



## Table of Contents

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Fire Use/Fuels.....     | 4  |
| Operations.....         | 6  |
| Prevention.....         | 9  |
| Training.....           | 14 |
| Blacksnakes Corner.15   |    |
| Publishers & Info..Back |    |

## A Tribute to Heros and Friends Memorial

~ Laurel Simos, BIA~NIFC

*The July 2008 Volume 10 Smoke Signals newsletter reprinted an article by Eric Newhouse, the Great Falls Tribune and [www.greatfallstribune.com](http://www.greatfallstribune.com), remembering Chief Mountain Hotshot, Michael MacDonald as an "inspiring firefighter."*

On June 29, 2008, in Flagstaff Arizona, Classic Life Guard II and Guardian Air Angel 1, two air ambulance helicopters, collided in the air, killing seven people. One of the victims of the accident was Michael MacDonald, a Blackfeet Tribal member and a member of the Chief Mountain Hotshot crew. On July 8, 2008, in Flagstaff Arizona, a memorial was held to



**Glenn Still Smoking speaks in Flagstaff at the Memorial for Heros and Friends.**  
~ Photo by Dalan Romero, BIA~NIFC

honor the seven victims of this tragic aircraft accident. Amid bagpipers, honor guards, speeches, music and other tributes, was Fredrick Andrews, a Hopi Tribal member, who played an Honor Prayer on his flute for the event, honoring Michael MacDonald and the Blackfeet Tribe. Glenn Still Smoking, a Blackfeet Tribal member and the first Superintendent of the Chief Mountain Hotshot crew represented the Indian firefighting community, the Chief Mountain Hotshots and the family of Michael MacDonald at this event as a featured speaker.



**Fredrick Andrews, a Hopi Tribal member played an Honor Prayer on his flute for the Memorial in honor of Michael MacDonald.**  
~ Photo by Dalan Romero, BIA~NIFC

After Glenn recognized and thanked the Zuni Hotshots in the audience for representing the hotshot community, he said, "Mike was an extraordinary individual who





**Blackfeet Hard hat, boots and t-shirt represent Michael MacDonald and wildland firefighters at the memorial.**

~ Photo by Dalan Romero, BIA-NIFC

touched so many people in so many ways. He will be greatly missed by all those who had the fortune of knowing him.”

“I would like to dedicate this speech to the memory of Mike, and all those who were lost in this tragic accident. May God hold them now and watch over those they left behind.”

“The Blackfeet have a long history of being powerful warriors, warriors who went forth to live and die to protect our ancestral homelands.”

“The famous western artist Sam Russell once did a painting of some Blackfeet warriors setting fire to some grazing land of enemy tribes. Perhaps this was evidence of our earliest burn out operations.”

“The Blackfeet had crews out fighting fire in the great fires of 1910, the year in which most of the west burned up. The Blackfeet have been sending out fire crews since this volatile year. Why we do what we do? I believe we go forth to fight fires the way the old Blackfeet warriors went forth, with courage, honor, dignity and respect.”

“The Chief Mountain hotshots have all of these outstanding characteristics, and they go forth as representatives of our people. And we are very proud of each and every one. Our people have a long history of sending out strong fire crews from the Sundance fire, to Mann Gulch, to the ‘Siege of ‘87’ in California, to the fires that devastated Yellowstone in 1988. The Blackfeet have had firefighters on these and many other fires...too many to mention. I am a member of a firefighting family.” Glenn went on to mention an extensive list of family members who have been in leadership positions within the ranks of firefighting professionals.

“We are in a very hazardous line of work, but we go forth fully aware of the dangers that are inherent to this line of work. So on behalf of Mike MacDonald and all of those who have lost their lives doing what we do, and all of those who have lost their lives supporting us in what we do, I dedicate this speech to them. They are all great warriors going out to face whatever is before us, fighting the fires that devastate our nation each year. And to those who did not make it home, may God hold them in His hands and may He let them know that they are our heroes, they will never be forgotten, they will forever be remembered and honored for the greatest sacrifice of



**Memorial opens with Color Guard**

~ Photo by Dalan Romero, BIA-NIFC

Glenn went on to say, “We do what we do to honor those who went before us, and to teach those who follow in our boot tracks.”

“We are modern day warriors who go forth to battle a new adversary, wildland fire.”

“We do what we do to take care of our families.”

all, the loss of their lives in the line of duty.”

Representative members of Michael’s family were present at the event, Uncles Steve Hall and John Hall from Montana, Uncle Ivan MacDonald from Phoenix and a female cousin whose name we were unable to obtain attended. Michael Smith, Deputy Director of the BIA, and Allen Anspach, Western Regional Director





**Back Row L to R: Allen Anspach, BIA Western Region Director; Michael's Uncle John Hall; Glenn Still Smoking - former Chief Mountain Crew Superintendent and Blackfeet Tribe; Michael's Uncle Ivan MacDonald and unidentified cousin. Front Row L to R: Michael Smith BIA Deputy Director; Michael's Uncle Steve Hall**  
 ~ Photo by Dalan Romero, BIA~NIFC

were there as part of the BIA's extended firefighter family.

Maggie Doherty, a US Forest Service employee and former Lolo hotshot with close ties to the Chief Mountain Hotshots was in Flagstaff shortly after the accident. In reference to the memorial event, she said, "It was important that Michael was represented the way his family and crew wanted. Glenn and his message did an excellent job of letting the community know what Michael was all about; family, friends on the Chief Mountain crew, the Blackfeet, and his amazing ability to turn tears into smiles."

Leon Ben. Jr., Regional Fire Management officer, Western Regional Office, also attended the event. Leon said, "It was a very moving event. Afterward, Dalan Romero (NIFC

Deputy Director Operations), Uncles Steve and John Hall, Glenn Still Smoking, and James Yazzie (Western Regional Office) and I were able to visit the crash site. I think it provided a little bit of closure to the family. We were also able to spend some quality time with Michael's Uncles and Glenn. They all shared some very interesting stories. It made the short time we had together very meaningful and memorable." Leon said he will always remember the time he spent with Michael's family. Leon also said, "To this day I am keeping the crew [Chief Mountain Hotshots] in mind, and the loss they are feeling." Although he had not met



**Michael Smith BIA Deputy Director, Sara Presler, Flagstaff's Mayor, and Allen Anspach, BIA Western Region Director pose for cameraman Dalan Romero BIA~NIFC**





Visit to the crash site. ~ Photo Dalan Romero BIA ~ NIFC

Michael, he said, “We are all still feeling the loss of a brother from our firefighting family.”

We welcome Michael’s son, Sean Taylor MacDonald who was born late this summer.

We also wish to extend our sympathies to Michael’s family at the loss of Michael’s beloved grandmother Hazel.



## Fuels

# Managing Hazardous Fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface

~ Morgan Beveridge, Fuels Manager, BIA Great Plains Regional Office

## Great Plains Region – Turtle Mountain Agency

Much hazardous fuel treatment work within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) has been accomplished at the Turtle Mountain Agency (TMA) the past few years. With a population of over 15,000 Tribal members that live on a relatively small land base of only 72 square miles, the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation is virtually all WUI with a population density of 28.3 housing units per square mile. Considering the challenge and difficulty of fire suppression under these conditions, fuel treatments and their timely completion have quickly become recognized as a great benefit to the protection of life and property on the Reservation.

Currently, TMA is accomplishing slightly over 1,000 acres of WUI fuel treatment annually. Most treatments are completed using mechanical applications due to the forested fuel



Sitting on tractor L to R: Fabian Morin, Forestry Tech; Allan DeLong, Forestry Tech.

Standing L to R: James DeCoteau, Forestry Tech; Steve Collins, FMO; Lee DeLong, Forestry Tech; Ken LaRocque, Forestry Tech; Scott Crissier, Supervisory Forestry Tech  
Not present for photo: Dan Falcon, Forestry Tech and Kathy Rishling, Fire Dispatcher and Administrative Assistant

types and associated upper plains grasslands that have gone many years with no disturbance. Due to the fast rejuvenating fuels, recurring maintenance treatments are the rule, not the exception at Turtle Mountain. To accommodate this, alternate and combined methods of treatment are being employed. By combining

prescribed burning with various methods of mechanical treatment, the Agency Fire Program has successfully reduced the threat of wildfire and met many fire restoration objectives.

One of the most effective pieces of mechanical fuel treatment equipment that the Agency has put to work is a





**Representative fuel conditions adjacent to the community of St. Mary's, North Dakota prior to the initiation of the St. Mary's Community HFR Project.**

T300 Bobcat Track Loader equipped with a Timber Axe Forestry Cutter or Brushcat Rotary Cutter. Daniel Falcon, Forestry Technician, purchased the equipment with finances secured through the BIA's supplemental fuels funding process. Other equipment has also been acquired to



**Reduced fuel conditions adjacent to the community of St. Mary's, North Dakota upon completion of the St. Mary's Community HFR Project.**

penalties, public education, posters, fire awareness signing and the utilization of a Fire Prevention Team have helped to lessen the number of human caused fires and promoted hazardous fuel reduction by private land owners within the Reservation boundary.



**This is the "Before" photo of the Bobcat with Timber Axe attachment creating a fuel break within a heavily fuelled woodland area adjacent to several housing developments on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation.**

provide the Agency with alternative methods of protecting their communities and dealing with the diverse types of hazardous fuel of the upper plains.

Steve Collins, Agency FMO, has led the Agency's effort by combining an aggressive approach to suppression with a proactive fire prevention, education and fuels management program. Community assistance efforts including the development and implementation of a burn permit system, the adoption of strong tribal codes on fire regulations and



**This is the partially completed fuel break "After" photo of the Bobcat working within the woodland area adjacent to several housing developments.**



**L to R: Turtle Mountain Agency employees Fabian Morin, Bobcat/Timber Axe Operator, and Dan Falcon, Fuels Management Assistant in front of the T300 Bobcat with Brushcat rotary cutting head.**



# Welcome! Fire Ecologist, Ed Brunson

~ Ed Brunson, Fire Ecologist, Eastern, Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains Regions



Ed Brunson

Ed Brunson joined BIA on July 21<sup>st</sup> as regional fire ecologist for the Eastern, Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains Regions. He was previously with The Nature Conservancy in Boise Idaho where, since 2002 he was the Fire Education Director for TNC's Global Fire Initiative as well as the Oregon program Fire Manager.

Ed began his career in fire in 1991 with TNC's Arizona State program, starting as Aravaipa and Muleshoe Preserves program manager followed by 6 years as State Fire Manager. During his time with TNC he worked primarily in prescribed fire management, fire effects monitoring and use of fire as a tool for ecological restoration.

His qualifications include RXB2, Firing Boss and Engine Boss and he has a BS in Wildlife Ecology from NW Missouri State University and MS in Resource Management from Oregon State University.

He's eager to get out in the Regions and learn first hand about the fuels and fire management programs, how they approach working in the diverse ecosystems of these three regions and how he can support them through his regional ecologist role. Ed works out of the Eastern Regional Office in Nashville and can be contacted at 615-564-6780.



## Operations

# Chumash, other firefighters battle California blazes

~ Vincent Schilling, © Indian Country Today August 05, 2008, All Rights Reserved

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VIAGINIA BEACH Va. – Firefighter officials in California – a state well known for its wildfires – have declared 2008's fire season an extremely active one so far.

Among those officials is Juan Mendez, crew superintendent for the Sycuan Fire Department Golden Eagles Interagency Hotshot Crew in San

Diego, and Battalion Chief J.P. Savala from the Chumash Tribe in Santa Ynez.

According to a statewide fire overview from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, on June 20 a thunderstorm system moved over the state's wildlands and started more than 2,000 lightning-sparked fires.

Since that time, well over 1 million acres have burned and nearly 13,000 fire personnel have been involved in attending to these wildfires.

Of the 287 fire crews that have been mobilized to fight these California wildfires, the BIA has supplied its share of firefighting forces. Among them stood the Zuni, Fort Apache, Navajo and Geronimo IHCs and the Golden Eagles Hotshots.

"This wildland fire season has begun like no other since the summer of 2000," Mendez said, "To date, we have worked 32 days and we've had six days off."

Six days out of 32 may not seem horrible, but a typical day for a



**Photo by Vincent Schilling - - Golden Eagles Hotshot crew members Cody Ridley, Jesus Quiroz, Teles Pablo III, Leland Kyle Read Eagle, Miguel Garcia and Jerry Stoltz recently spent 32 days battling the California wildfires with only six days off. The Golden Eagles are members of the Sycuan Fire Department; a typical work day is 12 to 16 hours in harm's way.**

wildfire firefighting crew is between 12 and 16 hours. Daily regimens for IHC crews consist of traversing many miles in rough terrain chopping down trees and clearing rough brush to create a barrier for oncoming fires.

In addition, these firefighters carry heavy equipment while covered in fire-retardant clothing that is more than uncomfortably hot. The strain on these crews is extensive.

The main firefighting performed by the Golden Eagles Hotshots crew took place in Los Padres National Forest in conjunction with other adjoining agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service; Cal Fire and the San Diego, Atascadero, Glendale, Oceanside, San Marcos, Vista, Escondido, Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange and Kern county fire departments.

One tribe that was affected in particular was the Chumash, whose reservation lies just outside of Los Padres National Forest. Their original tribal land is extensive: it once covered

present-day Malibu, Santa Barbara and Monterey and Kern counties. Covering more than 7,000 square miles, much of this land is susceptible to wildfires.



**Sycuan Hotshots**

The Chumash are well-known artisans. Sacred caves and cave drawings exist today and are well-tended by the tribe and its fire department. With the onslaught of this year's wildfires, much of this tribal artistry was in danger.

Savala dispersed cultural resource specialists to assist the Golden Eagles Hotshots with the protection of

Chumash reservation lands and sacred sites. The crews did their best, with only minor damage occurring to these sites.

He spoke about unexpected discoveries in the areas surrounding the sacred sites.

"When a lot of the brush burned through, artifacts were exposed near the cave drawings. We have found mortar and pestles, arrowheads, and one guy found an obsidian atlatl dart."

The atlatl is a precursor to the bow and arrow in which a small arrow-shaped spear was thrown with the aid of a staff. The Chumash tribe was excited by the find, which demonstrates open trade long before the existence of the bow and arrow since obsidian does not exist in the area.

Although much of the fire burned near Chumash sacred sites, cave drawings and tribal land remained bruised but not beaten.

As of July 28, 98 percent of the California wildfires had been contained. Local and other firefighters remained to fight the uncontained 2 percent. The Golden Eagles Hotshots returned home exhausted and well-worn. Mendez is proud of his men.

"This is hazardous work and the men have done an extraordinary job staying





Sycuan Hotshots

## Forester's Log: Solstice Storm

~ ©Mary Stuever, July 2008

On the shortest, midsummer night, where enormous redwood trees tickle low-lying clouds, dry lightning filled the northern California skies. Between the Pacific Coast and the Nevada border roughly six thousand strikes ignited over two thousand fires. Months before the normal fire season, flames erupted in dry, windy conditions primed for rapid fire growth.



Photo by Peter Armstrong

As fire fighters filled the airwaves requesting support, they learned that their usual sources of mutual aid were battling their own fires. Akin to the triage process of mass casualty events such as train wrecks, fire managers prioritized resources to protect lives and property. Throughout the region, rural home owners and land managers spent long hours and days responding to fire threats before reinforcements

arrived. The Mendocino Redwood Company even hired contract fire engines, crews and bulldozers to make sure their otherwise 'low-priority' timber land received immediate attention.

Within days, firefighters were streaming in from across the country. Over the next month more than 20,000 emergency responders from California and forty other states, as well as several countries, would populate the fire lines and support camps. My assignment was in Mendocino County working with the state firefighting agency, CAL FIRE on 129 fires within their State Responsibility Area.

Now, nearly a month since the storm, the Mendocino Unit Lightning Complex has contained all the fires, which totaled just under 55,000 acres. Throughout northern California, over 900,000 acres have burned. Dozens of fires still challenge firefighters.

safe. They were exhausted after this last tour and are enjoying some well-deserved days off."

These tours are dangerous, and Mendez knows how the families of his crew await their safe return. "All our friends and family feel relief when we make it home safe."

Store fronts, marquees, and road right-a-ways are plastered with signs and messages thanking firefighters; frequent honks and handshakes demonstrate sincere appreciation of our response. From my side of the fence, we are just doing our job; albeit in triple digit temperatures breathing smoky air day after day. Though this may be how we earn our paycheck, the encouragement is welcome.

It is, however, the communities that deserve recognition. People have stepped up in a million ways with a million sacrifices to help their neighbors, their friends, total strangers, and themselves.

Volunteer firefighters are obvious heroes. An assistant chief in Little River shared one tale. Spearheading suppression efforts on a fire in his district, he kept calling for help. Each time apparatus headed out his way, they would find another fire, or a different section of the fire he was working on. It was well into the

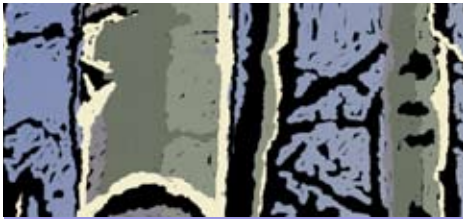




second day before he had a chance to turn command of the home-threatening blaze to the state department. Catching limited sleep he remained with the incident insuring the safety of his crews and equipment.

Other volunteers in the county stayed on fires for weeks. Another volunteer postponed his own wife's memorial service while he insured his elderly neighbors were safe from immediate fire threats.

Residents with dozers and excavators quickly scratched fire lines to protect the structures in their neighborhoods. On each ridgetop and in each valley,



## Prevention

# Pine Ridge Wildfire Prevention

~ Paul Pooler, Fire Ecologist Midwest and Great Plains Regions

In 2007, the Pine Ridge Fire Program recorded over 650 fires with the largest fire exceeding 22,000 acres. To date the number of fires in 2008 has been significantly reduced primarily due to the efforts of Fire Management Officer Daire Douville and Prevention and Education Team Member Jim Rodriguez. With the assistance of Jim Hamley, Prevention and Education Team Leader for the Great Plains Region, the Pine Ridge Fire Program has focused on raising awareness of wildfire issues with residents and tribal officials. The success of the prevention program is due to meeting objectives including public service announcements, We-Tip, youth awareness and public events such as Pow Wow's, rodeos and parades stated Hamley.

neighbors developed communication strategies to coordinate possible evacuation and fire defense.

One of the biggest challenges was getting accurate information to residents and visitors. With smoke everywhere, knowledge of where fires were actually burning was essential for everyone. The media rose to the call. Local papers carried extensive reports, but area radio stations really shined. Station managers would take phone calls in the middle of the night, and groggily head to their stations to make public service announcements. Radio announcers gave frequent updates and kept in constant communication

with fire information officers to insure listeners knew what was happening. Even incident personnel found the radio station updates informative.

Businesses donated goods and services; cooks fed volunteers; service station patrons bought gas for fire trucks; therapists treated sore necks and backs; stylists cut hair; neighbors kept watch over the elderly; the list goes on and on. Everywhere, someone was reaching out to someone else.

In an event steeped in unprecedented superlatives, "Thank You" has become the common salutation.



From L to R: Jim Hamley, Prevention Team Leader, Jim Rodriguez, Prevention Team Member and Marc Johnston, SCA Intern at Pine Ridge Agency.



Prevention Team members at Kyle, South Dakota rodeo. Pow Wow's and rodeos provide excellent opportunities for youth outreach.



# Midwest Region Case Study Storm

~ Gary Hilton Fire Prevention Forester, Midwest and Eastern Regions



Juvenile fire setting in and around homes can be dangerous and destructive.

*Partnerships between BIA Fire, Tribal Police, Tribal Court, and local citizens results in successful juvenile fire setter interventions*

Statistics from the US Fire Administration show that nearly 2/3's of children who play with fire do so outdoors. Juvenile fire setting has always been a component of unwanted fire occurrence. It continues to be a challenge for the fire prevention staff. Recently we have had success with attempts at juvenile intervention programs when we joined with local partners. Last fire season at Fort Totten, ND was a good example.

In April 2007 multiple fires were reported close to tribal housing at the Ft Totten/Spirit Lake Reservation near Devils Lake, North Dakota. An origin and cause fire investigation team was dispatched to the scene. One of those investigators, Stephen Swimmer, was on a 14- day training assignment dispatched from his home unit on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation, North Carolina. Steve and Ft. Totten fire prevention specialist Peter "Jim" Hamley described a successful

cooperative use of a juvenile intervention strategy. They made their presentation at the California Interagency Fire Prevention Mitigation & Education Conference held at the Jackson Rancheria, CA in March of 2008.

The team of investigators determined where the multiple fire sets occurred, determined the cause, and identified a witness who saw a group of teen girls near the origin. The witness identified one of the girls. The Tribal Police Department was notified and



Fire Prevention Officer Jim Hamley from the Great Plains Regional office describes successful juvenile firesetter intervention during the fire prevention conference hosted by Jackson Rancheria, CA

they obtained parental consent to interview the teen girl. She confessed to starting the fires and identified two others involved. A fourth girl would be identified later. The investigation team produced a "close out report" to the Tribal Justice Department including recommendations for follow up education and intervention with the girls, all teenagers.

A couple of months later, Jim Hamley received a call from the Ft. Totten Tribal Court Intake Officer. Three of the four girls had pled guilty to fire setting and were scheduled to appear in court for sentencing. The court requested recommendations from Jim on how to resolve the fire setting issues. At the time of the court appearances there were no laws regarding arson or reckless deliberate use of fire, but the Tribe did have a misdemeanor malicious mischief code with which the girls could be charged.

Jim suggested to the court that putting the girls in juvenile detention would not benefit anyone. He suggested that a "juvenile fire setting interview" with the girls might help educate them as to the seriousness of their actions. The judge agreed. The sentence imposed was a \$50 fine, one day of community service, and fire education interviews conducted by Jim. The parents signed a consent form and the interviews were scheduled individually at the Court House.

Jim conducted the interviews based on the juvenile intervention training he had received from FEMA conducted at Ft Snelling, MN a few months prior. He noticed a pattern of boredom and peer pressure seemed to be the motivation for the fires. The girls were each defiant at the onset of the interview. Once he explained the potential fire behavior in the flashy fuel near the homes where the fires were set, and the potential harm to family members the mood changed. Jim feels that the three girls are now truly sorry for their involvement in setting the fires, and the tears they shed at the completion of the interview were genuine. He completed the





**Steve Swimmer from Eastern Cherokee describes his role as origin and cause investigator, the first step in leading to juvenile fire setter intervention.**

assessment forms and all rated as low risk as a repeat offender. At that time, Jim recommended to the court that there be no further action.

The fourth teen girl who pled “not guilty” was eventually found guilty by Tribal Court and sentenced to a six week program called “Bringing Back the Horses”. The juvenile attends the program a couple of hours per week and is required to learn responsibility and all about horse care. The horses are donated by a local rancher. On the last week they are allowed to ride the horse. During the six week period speakers from various disciplines talk to the juveniles about drugs, dating, fire prevention, home life, and others. The goal of the program is to teach the juvenile respect, pride, responsibility, and trust. Since the horse is considered sacred by many tribes, Jim felt this was especially appropriate. In Jim’s words: “I consider this a success story due to the fact that all of the individuals and departments did what was required of them and made it work.”

I applaud the efforts of Jim Hamley to venture into the unknown. He took what he learned in Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention class (FEMA Training) and attempted to make a difference in the lives of four teens and their community. He did make a difference and there are at least four girls that received a valuable lesson.

It is obvious that the partnerships must all be in place for this to work. Local citizens must want to put an end to illegal fire setting. Investigators, law enforcement, the courts, and parents all need to work together to find solutions. The role of the wildland fire prevention specialist in educating everyone involved is essential. The juvenile intervention program provides us with additional tools to address a difficult problem. Contact your fire prevention specialist for more information.

## Mike Beaulieu Receives Earle R. Wilcox Award!

~ Gary Hilton, Midwest Region WUI/Prevention Specialist



prevention officer on the Red Lake Reservation in Northern Minnesota. The award presentation was made at the Thirty Second Annual National Indian Timber Symposium hosted by the White Mountain Apache Tribe at Hon-Dah, Arizona. Mike was able to take a conceptual fire prevention plan, implement it on site, and get measurable results that translated in significant reduction in human caused wildfires. The creativity and dedication of Mike and his co-worker Michelle Reynolds is apparent. Congratulations to Mike on this prestigious honor!

**Fire Prevention Officer Jim Hamley from the Great Plains Regional office describes successful juvenile firesetter intervention during the fire prevention conference hosted by Jackson Rancheria, CA**

In June 2008, Mike Beaulieu received the Earle R. Wilcox Memorial Individual Achievement Award for the Lake States area. Wilcox Memorial Awards honor individuals who have made significant contributions in the field of Indian forestry. These awards are given in honor of Mr. Earle R. Wilcox, who will always be remembered for his significant achievements on behalf of Indian people and their forests. Mike serves as the lead fire





# Pacific Region Case Study

~ Jay Hinshaw, Wildland Fire Investigator  
 ~ Soledad Holguin, Fire Prevention Specialist  
 ~ Jim Nanamkin, Lead Wildland fire Investigator  
 BIA Pacific Region



**Rick Jones, Wildland Fire Investigator (T) BIA Horton Agency, Kansas**  
*Juvenile Firesetter –Investigation, Intervention and Education*  
*Tule River Indian Reservation Tulare County, California*

Nanamkin offered a Fire Investigation course (FI-110) to the Tule River Fire Department and trained local firefighters to protect the scene. All responding wildland investigators interviewed locals, worked with local law enforcement and performed each fire investigation using standard wildland fire investigation methodology.

From the months of May through August, 34 separate fires were reported, peaking during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The Arson Task Force was on detail at the Reservation for 8 weeks. During the August rotation, Wildland Fire Investigators Jay Hinshaw and Rick Jones began investigating a fire that eventually allowed them to solve several nearby unsolved arson cases. Witness information indicated that an earlier fire may have been started by juveniles; however, the information was helpful but unreliable. Bare footprint evidence obtained from three fire scenes indicated that the three fires were probably linked and probably were set by the same person. Backtracking footprints at the most recent fire to the driveway of a residence led Hinshaw to believe that someone associated with that home may have set the fires. Adults and juveniles at two neighboring homes were interviewed after consent forms had been signed. Statements made by two juveniles known to hang-out together had discrepancies and placed them near the fire scenes

In 2007, BIA's Pacific Region developed an Arson Task Force at the Tule River Reservation located in Central California. The Tule River Reservation has oak woodland and annual grass vegetation with a riparian corridor running through the center of the Reservation.

The Region's lead investigator, Jim Nanamkin, contacted the Tribal Council and, together with the responding investigators, utilized the WeTip Arson Reporting Hotline and worked with the Tule Fire Department to set in motion a fire prevention campaign throughout the Tribal community.



**Jay Hinshaw, Wildland Fire Investigator, BIA Pacific Region**



**L to R: Jim Nanamkin, Pacific, Region, Lead Investigator; Shane Santos, Fire Chief Tule River Indian Reservation; Aaron Franco, Fire Captain Tule River Indian Reservation**





**L to R: Jim Nanamkin, BIA-Pacific Region; Shane Santos, Fire Chief Tule River Indian Reservation; Aaron Franco, Captain Tule River Indian Reservation; Jim Hamley, Great Plains Region; Steve Swimmer, Eastern Cherokee**

at the times the fires started, causing those juveniles to then become suspects in the arson cases. Hinshaw contacted local law enforcement and scheduled interrogations of the youths. However, one of the juveniles confessed to a parent prior to the interrogation.

Jim Nanamkin became involved in these cases when he rotated back into the Arson Task Force as Hinshaw and Jones rotated out. Nanamkin compiled a Juvenile Firesetter Questionnaire that was used during follow-up visits with the juveniles involved. A field tour of the three arson locations and a number of other unsolved fires was conducted. In total, the juveniles admitted to setting five recorded fires and two unrecorded fires or groups of fires at the Reservation in 2007.

The Tribal Council was consulted and a recommendation was made that the youths take part in a Juvenile Firesetters Fire Prevention Education Plan (JFFPEP) in coordination with the Tule River Fire Department rather than be prosecuted and punished through

the Tulare County Court System. Nanamkin developed a JFFPEP and the plan was implemented by Captain Franco and Fire Chief Santos of the Tule River Fire Department.

The Tule River Tribe did not have a juvenile firesetter program in place. However with the support of the Tule River Tribal Council, a temporary program was implemented. The Tribal Council sent letters requesting parents, guardians and children to be present at the Tribal Chambers for a scheduled meeting with wildland fire investigators, Tule Fire Department and Tribal Council.

Tribal Chairman, Neil Peyron addressed the children, parents and guardians about the dangers of wildland fires within the community. The Council passed a resolution that the children would have to complete a program that would be of service to the community. In lieu of restitution, the children would be required to complete 200 hours of community service at the fire department. Chief Santos and Captain Franco began working with

the children in the afternoons and one day on the weekends. The children were taught the difference between “good or useful fires” and “bad fire”. The children had various tasks to perform. The activities required adult supervision and dedication by fire department personnel. The restitution projects chosen for the children were the removal of fuels and painting of fire hydrants, fuel reduction projects around elder’s homes, cleaning the fire department bay area, washing fire apparatus and painting over graffiti.

The tasks done by the children were to teach them the importance of wildland fire prevention and understand the dangers and the duties of firefighters. The children began to realize that all fires endanger their community and that there is a lot of hard work to be done to keep their community fire safe. The Tule River Indian Reservation with the BIA will begin the process of developing an official Juvenile Firesetter Education Program.





## Interagency Crew Provides Training Opportunities for Horton Agency

~ Aaron Roper, Fuels Specialist, Horton Agency



**The Mid-Plains Interagency Handcrew conducts a firing operation on the Basin Complex in California**

In July of 2003, during the brunt of the fire season, fire managers from across Kansas and Nebraska decided to form a type 2 IA crew from state, federal, and tribal resources in the area. Bill Waln, FMO at Quivira National Wildlife explains “At the time, we were looking for an opportunity to get our local firefighters handcrew experience. None of state, federal, or tribal folks in the area had enough people for a crew on their own, but an interagency crew was possible and made sense.”

The 2003 crew was a success, and in the fall of 2003, representatives from the Horton Agency, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Kansas Forest Service, and National Park Service met in Manhattan, KS to discuss formalization of the crew. Out of that

meeting, the Mid-Plains Interagency Handcrew was formed. Over the years, with the assistance of Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center, the crew has added other partners along the southern front range of Colorado, and in 2005, the Nebraska National Forest became another key crew partner. Additional collaborators include the Colorado State Forest Service and multiple municipal departments in the greater Denver, Colorado, area.

The crew has been established to develop both technical and leadership skills of the firefighters involved. It is built to meet or exceed initial attack capabilities. The crew is managed by the interagency cadre of crewbosses with limited oversight by Bill Waln, FWS FMO, in Kansas. Performance evaluations and position taskbook

evaluations are stressed on every incident.

The crew kicks off each season with a week long crew training held in May at Halsey, NE. Training consists of morning PT in full PPE, classes, field exercises, team building games, and sand table exercises. After training, the crew is typically available from June 1 through September 1. Since that first mobilization in August of 2003, the crew has been mobilized 12 times to multiple incidents in 9 different states.

The Horton Agency typically provides 2-5 firefighters and use of a vehicle to the crew during each assignment. Crewmembers have been filled from Agency staff, AD's, and Tribal cooperators. The crew has provided the training opportunities that would have been otherwise unavailable. Along with direct benefits such as training and line experience, the networking that comes with an interagency crew has broken down agency barriers and resulted in resource sharing between the agencies during prescribed fire season.



**Sand table exercises at annual crew training in Halsey Nebraska**





# Blacksnake's Corner

~ Walt Lara - Yurok Forestry

The following article was released August 26, 2008 by Tom Lavagnino, ORCA (Oregon and California) Interagency Management Team Public Information Officer.

This fire season in the northwestern part of California was a deadly one for eleven firefighters. On June 21, a thunderstorm swept across Northwestern California starting numerous wild land fires. Many hundreds of fires were started that night and most of those were quickly suppressed before they became large fires. Unfortunately some of those fires exceeded the capacity of local fire-fighting agencies and became major complexes. Fire-fighting resources were mobilized and sent from across the county to battle these fires. The large fires were in very remote and inaccessible locations, some in Wilderness areas. The suppression activities lasted many weeks and were finally contained in late August after significant and heroic efforts were made to contain these blazes.

On July 25, 2008, Andre Palmer was struck and killed by falling debris on the Iron Complex (Shasta- Trinity National Forest). He was 18 years old and worked for the Olympic National Park, and lived in Port Angeles, WA.

On July 27, 2008, Chief Daniel Packer was overrun by fire and killed on the Panther Fire (Klamath National Forest). He was 49 years old and was from the East Pierce Fire and Rescue Service and lived in Lake Tapps, WA.

On August 5, 2008, a helicopter accident claimed the lives of nine of the thirteen firefighters on board that day on the Iron Complex on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. Killed

in the line of duty were: Shawn Blazer (30) from Medford, OR, Scott Albert Charlson (25) from Phoenix, OR, Matt Hammer (23) from Grants Pass, OR, Jim Ramage (63) from Redding, CA, Steven Caleb Renno (21) from Cave Junction, OR, Byran James Rich (29) from Medford, OR, Roark Schwanenberg (54) from Lostine, OR and David Elliha Steel (10) from Ashland, OR.

The four survivors of the helicopter accident were: Jonathon Frohreich, Richard Schroeder, Michael Brown and William Coultas. Mr. Coultas was one of the helicopter pilots from Carson Davis, CA. All of the younger victims of the helicopter crash (those under 54 years) were contract firefighters from the Grayback Forestry Inc. In White City, OR. End of Article

My sincerest condolences go out to all the families for your loss. This great loss is felt in the hearts of firefighters, foresters and readers across the Nation.

Traditionally Indian people had burns that kept a balance in our forest. Every two years the people had a burn that replenished the grounds for gathering materials, cleared the underbrush, created browse for animals and killed disease in dormant rot. The forest lands were so beautiful that the minors threw away their gold pans and went logging. Since these burns are not done anymore forest lands, as well as, cultural sites, homes and environmentally protected areas are in



Walt "Blacksnake" Lara

constant jeopardy of massive forest fires. Another concern are the current fire fighting methods of putting out fires in Yurok territories. Recently, the Yurok and Karuk Tribes worked collaboratively with the Six Rivers National Forest on an Memorandum of Understanding that allows the Tribes to have input on the protection of traditional territories within the Six River National Forest. It is my job and the goals of the Tribe, to protect our territories without endangering fire fighters. This fire season, the fires in the Helka District (as noted in the federal register) were in the most important cultural area of the Yurok Tribe, the prayer grounds for the ceremonial White Deer Skin Dance, Jump Dance and Indian Doctor training. This put the Yurok tribe in serious conflict with Forest Service Personnel's methods of fire extinguishing. After several meetings we were able to address our goals. I believe Forest Service Personnel began to understand more about these traditional areas and the culture of the people. It was necessary to reeducate a new complex of fire fighters (every 12 days) due to constant turnover. The fire has been eighty plus days thus far.



### 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. Please do not place them into Word documents and send them without the jpg 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

The staff of BIA-NIFC and of Smoke Signals wish to extend their sympathy to the family and friends of the firefighters we've lost this season.

### 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