



Pacific Southwest Region Fire Management

Fact Sheet

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Region 8 Fire Program (Region) provides fire management oversight for many unique and challenging environments in California, Nevada and the Oregon Klamath Basin. In California alone there are nine different bioregions and 18 ecotypes which have the most complex and diverse vegetation communities and fire regimes in the continental US. Many habitats in the Region have rare and protected resources including 346 federally listed species; 309 in California. Habitats include mixed conifer, juniper and riparian forest, chaparral and coastal sage scrub, estuaries and wetlands, and grasslands and deserts.

The Region manages 470,773 acres in California and 2.3 million acres in Nevada including 46 national wildlife refuges (NWRs), and three national fish hatcheries. Fire management for these diverse resources can be challenging especially when you consider climate change and increasing air quality regulations; 1/3 of California is a non-attainment area for air quality standards and there are 35 different air pollution control districts.



Goats and sheep were used successfully at the Stone Lakes NWR, south of Sacramento, CA to help create a fuel break and reduce the air quality impacts from prescribed fire.

Fire Program

The primary objectives of the fire program are to protect and manage all burnable acres on Service lands while providing for firefighter and public safety first. Collaboration and partnerships are crucial to successful fire management. Management activities include wildland fire suppression, burned area emergency response and rehabilitation, fuels/vegetation management, community and rural fire department grants, fire prevention and education.



Staffing & Equipment:

- 47 permanent employees; five regional positions and five zone fire management officers (FMOs).
- Fire staff and or stations located at the Regional Office, Klamath NWR, Sacramento NWR, San Luis NWR, San Diego NWR, Still Water NWR and Desert NWR.
- 11 fire engines and a wide range of support equipment (quads, marsh masters, airboats, etc)

Klamath FMZ accomplishes half of the region's prescribed fire target. In the photo, a helicopter is used to drop ignition balls across 7,000 acres of the Klamath Marsh NWR. This helps the refuge manage important migratory bird habitat in the Pacific Flyway.

On average, the Region treats over 35,000 acres per year; half of treatments in the wildland-urban interface, half of the acre target accomplished by the Klamath Fire Management Zone (FMZ).

Between 2003 and 2007, the Region treated an average of 28,164 acres a year of hazardous fuels and an additional 7,097 acres a year in the wildland-urban interface. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is where human infrastructure interfaces with the wildlands. In 2004, the portion of land under federal ownership was estimated at 45 percent in California, 85 percent in Nevada and 53 percent in Oregon. There are 38 million people in California, 53 congressional districts, 106 federally recognized tribes and 1,264 communities at risk to wildfire (CARs); over 35 percent of the landscape is rated as mixed wildland urban interface. The population of California is highly diverse and many of the refuges must address language and cultural barriers in their fire outreach and planning. In Nevada, the population is 2.5 million, there are 3 congressional districts, 19 federally recognized tribes and 250 CARs. Although there are fewer WUI areas in Nevada, only two fire management staff covers the entire state; most fire management activities are coordinated through interagency partnerships.

Collaborative Planning: Many county-wide community wildfire protection plans are in place in California, Nevada, and Oregon. The Region has draft or final risk assessments and mitigation strategies for associated WUI properties and in many cases has linked or been incorporated into a CWPP. The region has a number of effective agreements and partnerships including the California Wildfire Coordinating Group, California Fire Alliance, Great Basin Coordinating Group, and Southern Oregon Fuels Committee.



An interagency fire crew is used in Nevada FMZ to help with wildfire suppression and fuel reduction projects like this one at the Moapa NWR. Nevada FMZ also supports an interagency helitack program and several interagency fire stations.



The 2007 Harris Fire burned over 50% of the San Diego NWR and hundreds of homes in the area. The home in the photo was saved due to San Diego NWR fire engines and a Service funded Chipper Program which helps homeowners create defensible space.



The San Luis FMZ also supports collaborative WUI projects. In this photo, at the Antioch Dunes NWR, California Conservation Crews are given a safety lesson on how to use chipper by Zone FMO Peter Kelly.

Fire History

The recent wildfires of California and Nevada have received national and worldwide attention for their suppression costs and damages. Although there has been a long history of natural and managed fire in the Region, there is still a good deal controversy over fire management. Changes in land management practices and an increase in population have altered the natural landscape and fire regimes.

Historic Native American burning was estimated at 5.6 to 13 million acres a year in California. Lightning fires occurred throughout much of the Sierra Nevada's and Great Basin (62,889 lightning fires between 1985 and 2000).

Most Destructive Wildfires in the Region:

- 1991 Tunnel Fire burned 1,600 acres, destroyed 2,843 structures and killed 25 people
- 2003 Cedar Fire burned 280,278 acres, destroyed 2,232 homes and killed 15 people
- 2007 Harris Fire burned 90,440 acres, destroyed 200 homes and damaged sensitive habitat on over 50 percent of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge.

On Service lands there's been an average of 60 wildfires burning approximately 15,400 acres each year (2003-2007). The public and all interagency fire partners have been greatly impacted by wildfires. In California there were over 8,000 wildfires in 2008 burning around 1.2 million acres. In Nevada, there were 432 wildfires burning over 70,000 acres. In 2007, over 9,000 wildfires occurred in California burning over 1 million acres, and 891 wildfires occurred in Nevada burning over 890,000 acres.



San Diego Fire Storm

2008 Regional Fire Program Summary
Over 65 wildfires on or threatening refuge properties in the Region
\$241,680 spent on hazardous fuel projects, treating over 28,900 acres. \$391,644 spent on base WUI projects, treating over 8,600 acres
\$2,278,000 special funding for WUI projects in California (emphasis in southern CA). Special projects include funding and assistance for four community wildfire protection plans and four county-wide workshops on best management practices for private land fuel reduction projects
\$651,250 for community assistance grants for planning, outreach and treatment of 460 acres of hazardous fuels.
\$56,000 spent on rural fire assistance grants with emphasis on training
\$1,169,467 spent on burned area emergency stabilization efforts on 5,500 acres of Service lands and \$399,143 spent on burned area rehabilitation of Service lands

***** In 2008 100 firefighter fatalities were reported from incidents across the country. No Region 8 employees died. Safety will continue to be our #1 priority in fire management.**