



Table of Contents

Administration.....	3
Fire Use/Fuels.....	5
Operations.....	11
Prevention.....	12
BlacksnakesCorner.	15
Publishers & Info..	Back

Crew remembers MacDonald as “inspiring firefighter”

~ Eric Newhouse, Tribune Projects Editor, Great Falls Tribune



Members of the Chief Mountain Hot Shots fire crew carry the body of fallen comrade Michael MacDonald after arrival at the Cut Bank Airport Wednesday . MacDonald died after two medical helicopters collided near Flagstaff, Az., on Sunday (courtesy photo/John Murray).

Smoke Signals would like to thank Eric Newhouse, the Great Falls Tribune, and www.greatfallstribune.com for allowing us to reprint this article. The Bureau of Indian Affairs NIFC staff including the Smoke Signals staff extend their sympathy to the family of Michael James MacDonald, to the Chief Mountain Hotshots, and to the Blackfeet community.

CUT BANK – Michael MacDonald, a 26-year-old Chief Mountain Hot Shot firefighter, returned to Montana in a wooden coffin aboard a Forest Service smokejumpers’ plane Wednesday.

The first member of his group to die in the line of duty, MacDonald was killed Sunday in a helicopter crash as he was being transported to a hospital in Flagstaff, Ariz., for treatment of a bug bite and an allergic reaction to his treatment.

“Mike was in tremendous condition, but what happened to him was totally out of our control,” said Steve Bullshoe, property manager for the Hot Shots crew based in Browning. “We teach them to be professional, to be safe, but there are some things you can’t do anything about.”

MacDonald’s death stunned the close-knit crew because he had been strong, vital and inspirational, crew members said.

“This guy was outstanding,” said crew supervisor Lyle St. Goddard. “He was so happy to be doing what he was doing. So this is a hard time for us.

“We’ve had a good string of luck for 17 years, and finally our tragedy has struck,” said St. Goddard, who said firefighting is the seventh-most dangerous job in America, according to statistics he’s seen.

Maurice St. Goddard, a friend of MacDonald’s since sixth grade, remembers working beside him the day before his death, while fighting a huge fire on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

“We were working hard to get a (clear fire) line to the top of the ridge and tie it into another line,” Maurice St. Goddard said.

Maurice St. Goddard said MacDonald drew pictures of horses on his leather gloves and made up a story about how the Blackfeet Tribe had stolen the horses from the Spanish and driven them across the Grand Canyon. The tall tale made his weary crew laugh.

“We were tired, but after we had achieved our objective, (MacDonald) was just skiing down the mountain (on broken rock), having fun, and the firefighters in front of him were trying to get out of his way.” Maurice St. Goddard said.



Michael J. MacDonald, Chief Mountain Hotshot and Blackfeet Tribal Member.

On the day of MacDonald’s death, the Hot Shots dug more line through the morning, and then managed to take a break for a hot lunch that was flown in.

“I was sitting all alone, and Mike came and joined me,” said Kayla LaPier, the only female on the squad, a basketball cheerleader whom MacDonald recruited to join the Hot Shot crew.

“There were flames all over and he said, ‘Sit back and enjoy the show.’”

MacDonald was like a big brother to her, LaPier said.

“He took care of me, and he taught me things I didn’t know,” she said. “He was always there to listen to me and to keep my spirits up.”

“We had dug line all day and cleared brush, then we had lunch and Mike

left,” said Jess Racine, with tears running down his face. “After lunch, we jumped h hot spot and knocked it out. Then we got a call, and they told us Mike had been in a helicopter.”

MacDonald was one of his sponsors, Racine said, because they played basketball together for years.

“We have all kinds of state champions on this crew from teams in Browning and Heart Butte,” Racine said.

Mike was a great guy,” he added. “If someone was hungry, he’d split a sandwich with you or give you his last dollar/”

After learning of MacDonald’s death, the stunned Chief Mountain Hot Shots decided they needed to come home to Browning to come to terms with the loss.

“He left a little bit of himself with every one of us,” said crewmember William Pepion, Jr. “His happiness, joy and willingness to work were incredible. He was a strong young man, very safe and very conscious of those around him. He’s been run out of a few fires, and he was always watching out for the people around him.”

“He was a caretaker for a lot of us,” said Chico Reyes, a Hot Shots member. “After we’d been dispatched, I spent most of my money on bills and beer, but Mike took care of me. He took me out to his house a couple of times and fed me.”

Loren Bell remembers MacDonald as one of the ringleaders when the fire crew helped him put a new roof on his home in Browning.

“Mike was there the whole time,” Bell said. “It was a tremendous help to me and my family. He was one of the most energetic guys I ever knew, and he was always happy.”

A 22-year veteran of the fire crew, Mannie Alanvielle said MacDonald had a rare ability to prevent exhausted firefighters from feeling sorry for themselves.



Administration

Current trends related to wildland fire management present many

“Mike was one of those guys who could walk into a group of very tired guys and tell them to quit corner-bitching (four people standing in a corner complaining about fatigue),” he said. “And after he was done, there

made the long drive back to Montana from Arizona.

“We’re all like parents, making sure our children are OK and bringing them home safe,” said assistant crew superintendent Eli Still Smoking. “So it was a long ride for us because one of our family members was still missing.”

When they got back to Browning, the Hot Shots held an emotional prayer service at the Fire Cache.

“I prayed and made an offering,” said Joe Fisher, a close friend of MacDonald’s for two decades who played with him on the Browning state championship basketball team in 2001. “I was crying so hard, but then I looked up and saw a buck near where I had made my offering.”



Chief Mountain Hot Shots logo

were four guys with good attitudes instead of just one. He was awesome, and we’re going to miss him.”

“He was a good guy,” crewmember Kevin Heavy Runner said. “He’d always play a lot of jokes on me. He was always teasing me.”

All of those memories and more came back as the Chief Mountain Hot Shots

Fisher immediately remembered visiting Macdonald’s house in Missoula a few years earlier and taking pictures of deer in his friend’s back yard.

“I stopped crying,” Fisher said. “It was like he was right here beside me, telling me goodbye.”

Rocky Mountain Region Wins Award for National Fire Suppression Support

~ Lyle Carlile, Director, Branch of Fire Management

challenges to land managers. Fuels conditions, persistent drought and the expanding wildland-urban interface have exacerbated recent fire seasons.

The core of our ability to respond to these emergencies is the firefighter, the individual on the fireline, in camp or working at the unit in a support role.

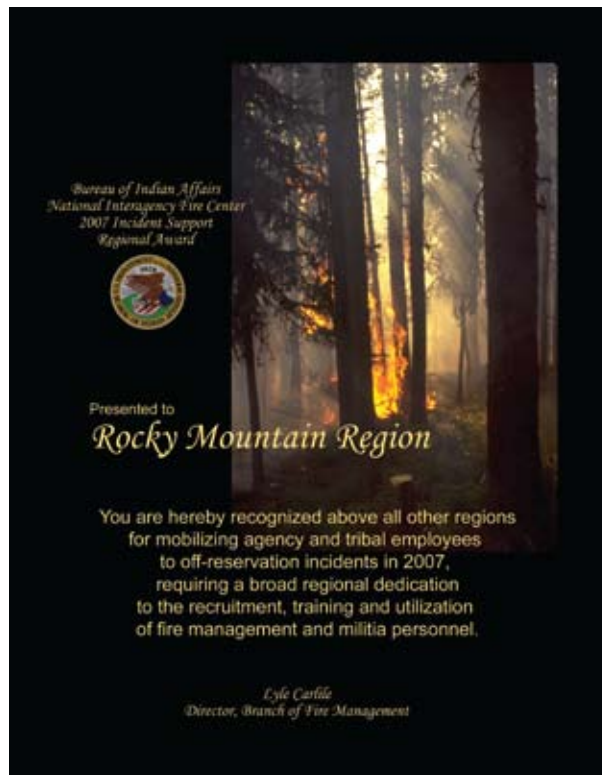


L to r: Lyle Carlile, Director, Branch of Fire Management-NIFC; Ed Parisian, RMR Director; Jerry Gidner, BIA Director.

The interagency fire program is funded to cover our fire management personnel. However, these employees cannot solely cover the emergency workload. Historically, the fire program has utilized the firefighting “militia” to augment emergency response. The “militia” is the employees that work in other programs that are trained and respond in some capacity to support the fire suppression effort. In spite of the increased funding brought about by the National Fire Plan the interagency fire community still requires support by the “militia”.

Recent trends indicate the “militia” resource participation has decreased. This is a function of many factors. The fire program recognizes the challenges presented when employees are released from their normal jobs to support the fire effort. The work at the home unit does not stop and must go

on. Supervisors are required to maintain services but are left short-handed.



RMR Award for National Fire Suppression Support.

BIA-NIFC presented the first regional award for support of the fire suppression effort at the BIA Line Officer meeting in Seattle, Washington on April 2, 2008. The BIA, Rocky Mountain Region was recognized for their sacrifice and support of the fire suppression effort in 2007. This region mobilized more resources to off-reservation incidents, based on a percentage of their total capacity, than all other BIA regions.

BIA-NIFC will continue to annually recognize regions that encourage and support their employees to assist with the fire suppression effort. BIA-NIFC plans to present an additional award starting next year that recognizes the individual tribe/agency unit with the greatest off-reservation mobilization support.

Congratulations to the Rocky Mountain Region and THANK YOU for your support!



FEMOs and Future of Fire Monitoring

~ Laura Atkins, Northwest Regional Office

The San Carlos Apache Tribe Fire Use and Fuels Program hosted a Fire Effects Monitor (FEMO) workshop on April 29th-May 1st, 2008 at the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona. Mary Taber, National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) Fire Ecologist coordinated the training, stating “this was the first time the BIA has hosted the modern FEMO Workshop developed recently by the National Park Service.” Mary explains that with the growing demand for the FEMOs in the BIA and other Federal agencies, trainings like this one are crucial to the success of fuels and fire programs. Individuals from the Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs presented the training. Attending the training were folks from the San Carlos Apache tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Yakama Agency, the Menominee tribe, the Colville



Ron Sherron, Karrie Stevens, and Paul Pooler completing field tasks.

Agency, the Spokane Agency, and the Student Conservation Association. Individuals from the Western, Southwest, Navajo, Northwest Region, as well as the National Office were also present at the training.

The San Carlos Apache Reservation, a 1.8 million acre land base, was chosen

to host the workshop because of its active burning program and its model fire effects monitoring program. Three newly hired San Carlos Apache tribal members attended the training to become more familiar with the FEMO techniques. They were hired recently to do monitoring after two successful seasons with Student Conservation



Participants of the FEMO workshop working on class assignments.



Ben Butler and Darrell Clairmont measure fuel load.

Association (SCA) interns who have been contributing to the fire monitoring program. Monitoring has been utilized at the San Carlos Apache Tribe since the 1990's when the RX-80 Park Service protocol was implemented.

The workshop began Tuesday morning and convened Thursday afternoon. Tuesday's classroom discussions covered topics such as burn plan objectives and monitoring and fuel moisture measurements. Each day of the workshop provided time for a field exercise. For the first field exercise, participants were tasked with mapping features in a rugged 2 acre lot adjacent to the Apache Gold Casino

golf course. This included mapping the topography, potential hazards, fuels, and the potential values at risk (natural and cultural resources).

The participants also recorded weather observations every fifteen minutes to better simulate the actual duties of a Fire Effects Monitor. For the second day of the workshop, two class topics included Bil Grauel's (San Carlos Apache Tribe Fire Use Specialist) discussion on the new FIREMON Fire Behavior protocol and a presentation on smoke monitoring and air quality considerations by Regional Environmental Quality Specialist Ron Sherron. For the second field

assignment, participants took a short ride into the San Carlos Wildland Urban Interface Rx Project where a prescribed burn had taken place in a previous season. The focus was to complete post treatment monitoring. This included making a detailed map of the burn area showing burn severity, vegetation recovery, species of interest, and noting the change in fuel loading that resulted from brush shredding followed by a prescribed fire. The final day of the workshop was spent in the same area as the prescribed burn. Participants prepared a written Fire Effects Monitoring Report of the previous day's observations that were turned into the instructors for review. The reports drew conclusions as to whether the

objectives of the burn had been met.

Fire effects monitoring has become crucial to the success of fire programs. With increasing emphasis on whether objectives are being met in prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and appropriate management response fire, the observations, analysis, and documentation skills a FEMO provides is crucial to decision making in fire and fuels management. Throughout the BIA and tribal programs, there are currently seven certified FEMOs. Thanks to trainings like this one, and more in the future, this position will likely become more known and utilized in successful fire programs. Overall, "It's all about the objectives," Mary Taber, 2008.



Laural Atkins is the current Student Conservation Association Intern for the Northwest Regional Office in Portland, Oregon.



Forester's Log: Leopold Retires from Forest Career

~ ©Mary Stuever

©Mary Stuever, May 2008 *The Forester's Log* is a monthly column published in newspapers and magazines primarily in the American west. Stuever is a forester in the American Southwest. She can be reached at sse@nmia.com.

He has been a constant companion. For the last five years he has lain under my desk at the Tribal Forestry Field Office or been in the woods on field days. Before we worked for the tribe in Arizona, he accompanied me each summer visiting forest ecosystems across the Southwest. He was always a hit at environmental education workshops for school children. He's been the best partner a forester could have.

His name is Leopold. Leopold the dog, named for Aldo Leopold, the forester and author of *Sand County Almanac*. This book and other Leopold writings help mold much of the ethical and ecological underpinnings of forestry and related professions.

At the mellow age of 13, my 100-pound mutt has officially announced his retirement from a long career of forestry assistance. I am grateful he has made this decision, as my new job is located in a state building in Santa Fe where dogs are not necessarily daily companions. Otherwise I might have had to

develop a disability that required dog assistance. Leopold, though, is the one developing disabilities.

A few weeks ago when we did the pack test to insure we were ready to fight fires for the season, he tagged along for the first mile but rode in the back of the test administrator's truck



Leo at Sandstone Bluffs.

for the next two miles. He stood, though, barking his encouragement as we struggled with our 45-pound loads to demonstrate that we could move the required three miles in less than 45 minutes.

A mile is a good distance for Leo, and even with retirement, he and I sally forth from our woodland home daily to give the old bones a workout. We used to run for miles and miles.

It was on one of those runs that Leopold found the injured coyote. The animal was alive, but could not move his rear end. I would have raced right past his hiding space by the trail if Leopold had not pointed him out. With the help of a neighboring veterinarian, we transported the coyote to the Rio Grande Zoo vet clinic. For weeks the zoo vets tried to help the poor animal, but finally determined he would not survive the paralysis.

Leopold always makes me more aware in the woods. I imagine that if I could have gone to the woods with the famous ecologist, I would have been shown many things I would miss if alone. Since Aldo Leopold died in 1948, and I was not born until eleven years later, I would have to suffice

with reading his writings and exploring the woods with his name-sake. Since then the dog has introduced me to hidden fawns, mountain-lion killed carcasses, bear scat, and innumerable evidence of animal death in the forest environment. As a forester, I might have otherwise been content to stay focused on trees and plants.

Aldo Leopold never let his

attention remain tree-focused. Although one of the early foresters, he is dubbed the father of modern wildlife management. Leopold was also a leader in wilderness establishment, and crafted the basis of land ethics. In 1924 he was writing about the importance of keeping fire in ponderosa pine forests.

We have moved home, to the yard that Leopold grew up in. He seems content to spend his days curled under a juniper tree, rather than under my desk. Neither of us misses the daily struggle to get his 100-pound arthritis-ridden torso into the back of my Subaru Forester. Although I miss the familiar breathing beneath my desk, I am grateful to find a faithful mutt waiting at the end of the day to take a walk and see what lessons wait for us.

Forest Management Aids Fire Suppression

~ Thomas Lavagnino, Information Officer, Medford Oregon



Crown fire drops to forest floor in treated area.

This spring, the Mescalero Apache Reservation hosted a Type-1 incident (the South Tularosa Fire) and a Type-2 incident (the Roger's Trap Fire). Both fires could have been much worse. Both fires were suppressed at relatively low cost as a result of intensive forest management. The forest management occurring on the Mescalero Apache Reservation is a national model, resulting in the restoration of historic forest composition and density and returning the land to a historic, low intensity fire regime.

The South Tularosa Fire was driven by a west wind in excess of 45 miles per hour, and grew to a size of 3,860 acres during the first week of May. Because of the vast expanse of unbroken forestland downwind from the fire however, plans were being made to do battle with a fire of 10,000 to 30,000 acres. The nearby Chino

fire of 1999 had burned 12,000 acres in the first afternoon of burning under very similar circumstances. What was

the difference – why did the South Tularosa Fire not equal or surpass the Chino Fire in size?



Restoration management must include logging.

Clearly, many factors influence fire spread. But there are reasonable explanations why the crown fire that came roaring up out of West Telephone Canyon dropped to the ground at the

top of a high, broad ridge. When the South Tularosa Fire reached the ridgetop, it also reached the first of three forest management units in the fire area. The spacing and continuity of the trees, brush and understory

fuel on the ridgetop moderated fire behavior, allowing firefighters to get close enough to the fire's edge to control it's spread.



Well managed uneven-aged mixed conifer stand.



Well managed uneven-aged ponderosa pine stand.

Great Plains Fuels Project and Monitoring Review

~ Paul Pooler, Fire Ecologist Midwest and Great Plains Regions

reviews are conducted periodically to ensure adherence to National Policy and Guidelines.

Hazardous fuel reduction sites were also visited at Pine Ridge and



Fuels Project files under review by Morgan Beveridge, Regional Fuels Specialist and Avery Thompson, Fuels Specialist at Lower Brule Agency.

Fuels Project Files and Monitoring reviews were conducted this spring in the Great Plains Region by Regional Fuels Specialist Morgan Beveridge and Regional Fire Ecologist, Paul Pooler. These



Morgan Beveridge and Tamera Randall, Fuels Technician, at the Pine Ridge West Fuel Break Project.

Winnebago Agencies. These sites have become a source of pride to Agencies within the Great Plains. At Pine Ridge, the West Fuel Break Project has received numerous compliments from the local residents. By the end of the summer, this project will be converted to a picnic and camping area.



Tamara Randall, Fuels Tech., Morgan Beveridge, and Mike Twiss, Fire Operations Specialist, on a HFR Site in Pine Ridge, South Dakota.



Burn Team members from left to right: Nate Kershner, Steven Lejuene, Doug Head, Eric Pfeilschifter, Darrin Jones, Chad Loreth. Front row: Sam Vanorney, Tom Remus.

Inter-Agency RX Burns Successful at Union Slough Wildlife Refuge

~ Paul Pooler, Fire Ecologist Midwest and Great Plains Regions

Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Iowa was established in 1937 to provide a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. A slough is defined as an area of soft, muddy ground; swamp or swamplike region. The Union Slough is the remnants of a pre-glacial riverbed and its name is derived



Tom Remus, Midwest Regional Fuels Specialist, at the Union Slough Wildlife Refuge.



Burned marsh area at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge

from the connection or “union” of the Blue Earth River of Minnesota and the East Fork of the Des Moines River in Iowa. The Iowa Wetland Management District is part of the refuge and is a major producer of wood ducks and the site of several successful reintroductions of the trumpeter swan.

This year members of the BIA Midwest Region participated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to conduct prescribed fires within waterfowl production areas in the Refuge near Spencer, Iowa. Chad Loreth, Zone Wildland-Urban Interface Specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, believes this kind of inter-agency cooperation is essential for future successful burning on the refuge.



Operations

20 Years - Celebration

~ Laura Atkins, Northwest Regional Office; Article and Photographs

A ceremony was held on May 27th, 2008 in Portland, Oregon to honor and highlight the past twenty years of successful operation by the Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC). It was an opportunity for local media to capture the stories, history, and mission of this interagency coordination center. In addition, those associated with the center, both past and present, were brought together to be honored and to reflect on time spent at the NWCC.

The ceremony consisted of formal presentations, recognitions of past employees, a reception, tours of the center, weather briefings, engine displays, and an opportunity to view a black hawk helicopter.

The NWCC began operation in the spring of 1988. It emerged out of a growing need for agencies to work together to better allocate engines, crews, aircraft and other resources

to fires in Oregon and Washington. Increasingly intense wildfires had spread fire resources thin; therefore, the creation of an interagency center allowed fire managers to better coordinate fire suppression efforts.

In order to maximize its resources, the center constantly monitors weather data and wildland fuel conditions in Oregon and Washington to determine where fire potential is highest. Wildland fire is the center's primary mission; however, it has also responded to non-wildfire events including Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, and the Space Shuttle Columbia recovery.

NWCC was initially staffed by the Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Presently, the center shares responsibilities with nine state and federal fire agencies in Washington and Oregon.

For the past twenty years, the NWCC has seen its role evolve and expand. This is no doubt going to be



Warm Springs fire crew members J.R. Starr, Treva Keems, and Kosie Wolfe.

the trend for the next twenty years. Environmental and demographic changes will bring more challenges to NWCC. One assurance to these challenges is the unflinching spirit of interagency cooperation on which it was founded that will remain constant and dedicated to the suppression of wildfires.



Cory Winnie, NWRO FMO recognizes employees across the years.

Crow Creek Agency Hosts Engine Academy

~ Paul Pooler, Fire Ecologist Midwest and Great Plains Regions

The Crow Creek Agency of the Great Plains Region, BIA, hosted firefighters from Lower Brule, Pine Ridge,

Cheyenne River and Crow Creek for a week long Engine Academy. Besides an introduction to foam use and tactics the Academy includes S-211, Portable Pumps and Water Handling, and S-216, Driving for the Fire Service.



Elvis Handboy, Model 52 technician, Fain LeBeau, Supervisor Model 52 Program, and Marty Anderson, Model 52 technician at the Crow Creek Engine Academy.

Fain LeBeau, Supervisor of the Northern Center of the BIA Model 52 Program, believes this training is one of the most important in the Great Plains, ensuring wildland firefighters have



Treon Fleury, Wildland Fire Operations Specialist, Crow Creek Agency and Fain LeBeau, lead instructor for the Engine Academy.

essential knowledge and skills necessary to perform operations safely and efficiently. Fain has been the lead instructor for this Academy since the Model 52 Program began in 1986.



Native American Fire Prevention Teams

~ Marco Minjarez, Fort Apache Fire Prevention



L to R: Marco Minjarez, Fort Apache; Jim Nanamkin, Pacific Regional Office; Jamie Mitchell Leech, Lake Minnesota; Jim Hamley, Turtle Mountain; William Quakenbush, HoChunk Nation.

different approach and had an advantage because we were natives ourselves. We were able to blend in. We came away with good feelings of friendship and the sense that we did something positive for these people.



Working on fire reports.

I was home watching an old western movie, *The Lone Ranger*. The phone rang... "Hello", I said. "Are you available for a fire prevention assignment to North Dakota?", the voice on the other side asked. Hmm...

my rental car and tried to turn on the windshield wipers, they were frozen, standing outside I was freezing and trying to knock ice off my window. I was wondering if I had made a mistake.

I have fought fires in 37 states but have never been to North Dakota. I finally had a chance to mark it off my list. I quickly said yes. I flew out of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport where it was 91 degrees. I woke up to a rough landing and looked out the window; all I saw were huge snowflakes. I started to wonder if they forgot to wake me up, and now I was in Alaska or the North Pole? The time was 12:00 am. I jumped in

I was going to the Turtle Mountain Reservation in northern North Dakota. The focus of this assignment was to reduce the number of human-caused fires, protecting lives and property. Although it was snowing when I landed, it wasn't long before the Reservation dried out and we started having fires. Working with the local fire investigators we found that the major problem areas were arson and debris burning. We concentrated on public education and awareness. We did school presentations, newspaper articles, posters, brochures, a children's book, an art contest, and set up booths at public events. I know that the success of this assignment and the accomplishments in this short time were due to the fact that we, for the first time, had an all-Native American Prevention Team. We brought a

The investigators also stated that they were more approachable simply because they were Natives Americans themselves. Our investigators were able to communicate with tribal members and receive a lot more information than the Men in Black could have.

During our in-briefing we were told of local "problem areas" that we should avoid. I went there and it looked very familiar to the neighborhood where I grew up. I was home. I told them I was from the White Mountain Apache Tribe. They quickly opened up and gave us much useful information that we used to help them help themselves.

Another advantage native-American prevention team members have is the knowledge we have regarding tribal cultures, religions and traditions. We understand traditional religious ceremonies, we know when it is ok to take pictures, we know what questions to avoid, and we understand



We-Tip posters at local Pow Wow.

that when an elder speaks you don't interrupt. I grew up poor and have an understanding of their living conditions and know what they are going through because I went through it myself.

Working with the Turtle Mountain fire investigators was a learning experience for both parties. We shared prevention materials like MOU's, tribal codes,

tribal judicial system, brochures, and posters.

Another advantage we had was our ability to communicate effectively with tribal leaders. Our collective knowledge gained from growing up and living on different reservations created an atmosphere of trust and rapport with these leaders and we shared prevention and fire investigation stories that helped them.

I enjoyed my stay at Turtle Mountain and thank Jim Hamley for his guidance and knowledge (Meegueech). Good luck and thank you for allowing me to work on your beautiful reservation.

I am now back home watching my old westerns hoping for another phone call. I wonder if Tonto ever wanted to be a Lone Ranger?

'WeTip' National Award Goes to the Family of Donald Povatah

~ Val Christianson, WUI Prevention Specialist ~NIFC



The immediate family of the late Donald Povatah receives the "Wildland Fire Arson Investigator of the Year Award" posthumously for Donald at the 2008 'WeTip' National conference in Ontario California. Author of this article, Val Christianson (far right) NIFC-BIA Prevention Specialist.

This story is a follow up on the "Remembering Donald Povatah" story run in the May 2008 (Volume 9-page 10) 'Smoke Signals'

A very fitting presentation was recently made to the family of the late Donald Povatah. The 2008 'WeTip' national conference was held in early May in Ontario, CA. The entire immediate family of Donald was present to receive the 'Wildland Fire Arson Investigator of the Year' award on his behalf.

The 'WeTip' national lead staff (Sue Mandell and Sue Aguilar) welcomed the family to a special luncheon presentation. The Povatah family was seated at a special table in front of the forum. Donald's wife, Delphine, his Mom and Dad, both daughters, a son-in-law, a new granddaughter and one son (the second son remained on the Hopi Reservation tending to his classes) all were called to the podium to receive the special award.

The Povatah family were very warmly received by all of the attendees of the prestigious 'WeTip' gathering. Donald's family has since left Keams Canyon to move to Flagstaff, Arizona, so that his daughters can pursue their college studies at Northern Arizona University, Donald's alma mater.

This photo of Donald Povatah was taken at the Colorado River Reservation (Parker, AZ) after he and two others 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.



Wilfred "Pie" Steele Wins Smokey Award

~ Val Christianson, WUI Prevention Specialist ~NIFC



Ed Collins, District Ranger of the Lakeside Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest presented the Bronze Smokey to Wilfred "Pie" Steele while Lyle Carlile, Director, Branch of Fire Management ~ NIFC, and Sam Scranton, Deputy Fire Use/Fuels ~ NIFC watch from the background.

On June 3, 2008, at the Intertribal Timber Council Symposium, Wilfred 'Pie' Steele was awarded the Bronze Smokey Bear Award for 2008. There are no more than ten of these awards presented nationally for any given year for outstanding wildfire prevention endeavors at the Regional or local level.

"Pie" is the Prevention Technician on the San Carlos Apache Reservation in southeastern Arizona. He has been in this position for almost three years.

Tribal Fire Planner Dan Pitterle, and Agency Fire Management Officer Bill Astor, placed Pie in the vacant Prevention position after the Reservation had experienced several years in a row of 100+ intentional human-caused wildfires. In 2005, there were 647 human-caused starts. In 2007, the Reservation experienced a 'measly' 139 starts, a reduction of 79%. This drop in just two fire seasons is unheard of in any jurisdiction anywhere in the Nation.

Pie was able to "hit the ground running" with the prevention program since he'd spent 15 years on the Agency Helitack and IA engine crews. He formed an 'Advisory Committee' of Tribal and Agency departments and staff to assist him in the challenge of reducing the wildfires on the Reservation. He sought counsel from the Housing Authority, Tribal Police and Fire-Rescue, the Wellness Center,

Indian Health Service, the Boys and Girls Club director, the school councilors, the churches, the Tribal Veteran's organization and Senior Citizens, and others to address the dysfunctional behavior of so many youth and young adults who were fire setting.

Pie organized clean-up crews from youth inmates at the Tribal jail. He got other youth to perform 'defensible space' projects for the elderly and handicapped. Pie provided countless prevention related presentations to the seniors and to the schools. He spearheaded recycling of materials that traditionally wound up in the 'burn barrels' as well as numerous other community recycling projects.

Pie showed innovation by talking to groups of youth who were 'hanging out'. He talked face to face with them about personal pride and honor, about their heritage, and about taking pride in their environment and their Reservation. Though there are still many challenges facing San Carlos for the curtailment of human-caused fire starts, the previous



Wilfred "Pie" Steele receives the Bronze Smokey Award.

atmosphere of harassment and intimidation has definitely decreased across the Reservation, largely due to the endeavors of Pie.

Ed Collins, District Ranger of the Lakeside Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest presented the Bronze Smokey. Congratulating Pie were Lyle Carlile, Dennis Dupuis and Sam Scranton (all from NIFC), and his immediate supervisor Dan Pitterle. The entire ITC luncheon audience gave Wilfred 'Pie' Steele a huge ovation as this moment brought a great honor to Indian Country.



Left to right: Dennis Dupuis, Assistant Director, Fire Use/Fuels Specialist; Ed Collins, District Ranger, Lakeside Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest; Lyle Carlile, Director, Branch of Fire Management ~ NIFC; Sam Scranton, Deputy Fire Use/Fuels ~ NIFC; Dan Pitterle, Wilfred's supervisor watch from the back as Wilfred "Pie" Steele receives the Bronze Smokey Award.

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're happy to edit your submissions for you!

2008 Fire Season

All of us are often reminded to fight fire safely but Smoke Signals would like to hear from you how a safe practice kept someone from being injured!

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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Article Submission Checklist

- 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