white. Crew member Del Reyna looked at his crewmates and then looked up at the majestic snow covered Taos Mountains towering over the Pueblo and remarked, "We all look like a bunch of snowballs!" The crew all laughed and the name stuck. It is still used today by Taos Pueblo members when they go out as an EFF crew. They boarded the old school bus that was driven by Sam Martinez. The crew bosses for the Snowballs were Tony and Albert Martinez and they reported directly to Lupe and Telisfor. Tony and Albert would keep track of the crew's time and handle logistics in the base camp and on the fire line.

As soon as the manifest was completed, the Snowballs loaded the bus and headed south on a long, uncomfortable, albeit exciting, all-day drive. The northern New Mexico spring morning was still crisp as the bus headed down the deep canyon of the Rio Grande. The older crew members wrapped themselves in Pendleton and Chimayo woolen blankets to keep warm. The morning



**Left is Paul Romero and right, Adolph Samora. These gentlemen are regrettably the last of the original Snowballs.**

breakfast consisted of what the wives and mothers had prepared back in the Pueblo, the now-famous breakfast burrito, a flour tortilla with pintos, onion and potatoes. Green chili was not yet in season! The crew passed the time singing aloud "Taos Round Dance Songs" and fantasizing if they might be able to make a down payment on a new Ford pickup with their fire paycheck! As the bus wound its way along the side of the roaring river, swollen with the spring snowmelt, the Jemez Mountains appeared just west of the Rio and the Snowballs could not imagine that exactly 50 years later some of their sons, daughters and grandchildren would be involved in suppressing the largest human-caused wildfire in New Mexico history, the Cerro Grande above Los Alamos. The bus proceeded through downtown Albuquerque and stopped at the historic "Lindy's Diner" on Fifth and Route 66. Lupe and Telisfor obtained a small soda, a bologna sandwich with a little mayo, an apple and a handful of chips for each member. Yum!

The tired crew arrived at the Los Tablos base camp early Friday evening. After their Crew Reps checked them in, the Snowballs stowed their personal gear in a small cache next to a freshly bulldozed juniper tree, then grabbed a handtool, a round half gallon metal canteen, and an impromptu sack lunch, with you guessed it, a bologna and mayo

sandwich. They hooked up headlamps to their helmets, jumped on Army deuce and a halves (two and a half ton transportation trucks for troops) and were driven several miles to a drop off point. They immediately began to hike up an established fireline where they would relieve the day crew of US Army soldiers from Ft. Bliss, Texas, who were supervised by New Mexico Game Wardens. Their responsibility would be that of extending the fireline around the perimeter of the still active fire, widening the line, and patrolling for spot fires and hotspots. Night crew duty usually involved mop-up: a dirty, mundane and sometimes dangerous job. They were forever watchful of embers that may have blown over the fireline by the erratic spring winds.

By late Saturday morning, May 6, the Los Tablos was coming under containment and fire personnel were beginning to be demobilized. By early afternoon the Snowballs were gathering their belongings to begin the journey back to Taos when a new alarm went through the base camp that another wildfire had started upwind from their present location. The "Demob" process was put on hold for everyone and the base camp was ordered to relocate as soon as possible because it was directly in the anticipated path of the new fire, the "Capitan Gap Fire." After just a few hours of uncomfortable rest upon their return from the previous night's shift,

the Snowballs were ordered out to the line again. That Saturday afternoon they punched direct line with the Soldiers from Ft. Bliss, along with new crews reporting to base camp. These crews included the Mescalero Apache Redhats, and community crews from Zia Pueblo and Santo Domingo Pueblo. The Mescalero crew was sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, while Zia and Santo Domingo were sponsored by the Forest Service. The crews were on the line well through the first night before being ordered to stand down on Sunday morning. They would perform evening shift “mop-up” duties through the duration of the incident.

The Capitan Gap Fire was an extremely dangerous fire burning in the higher elevations of the 10,000 foot Capitan Mountains. The fire was actively burning in Douglas fir, white fir and quaking aspen. It was rapidly consuming the watershed of the north side of the east-west oriented mountain range, along with the habitat of elk, bighorn sheep and the American black bear.

On Monday, May 8, the winds became so strong that a crew of Ft. Bliss soldiers, under the supervision of a Game Warden, had to take shelter in a rock slide of a narrow canyon. Since there were no fire shelters readily available in 1950, the crew boss sternly told his frightened crew to lie face down in the rock slide, burrowing their faces into the cooler air of the rock crevices. The fire roared overhead, singeing their clothes and hair, crowning as it raced from west to east. This is what we would term a “burn over” today. All of the crew survived, with only minor injuries. Late in the afternoon, after such a close call, the Ft. Bliss crew began their trek down Capitan Mountain to base camp for some much needed rest and first aid.

Through the smoke and haze of the fire, dusk came early that evening. As the Snowballs headed uphill to begin their night “mop-up” duties, they passed the Ft. Bliss crew heading down off of the line toward base camp. On that particular section of the fireline only the military crews and the Snowballs were on duty. They briefly explained their

burn over experience to Lupe and Telisfor, a harrowing ordeal. The Snowballs gratefully acknowledged the survival of the soldiers and then wondered what they were getting into that evening with their mop-up duties because the temperature and winds had abated little. As they parted company with the soldiers, Game Warden Speed Simmons hollered back up at the Snowballs that there was a small, wild and frightened black bear cub further up near the rock outcrop where they had taken refuge. He said that several soldiers tried to secure it, in the guise of rescuing it, but that it scratched a couple of them pretty good. As the Snowballs hiked past the rock pile/talus slope they soon heard a shrill whining and crying that they ascertained to be the wailing of the cub. Through the rapidly approaching dark, in the midst of throat-filling smoke and still existing flames in the remaining vegetation, the crew saw the very small fur ball scampering away from their progress and running toward a charred snag. It struggled up the snag to chest level, and Lupe and Telisfor could decipher that the hair had been quite singed on the ears and bottom of the little critter. In the dull light of their primitive headlamps, they could see the paws had been burned enough to produce obvious blisters. They realized that the animal had not sought shelter in the tree during the crowning of the burnover but it had probably hid near or in the rock slide where the soldiers had sought shelter. They knew the animal would have perished quickly had it been in the tree. The burn injuries no doubt were received as it was roaming amidst the freshly burned vegetation of the forest floor.

Telisfor reached out to gently encompass the cub in his hands and remove it from the snag. Even with his gloves on, and due to the obvious fright and confusion of the animal, he quickly put him down on the forest floor when the disoriented cub attempted to lash out at him. The crew all laughed at Telisfor as the little cub scampered several feet away. They knew they would not be able to rescue the animal, or adopt it as a mascot, because they still had their evening tasks to perform. At orientation in base camp everyone had been told that this part of the Forest was also

a game preserve and that all wildlife should be strictly left alone for fear of a \$300 fine from Game and Fish. The little cub attempted to tag after the crew as they continued their upward trek on the fireline, but it soon gave up its pursuit due to its injuries. Thus ended the very brief, yet unheralded and historical, encounter of the Taos Pueblo Snowballs and what would become the living Smokey Bear.

As they continued up the fireline they encountered another Ft. Bliss crew that was headed downhill after their daytime shift. In the encroaching darkness the Snowballs relayed to them that there was a fierce, huge wild boar ravaging the smoldering undergrowth remains a little further down from them. The soldiers’ eyes all got big for a second, but then the Snowballs chuckled and told them not to fear, but that only a tiny injured cub was wandering around looking for an adoptive mother. The soldiers were relieved to hear the boar was but a cub, and the two crews parted ways with a warning from Telisfor that the cub, though injured, was sure feisty. Less than a minute later the Snowballs heard an “Ouch!” from down the fireline a small distance, and then they all laughed as they realized a soldier must have just got nipped by the young black bear cub.

That was the first time the Snowballs saw of the animal on the fireline. They may have encountered “Smokey” again the next morning as they were moving back down off of the Mountain, and they may have seen him in base camp, but those details are vaguely recorded and remembered. There are numerous accounts of various soldiers and overhead picking up the animal and eventually bringing it back to camp, but that initial encounter with the Snowballs on the fireline is what endears Smokey to Native American firefighters. They weren’t immediately aware that the survival of one small cub, in the midst of such destruction, would become such an All-American symbol. They probably were not then aware that the Capitan Gap Fire was human caused either. But as the years and generations have gone by, the Taos Pueblo Snowballs and Wildfire Prevention have become synonymous in northern New Mexico. They weren’t aware that

on the night of Monday, May, 8, 1950, when they first met that little black bear cub, he would become the real Smokey Bear, but they did take back the knowledge of the importance of his survival and that “Only YOU Can Prevent Wildfires”.

As told by Adolph Samora, 76, and Paul Romero, 77, to Val Christianson, BIA Prevention Coordinator, and

Andy Lujan (Retired), Prevention Technician, Northern Pueblos Agency, Taos Pueblo Forestry Guard Station, May 6, 2005, and with the Taos WarChiefs on August 8, 2007, Taos Pueblo Headquarters.

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## Administration

# Forestry and Fire Conference ~ From the Director

~ Lyle Carlile, Director, Branch of Fire Management

The first ever, BIA National Indian Forestry and Wildland Fire Management Conference was held recently in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was a great opportunity to hear presentations on current issues and to network with fellow Indian Country forestry and fire managers to exchange ideas. It was excellent opportunity to visit with many old friends and acquaintances as well.

It levels, to support tribal goals and objectives as well as the interagency fire suppression effort. However, effective coordination requires continuous effort to sustain and improve working relationships. Meetings such as this conference are great opportunities to further this cooperation. I want to thank all the presenters and participants for making this meeting a huge success.

Indian Country has a long history of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management working together, at

I look forward to the next meeting.

# Forestry and Fire Management Meet in Albuquerque

~ Dave Koch, NIFC Assistant Director - Training

The BIA conducted a joint national forestry and fire meeting March 3-7 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was the first national-level meeting conducted since 2004, when it was held in Southern California. The audience and agenda at that time primarily targeted the fire employee while this time the agenda featured a mix between fire topics such as [Appropriate Management Response](#), and forestry topics such as [Management Challenges in Changing Wood Products Markets](#).

The importance of conducting these meetings jointly cannot be understated as forestry and fire go hand in hand. When forest managers write their prescriptions for the treatment of tribal land; timber, fire and a multitude of other resources are generally addressed. When fire management staff design hazardous fuels reduction treatments, they do so in consultation and coordination with foresters. To conduct these national meetings in a vacuum, with one discipline divorced from the other, is in opposition to the

holistic land management philosophy tribes have always shared.

In fact, it was not long ago that there was no significant distinction in Bureau or Tribal programs between the duties of the fire management officer and the forester. Historically, if there was any prescribed burning to be conducted, it was accomplished by the collective “forestry” staff. There were no “prescribed fire and fuels specialists” at that time. There was only the common (and lest we forget scientific) knowledge that at certain times of the year broadcast burning was a good thing to do so, we did it. We did it without the layers of policies, rules, and regulations we have now. It was simply the right thing to do for the land. And the forestry staff worked as one.

Between 1997 and 2004, the federal fire management budget grew significantly, and our bureau and tribal programs, armed with manpower and funding, created fire organizations that have at times appeared autonomous from their parent, i.e. Forestry. Our greatest strength as an organization has always been our ability to develop holistic land management plans and implement them using a multidisciplinary organization.

So it makes complete sense that these meetings continue to be held jointly. There are always concerns from a minority of attendees that because it is a joint meeting not enough time is available to really flesh out some topics, to really bore into the nitty-gritty. I would argue that we have a



Ray Ruiz, Golden Eagles IHC Superintendent, takes a few moments to recognize the contributions made by BIA Interagency Hotshot Crews.

whole life to immerse ourselves in the science and policy minutia of our business. The variety and amount of information served up at these large meetings is more than adequate to

quench the thirst of both “lumper” and “splitter”.

Besides information sharing, the greatest benefit a combined meeting

provides us is an enhanced awareness of who we are as an organization. We take pride in managing the natural environment. We embrace change in the form of implementing the economic efficiencies of appropriate management response. We strive to refine our inventory analyses, fine tune our harvesting and milling systems, and explore alternative wood products markets in an effort to be proactive and resilient to trends in the market place. We value relationships and the people around us who help us achieve success. And we value our customers, the tribes we serve. These national meetings help us recharge our sense of “organization” and our common values steeped in duty, respect and integrity. We look forward to continuing our service and the renewed tradition of a joint national meeting.

## Land Stewardship: Mescalero Apache Tribe and Lincoln National Forest Forge New Partnership

~ Jim Erickson, ITC Fire Technical Specialist



In early October of 2007, declining wood products markets forced the long-term closure of MFP #2 in Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Extended droughts, insect epidemics and pending wildfires face all land ownerships in Southeast New Mexico. These threats do not respect land ownership or boundaries. This stark reality has brought together the Mescalero Apache Tribe and the Lincoln National Forest to partner in accomplishing land treatments that will protect tribal and federal land ownerships as well as private land and local communities. This partnership became possible due the passing of the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) in 2004. This act allows tribes to enter into stewardship contracts

on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands in order to treat conditions that threaten tribal lands. The beauty of this act is that implementation provides protection of other land holdings as well, thus the positive partnership atmosphere.

However, the newness of this act has presented challenges for both entities. While the stewardship authority is not new, the special authority that allows tribes to initiate sole source negotiating with federal agencies is new. The Mescalero Apache Tribe took a courageous step in late 2005 and requested of the Lincoln National Forest to enter into a contract to combine and implement the Sixteen Mile Springs timber sale and follow-up hazard fuel reduction projects.

This bold move created challenges for both entities as they ventured into new territory. Early discussions were often awkward and slow as both entities became familiar with the TFPA and each other in the development of the first large scale contract under TFPA. Differing philosophies in resource management and project implementation presented challenges for both sides. Access limitations for various threatened and endangered species required the tribe to adjust their implementation strategies and negotiated rates for hazard fuel treatments. This one variable showed the importance for tribes to get involved early in the planning process to have input in factors that

affect management style and impact implementation costs. Both sides are capitalizing on this lesson learned to incorporate input into upcoming Forest Service projects that the tribe could also contract.

Fortunately both sides committed early to make this contract work. Perseverance resulted in a contract early in 2006. The first year of implementation saw the tribe harvest approximately 4 million board feet of Forest Service timber to help supply Mescalero Forest Product (MFP) mills at Mescalero and Alamogordo. They were also initially awarded 500 acres of hazard fuel treatments, followed by an additional 600 acres with year-end monies. The timber harvest progressed smoothly since MFP had an established relationship harvesting Forest Service timber under standard timber sale contracts. The first year, hazard fuel treatments faced several challenges affected by access to sites and restrictions due to threatened and endangered species. Adjustments were made, costs adjusted, and the projects completed timely.

The second year was faced by new challenges. Depressed timber markets,

the closing of the Alamogordo mill, and delays in getting field information on hazard fuel treatments provided significant hurdles to implementation. The result has been the need additional contract adjustments. This was accomplished through frequent and open communications and negotiations. Assigning key dedicated people on both sides has been instrumental to open negotiations to address and adjust to unexpected issues.

After nearly two years of trial and error, it became apparent to both sides that this attempt to combine pre-planned Forest Service projects of a timber sale and separate hazard fuel treatments into a stewardship contract is not the most efficient process to meet land management objectives. Recognition by both sides that this contract would require some special consideration and adjustments led to a collaborative atmosphere to work through this contract and to apply lessons learned to future projects. Strong commitment by both parties has resulted in continued progress, better understanding of agency policies and objectives, and new friendships. This increased commitment is

credit to the professionalism of both organizations.

Leadership on both sides has been critical to identifying, and selecting key staff to make this project successful. Thora Padilla, Mescalero Division of Resource Management, and Jacque Buchanan, Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Lincoln National Forest, deserve tremendous credit for making this project a success.

Lessons learned are being compiled from a recent project review by Intertribal Timber Council and Forest Service representatives. Tribes across the nation and their neighboring federal partners can learn a lot from the efforts of these two dedicated partners. Results from this project and other successful Forest Service projects will be shared as part of the ITC Timber Symposium Stewardship Contracting workshop coming up June 3-5, 2008 in Hondah, Arizona. Please come and join us in learning these valuable lessons. Also, bring your federal partner to share this learning experience.

## The AMR Ship is Sailing--Are You on Board?

~ Rowdy Muir, IC, Great Basin Type 1 IMT

*There have been many positive responses to Rowdy Muir's article on Appropriate Management Response (AMR) printed in the January 08 Vol. 8 issue of Smoke Signals. Interest in the article has prompted him to continue to write about AMR. Rowdy is an employee of the U.S. Forest Service.*

### Appropriate Management Response

What exactly is an Appropriate Management Response (AMR)? The answer is difficult for agency employees to articulate because we do not have a clear understanding of when to implement an AMR. Lately we have had discussions in my district about how AMR relates to our Fire Management Plan (FMP)—and whether or not Wildland Fire Use (WFU) is an appropriate management response.

The answer to me is clearly, Yes! Just because a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) has to be completed before implementing a Fire Use



Cascade Complex 2007.

~ Photo Cordell Taylor

strategy, and Fire Use fires are coded differently, doesn't exclude a WFU from being an AMR.

A WFIP is a decision document used to implement the AMR. The term "AMR" is a general philosophy or umbrella term in which the use or combined use of any of the following strategies can be applied: direct attack, indirect attack, fire use, confinement, containment, control, back firing, burning out, use of dozers, use of aviation, monitoring, etc.

Any tactic or any strategy can fall under AMR. AMR means that management will use the best strategy for each unique situation. AMR should not be exclusive to suppression, but rather can also include what has traditionally been called “fire use.”

There are three distinct types of *wildland fire* defined within current policy guidance:

- **Wildfire** – An unplanned, unwanted wildland fire, including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped wildland fire use events, escaped prescribed fire projects, and all other wildland fires where the objective is to suppress the fire.
- **Wildland Fire Use** – The application of an AMR for naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas outlined in FMPs.
- **Prescribed Fire** – Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements (where applicable) must be met, prior to ignition.

However, even with those definitions in mind, it would be more efficient to develop a combination of the types to accommodate the realities we as land managers and agency administrators encounter: for example, “a wildland fire initiated from a planned ignition”; or, “a wildland fire initiated from an unplanned ignition”. In more simple terms, the decision matrix could begin with determining whether you have a planned event or an unplanned incident.

**Planned events** are traditionally described as prescribed fires and would require the same documentation as they do now—a written, approved prescribed fire

plan, and compliance with NEPA policies prior to ignition.

**Unplanned incidents** allow fire to move across and into different landscapes based on a Land Use, Resource Management, and/or Forest plan.



Casper Mountain Fire 2007 near Casper Wyoming

What is wrong with allowing for a human-caused fire to move into an area that a Land Use plan has already approved to be allowed to burn in order to meet resource benefits?

We know we are required to suppress human caused fires; wildfires cannot be put into fire use status. However, any wildfire, whether it is human or natural caused, can be suppressed in a variety of ways. The key word here is “suppressed.”

Having flexibility in how suppression is defined and implemented would allow land managers to efficiently and safely adjust their response. Just because a fire must be suppressed doesn’t mean that we cannot take the “appropriate management response”—especially when relying on decision tools such as a Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA).

### Decision Tools

The WFSA is a decision making document that considers alternatives. Once you select an alternative, you *have* selected the appropriate management response. Whether we

use a WFSA or WFIP, we are selecting the alternative and consideration is given to the AMR. Under new Forest Service policies, Line Officers are asked to use other decision support tools such as FSPRO, RAVAR and a Stratified Cost Index (preferably used at the 5 million dollar threshold and mandatory for fires that reach the 10 million dollar level. Again, these are just tools to help develop strategic planning to meet objectives as outlined in a delegation of authority.

The use of infrared technology has become a real benefit, and almost essential in order to track the progression of large fires. A fire history map is probably the most reliable source of

information for determining safe, efficient, and effective protection of values at risk. We sometimes get “wrapped around the axle” about the need for futuristic decision tools, when we really just need to take full advantage of tools we already have. There have been insightful proposals to eliminate the typical WFSA/WFIP concept, and rely on the Wildland Fire Decision Support System or WFDSS. This would be a great change.

### Decision Traps

What tends to happen with a WFSA is that the alternatives are written so that one alternative becomes attractive to the Line Officer. That alternative is usually the one that addresses the least amount of days estimated to establish containment, the least amount of money to be spent, and the belief that all needed resources would be available at that particular time.

Many Line Officers admit to falling into the WFSA decision trap because of the reality of public and political influences who want you to put the fire out and protect the values they own, lease, or represent. Because of this pressure there are fewer

incentives to allow a fire to burn naturally, or to propose suppressing a fire with minimal resources, to use point protection, or to protect only a few prioritized values at risk.

The same happens with a WFIP. It's easy to put a single tree fire in Fire Use strategy. It's easy to draw lines on a map. But when the fire gets larger than the single tree, and the lines on the map no longer accurately represent what people see happening to their landscape—the public wants to know what you're doing about it. In some cases, the decision to implement a Fire Use strategy may be much more expensive than if the fire had been suppressed early on.

### Land Use Plans/Forest Plans

It is important to remember that an AMR is tied to Fire Management Units, to the Fire Management Plan, and then tied to either NEPA compliant Land Use Plans or Forest Management Plans. Some of these plans still need work to identify planned or unplanned wildfire, or AMR/Fire Use. An AMR gives managers some flexibility; an AMR doesn't tie managers to using a strategy that becomes inappropriate if/when conditions change. An AMR encourages one decision document, and one decision making process.

Once again I tip my hat to the Line Officers of the Boise, Payette, and the Salmon-Challis National Forests (as well as many other Forests in the West) for stepping back and taking a "big-picture" look at the direction mid-summer large timber fires are going. These Forests are certainly in the forefront of understanding the advantages of AMR and using it to best advantage.

### Incident Management Teams

There have been many discussions recently about the use of Fire Use Teams versus Incident Management Teams (IMT). Incident Management Teams are just that, teams that manage incidents. Whether incidents are fire use, wildfires, or prescribed fire, IMTs should be the organizations to manage incidents. The Incident Command System allows us the flexibility to use the necessary Command and General staffs appropriate to manage any size incident. It's a myth that when a Type

1 or Type 2 IMT is ordered, they have to bring every person assigned to the team. Any IMT can be configured in a way appropriate for the situation. It's time to dispel this myth so managers really understand the benefits of using Incident Management Teams.

### Strategic Planning/Long Term Implementation Plans (LTIP)

If you are planning on attending S-520 (Advanced Incident Command) in the near future, you should know the emphasis is on strategic planning. With this emphasis in mind, I was recently asked, "Are we just going to sit back, think strategically, and allow all fires to burn until a season ending event?"

My answer to the question was "No." There will still be wildfires that are suppressed, contained, and controlled during Initial Attack with small acreages and low costs. Type 1 and Type 2 IMTs will still be asked to confine, contain, and control wildfires. Those strategies may very well be the appropriate management response for those types and complexities of incidents—but not for those fires that escape Initial Attack to become very large fires, which we know we can't put out even if we had all the money, resources, and time in the world. These are the fires that need strategic planning, long-term implementation plans, "mega-WFSAs", turnkey transitions, and Line Officer support.

Last year NIMO teams managed incidents for up to 30 days. Nothing prohibits IMTs from doing the same thing—even with the 2:1 Work Rest and Length of Assignment guidelines. We need to order the appropriate resources to allow Command and General Staff members to rotate in and out of incidents to meet the guidelines. We do this with all other resources. We rotate them out for 2 or 3 days of R&R and bring them back to the incident. I have heard Forest Supervisors say they do not like having to in-brief a new team every 14 days and close them out every 14 days. It takes too much of their time as well as that of their staff members.

Consider this: what if IMT members were rotated in order for them to

stay on an incident for more than 21 days. If one team stayed on an incident for 30 days, one transition, one closeout and one in-briefing have been eliminated. The workload in a 90-day event is cut in half—as well as associated travel and other costs. Rather than six teams assigned to an incident, only three teams have been assigned. The same applies for transitions, in-briefings and closeouts. I won't say having the same team assigned to an incident for 30 days is the right thing to do all the time, but it's certainly an option in many cases. There would certainly be an impact on units that support Incident Management Teams with team members—unless of course the incident is on your home unit, which means you will be impacted anyway.

During long term/long duration fires it takes at least 2 fully qualified Operations Section Chiefs with several good Resource Unit Leaders to accurately track, rotate, and order the appropriate resources. The 14-day policy is very challenging on these kinds of fires.

Strategic planning may also require the use of Management Action Points or MAPs. This term is taken from the Fire Use process and can be part of your Long Term Implementation Plan used for Fire Use fires.

There again lies the confusion of strategic planning. The only difference is the way we interpret the terms "Fire Use" or "wildfire." MAPs would take the place of trigger points. MAPs trigger tactical assignments that will take place once fire reaches a specified location. MAPs are typically tied to Values to Protect (VTP). The VTP are given to the IMTs by the Line Officers. For example, a VTP may be a bridge to the wilderness, outfitter camps, utilities, recreation areas, roads, fisheries, communities, fire protection boundaries, agency boundaries, etc. MAP #1 may read "when fire reaches this drainage, a squad will fly from helibase to the outfitter camp and start the pumps that will protect the camp." MAP #2 may address direct line construction, or to burn out and hold line as needed in order to protect a specific power line.



Obviously, the VTP and the MAP can keep Operations and Planning very busy. Having that information on an ftp: site is the key. The information can be shared during the hectic days of IMT transitions to provide for continuity when maintaining and updating IAPs, maps, evacuation plans, ICP locations, resource assignments, strategic plans, WFSAs, MAPs, and VTP.

I like the term, “values to protect” (VTP). This directly coincides with the amount of money being spent to protect the “values” or things of particular “value” on an incident. These values are provided to the IMT by the Line Officers who have the fiscal responsibility for the incident. AMR is nothing more than protecting the values that are at risk and being able justify spending the appropriate amount of money to protect those values.

The concept of values at risk is also something that the concerned public and political entities readily understand.

I believe in the near future, Line Officer’s will present a team with a selected alternative that identifies the following:

- 1) Project boundaries
- 2) The values in that boundary that need to be protected
- 3) The amount of money appropriate to protect those values.

The IMT will then have to become very strategic, very creative, and be successful at applying the correct strategies and tactics to protect those values.

Here is an example of what I would hope to hear from a Line Officer in regards to this subject:

Here is the fire. Here is the

outermost boundary for that fire. These are the values we have identified in the area. We want you to use what ever tactics you need to safely and efficiently protect these values. Here is the amount of money we think is appropriate to protect those values. You can use as many or as few resources as you deem appropriate.

Whether it is full suppression, direct attack, limited suppression, in-direct attack, or a combination, the concept of protecting values at risk still applies.

Some of these concepts for managing wildland fire, like fire management itself, are a work in progress; an unknown future. But, what we do know is that fires are getting larger, the woods are getting drier, we are doing more with less, and there are more homes to protect every year. There will likely be less money than more.



## Fuels

# Partnership Yielding Accomplishment on-the-Ground

~ Val Christianson, WUI Prevention Specialist - NIFC

Several Bureaus within Interior have come together over the past several years to successfully collaborate on reducing hazardous fuels from around both communities and other values-at-risk in Northern California. The little known Interagency Fuels Crew is made up of resources from the Bureau of Land Management, Surprise Field Office in Cedarville, California; the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Pacific Regional Office out of Sacramento; and at times Fish and Wildlife Service Staff. The crew consists of a Fuels Crew Leader, Assistant Crew Leader, Squad Bosses and Crewmembers.

Fire engines, crew rigs and technical support are all housed by the BLM at the facilities in Cedarville.

The history of the Fuels Crew has its origin in 1991 when the BIA-Northern California Agency created a Fire Crew on the Fort Bidwell Reservation in the remote northeastern corner of the State. Two years later the Crew moved into the BLM facilities in Cedarville and began to initiate a fuel break between the wildland-urban interface communities of the Reservation and the encroaching western juniper and cheatgrass. A decade later, this fuel



Trevor Jimenez in the blue helmet, and Kevin Konz in the Yellow, cutting Juniper and down snags at the Big Bally aspen project.

break, and ongoing maintenance, spared the Reservation from the Sanders Fire in September 2006.

The crew transitioned from a primary suppression entity into an interagency fuels reduction crew in 2002, and six BIA staff were funded out of the national WUI budget. When not working on fuels reduction projects around the Tribal Rancherías, Forest Service lands, private lands and



This is the whole station presenting the former Field Office Manager, Owen Billingsley with a Certificate of Appreciation. The fuels crew is made up of the individuals wearing the denim long sleeve shirts; first row on knees L to R: Jared Strahorn, Marino Fernandez, Matt Brown, Jesse Wood, David Steger, Whitney Martin, Kelsey McCutchen; second row standing L to R: Rolando Guzman, Scott Soletti, Kevin Konz, Kenny Long, Josh Boneck, and Trevor Jimenez.

BLM holdings, the Crew has traveled to the Great Lakes Region to assist National Wildlife Refuges on prescribed burns. When the need arises, the three Interior Agencies have assembled their Fuels staff to make up a twenty person handcrew to travel to incidents out of Region.

Another notable successful endeavor of the Interagency Crew is that of protecting the prehistoric resources at the Massacre Rim Petroglyph site in the extreme corner of northwestern Nevada. The crew established a mechanical fuels treatment by hand, protecting the National Register of Historic Places (eligible) site. Scientists explained to the Crew's staff that intensive heat and smoke can lead to the defacement of the indigenous Native American historical and cultural historic record.

The Crew is a true testimony to the spirit of the National Fire Plan and the Federal Wildfire Management Policy, i.e., the cooperation between Federal agencies in the pursuit of community protection from wildfire. The work of the Crew has been very cost effective and the entries into NFPORS in the HFR/WUI Fuels component is establishing further funding for endeavors for Fuels treatments in northeastern California.

Two BIA staff, Waposta 'Posh' Van Etten (Rosebud Sioux), and Trevor Jimenez (Paiute Gidutikad) both finished the 2007 field season successfully and are anticipating being picked back up in the early spring for another season. The BIA is looking at hiring another staff as a Crew Leader for 2008. Other staff that have been instrumental in the success of this interagency endeavor include Garth Jeffers, BLM-FMO at the Surprise Field Office, and Ron Recker, BIA-Pacific Region FMO.

## Remembering Donald Povatah

~ Val Christianson, WUI Prevention Specialist - NIFC



L to r: Aaron Massey, Ft. Apache Agency; Harry Wheeler, Northern Pueblos Agency; Donald Povatah, Hopi Agency. Photo taken at Colorado River Reservation (Parker, AZ) after the three finished their Arson Investigation assignment on the Ft. Mojave Reservation, late September 2007. Photo taken by Tim Marascal, Colorado River Indian Tribal Wildland Fire Dept.

Donald Povatah (Hopi/Navajo) was the Fire Management Officer (FMO) at the Hopi Agency, since 2001. His undergraduate degree was in Biology from Northern Arizona University. He had completed his Technical Forest Management coursework and he was also in the throes of completing his Master's Thesis in Forest Ecology at NAU.

Donald first attended 'Wildland Fire Origin and Cause Determination, FI-210' in early February 2004. He was called up to his first off-unit assignment to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in July 2004. He worked competently and diligently with the lead INVF staff and the rest of the team. For the next three fire seasons he had to lead the suppression resources on the Hopi Reservation and was not able to participate in an investigation assignment. In June 2007, a rash of intentionally set fires began to occur on the Ute Mountain Reservation in southwestern Colorado. When requested to join the investigation team being formed, he gladly consented to do so. Again, his work with the team leaders and members was commended by the Agency Superintendent and the BIA Police, as well as by his coworkers. His taskbook was completed and he was fully qualified as a Type III Wildland Fire Investigator. Two arrests were made and one individual was prosecuted by the Assistant US Attorney as a result of the involvement of the Investigation Team. In October 2007, a number of

methodically planned fires were being set along the Colorado River on the Ft. Mojave Indian Reservation destroying old growth stands of the Tribe's mesquite. Donald was called upon to head up the investigation team being formed. Under his direction, the Team worked closely with the Tribal Chairman and Council, Tribal Police, Bordertown Fire Departments and other Police Jurisdictions, as well as with the Colorado River Tribal Wildland and Structural Fire Management staff. Once again, he was commended by his peers, by

the Law and Fire staff and by both the Tribal Chair and Council and the Agency Superintendent. He lead instruction in the FI-110, Origin and Cause Determination for First Responders, for Law and Fire staff from the Colorado River Agency, and also spearheaded the initial WeTip orientation for Tribal and Bureau administrators. The wildfire starts along the River plummeted after the initial posting of the WeTip posters.

Donald's mannerisms, soft voice, and attention he paid to an individual, as

well as his knowledge of origin and cause determination issues, made for the qualities of a good leader. He was one of only four carded investigators in the entire southwestern United States in Indian Country, and he would have become an oft-called INVf Team Leader. Donald died from complications due to a massive stroke just before Christmas 2007. He is survived by his wife, four children and his parents all still living on the Hopi Reservation. His parting has left a noticeable void within our fire management community.

## Prairie Restoration at Sac & Fox Tribe in Iowa

~ Paul Pooler, Fire Ecologist Midwest and Great Plains Regions



Recently acquired bison heard at Sac & Fox came within 100 feet of the ignitors.

The Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa has undertaken natural prairie restoration and establishment of a tribal bison herd near Tama, Iowa. This project is in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in an attempt to achieve shared wildlife management goals. One of the goals is to increase both grazing land for the bison and species diversity on the Settlement by restoring the native prairie with prescribed burning.



Chris Clingan, Conservation Officer and Mike Demarr, National Resource Officer of the Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa.

In April, the Midwest Region of the BIA assisted the Sac & Fox Tribe in conducting the Tribes first prescribed fire on approximately 150 acres of grasslands and woody draws. The plan was written by Paul Maday, Fuels Specialist at Minnesota Agency, BIA and conducted by Tom Remus, Fuels Specialist for the Midwest Region.

Mike Demarr, Natural Resource Director and Chris Clingan, Conservation Officer, of the Sac & Fox Tribe, stated the use of RX fire to re-establish the native prairie will not only benefit the tribal bison herd but will also provide for a variety of other wildlife and natural resources. Data collected from Firemon plots and established photo plots will generate information that will be utilized in refining and developing other natural resource management plans for the tribe.



First ignition of a RX fire on Sac & Fox Tribe.



# Southern Ute Agency Develops Training for Firefighters Working Near Oil and Gas Well Infrastructure

~ Dave Koch, NIFC Assistant Director - Training



**Pump jack.**

The Southern Ute Agency recently developed a training program for firefighters conducting wildland fire operations in and around oil and gas infrastructure in the Four Corners Region. Encountering oil and gas well sites and infrastructure is not unique to the Four Corners region and Indian Country. Oil and gas producing regions are prevalent throughout rural America exposing our firefighters to a unique set of mitigation measures during the execution of our mission.

In 1999, two firefighters suppressing a fire near Marvel, Colorado became ill and exhibited symptoms consistent with asphyxiation and gas poisoning. A safety panel was convened to investigate the cause of the illness and to provide recommendations to avoid future occurrences. While no direct link to hydrogen sulfide ( $H_2S$ ) or other noxious gases was proven, safety measures were recommended and have since been implemented and supported by this training.

The objectives of this course are as follows:

1. Promote communication between the oil and gas industry and wildland fire officials before and during wildland fire incidents.



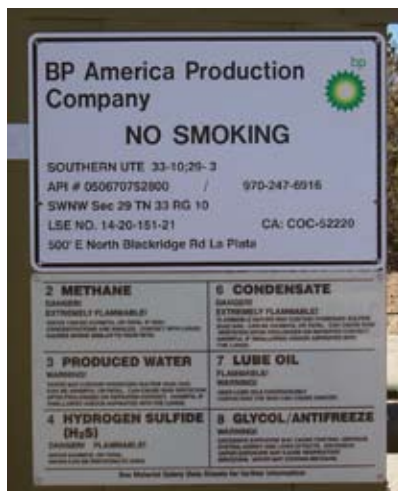
**Firefighter with monitor**

2. Identify standardized operating procedures for wildland fire incidents within the oil and gas field.
3. Reference informational safety sheets to promote the identification of oil and gas industry hazards and possible ways to mitigate those hazards.
4. Identify well pad infrastructure and associated hazards.
5. Identify sources of oil and gas information available to wildland firefighters.
6. Identify hazardous gas areas and methods of mitigating the associated hazards.

The success of this safety related program is made possible through protocols established collectively within the local fire management zone. When fire personnel arrive at the scene of a wildland fire incident, their size-up includes an assessment of oil and gas wells, pipelines, and other infrastructure. During pre-season

planning meetings with industry safety personnel, mitigation measures have been developed to include not only what to do when encountering such sites, but who to contact for expertise in dealing with those sites. The local zone dispatch office maintains a list of key industry contacts that can be contacted 24/7 in the event help is needed.

For more information on this course, contact Rich Gustafson, Southern Ute Agency Fire Management Officer, at (970) 563-4571.



Well pad information.

does the trick. I am ready to face the day. As I stroll back to my trailer I can see that all the units are awake now and going about the morning rituals, lunches are made, water is stowed in line gear, PPE is assembled, and vehicles are loaded appropriately to accomplish the days tasks. Working with the agency's burn plans we have reconned most of the ground and have developed two to three prescribed fire options depending on how the weather is on any given day. This is day four and although my team had not worked together in the past we are starting to operate as a well oiled cohesive crew. The team members are flexible and supportive; each sharing generously of their own experiences in the realm of prescribed fire to help achieve the ultimate mission of the program, to increase their own skill in prescribed fire, and reach the targets for the Seminole agency. I think most participants appreciate the unique opportunity that the BIA Fire Mentoring Program at Seminole offers us.

This was the inaugural year for the BIA Fire Mentoring Program, and as you have gathered if you have read this far the Seminole Agency was selected to serve as a Prescribed Fire Mentoring Hub. The concept was straight forward, the Seminole Agency needed some extra help to accomplish their prescribed fire burning goals while the BIA, and Tribal fire management folks benefit from opportunities to hone their skills.

It is always tough to be the first to engage in a new activity, like buying the first model year of a new car, there always seems to be engineering glitches that arise that were not anticipated by those designers in their ivory towers. It takes an intrepid group to take the new model and adjust, shape and build a product or program that works. We were lucky to have two such groups apply and be selected this year to establish a successful frame work for the BIA Fire Mentoring Program.

Each group participated in a 21 day assignment allowing for about 19 work days with two days set aside for travel to and from the Seminole Agency. As the first group completed their assignment the next group arrived

## BIA Fire Mentoring Hub Works

~ Craig Cook, NIFC



Night burn.

There it is again. That sound. My hackles are up now as I strain to peer into the palmetto palms shrouded in darkness. I try to make out an outline, an image, something that will tell me if I should run or stand my ground.. I am frozen to the patch of earth I now occupy. Although I can't see into the brush I am convinced that the groaning I hear is coming from a medium sized gator. Just as I decide the best course is to back up and choose a different course around the burn unit I open my eyes and find myself in my bed.

Still a bit confused I lie in my bed and rerun the dream in my head. Then I hear that eerie sound again, this time I recognize the sound for what it is, the snoring of my room mate, who is part of my team working at the Seminole Agency as part of the new BIA Fire Mentoring Program.

Relieved, I pull on my nomex pants and slip into my tennis shoes and wander next door to trailer #4 where I know Paley will have strong coffee brewing. As always, the black coffee

and picked up where the first group left off. The 2008 program began on January 9<sup>th</sup> and concluded when Group 2 traveled home on February 19<sup>th</sup>.

Both groups were highly productive and successful in meeting the goals of the program. Combined the groups hand ignited over 3000 acres for the Seminole Agency. That requires a lot of walking with a torch in hand! In addition Group 2 participated in a 500 acre aerial ignition burn with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the Florida Panther Wild life preserve. Both groups represented themselves well within the community, helping enhance the local community's support for the program. The first group participated in the Rez Rally, a fun run, organized to focus attention on the benefits of fitness to the community, proudly all members of the group placed in their respective age groups.

From the training and mentoring standpoint, the program was also viewed as success both from the view point of the individual participant's feedback and quantitatively from an objective point of view. Of the six RXB2 trainees that attended the program two made substantial progress in completing tasks leading toward qualification. One completed his task book with a recommendation to the certifying official that they complete a burn on their home unit prior to certification and three RXB2 trainees completed task books and received recommendations for certification. Of the 5 Firing Boss trainees, 3 were completely signed off with recommendations for certification, and 2 made significant progress in their task books.

The title of this article "BIA Fire Mentoring Hub Works" was chosen because it describes the program on three distinct levels.



**Night burn.**

First of all, the word "works" accurately describes the bulk of what the participants did. They worked a lot; they reviewed burn plans, created maps, wrote accomplishment reports, got vehicles stuck and freed, they staffed engines as needed, operated dozers, tractors, and walked many miles with drip torch in hand. But "works" can also be seen in the context of something akin to a place where things are made or constructed such as an iron works, where ore is melded into the finished product, steel. I think this definition fits well because the groups meld their combined knowledge and practice burning skills resulting in increased proficiency for all, which benefits Indian country. And thirdly, the word "works" can be seen as a testament to the program's initial success as in "the program really works." So, if you find yourself at Seminole you will know to expect lots of work and opportunities to grow professionally.

Special thanks goes to all those folks who helped make this first year a success; Jamie McDaniel, Seminole Agency FCO, Randy Pretty-on-top, and David Walks, of Crow

Agency for sharing their local burning expertise with the groups, Red Anderson, Regional Fuels Specialist, for providing regional expectations and support to the groups. Tony Recker, Regional FMO, for his help establishing needed housing, Joe Frank, Seminole Agency Forest Manager for embracing the groups into his community, the NIFC Fuels Manager for making regional blanket training accounts available to cover travel for two groups. And finally a thanks to Jon Lee, Western Region's AFMO, and Ralph Thomas, Fuels Specialist Fort Apache Agency, for serving as Field Coordinators for the two groups.

We are all looking forward to another successful year burning at the Seminole Agency. If you are interested, applications will be accepted beginning November 1, and ending November 30, 2008 for next session. For more information on the program feel free to contact:

Craig Cook  
Fire Mentoring Program Coordinator  
208-387-5965  
FAX 208-387-5580

### Thanks!

Thanks again to those of you who have submitted articles and photographs. Keep up the great work!

### Submission Criteria

Please include the author's name, title and location, captions and high resolution photographs attached as separate jpeg files. The article submission deadline for "Smoke Signals" is as follows:

March 1  
June 1  
September 1  
December 1

We apologize for the tardiness of this issue. Serious hardware problems caused a long delay in production.

### Distribution

Please route this publication to your staff as well as to your EFFers. If you need additional copies for your staff, or need copies sent to an another address please contact us. Please make sure your seasonal fire employees have an opportunity to read Smoke Signals!

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- Author's name
- Author's title
- Author's agency/location
  
- High resolution jpg photos
- Photo captions
- Names of people in photo and where they work
  
- Contact name, number, and email address