



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fire Management Annual Report

*Fiscal Year 2014*



*Devil's Elbow Complex- Engine from Sherburne NWR Engine on an interagency wildfire in Washington State, August 2014. Credit: Alex Galt, FWS*

*Report provided by the*  
Branch of Fire Management  
National Wildlife Refuge System  
Headquarters Office, located at the  
National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC)  
Boise, Idaho

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## STATE OF THE PROGRAM

### *A note from the Chief, Branch of Fire Management*

The last few years have been challenging for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Fire Program, yet our employees continue to find ways to get things done, and to do them right. This report chronicles numerous individual and regional accomplishments during the past fiscal year, but several program accomplishments stand out to me:



John Segar

- *There were no serious Service fire-related accidents.* This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, but it is worth pointing out that safety is still our highest priority and that we have been able to avoid serious accidents despite all of the challenges. It is rewarding to recognize individual employees, but all of our firefighters deserve recognition for their dedication to safety.
- *We minimized wildfire threats to our natural resources and our neighbors.* Wildfires such as the Funny River Fire on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge highlighted how important our fuels treatments and wildfire response can be to our neighboring communities, as well as to the natural resources we protect and manage. The Funny River wildfire also demonstrated how important our interagency partnerships have become in redeeming our fire management responsibilities.
- *We continued to provide strong support to use prescribed fire to meet landscape and wildlife management objectives.* All of us would like to have increased funding so that we can do more, but our more than 400 highly trained and experienced fire management specialists and \$75-million inventory of specialized fire equipment continue to provide the backbone for all aspects of fire management, including habitat burning. While it has been rewarding to see the increased use of collateral duty firefighters in many areas, to help offset the loss of full-time fire positions, the effectiveness of our core fire specialists and equipment are the key to our success.

Challenges like funding and climate change will continue for the fire program, but I have no doubt that our employees and partners will continue to rise to the occasion. I hope that this report will help illustrate the good work we have done in FY2014, and demonstrate why I am so proud of our firefighters.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Segar', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John Segar

## OVERVIEW

This report summarizes Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14) accomplishments in the Fire Management Program for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) across its eight Regions and Headquarters office in the areas of personnel, wildland fire management, fuels management, training, communications/outreach, planning, and all-hazard response.

In a challenging year for firefighters all over the country, working collaboratively across programs and agencies was key to fire management success. Alaska's interagency fire management community worked with partners to contain the Funny River Fire almost entirely within Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), thereby protecting local communities with a combined population of more than 60,000 year-round residents.

The Service Fire Management Program announced its first annual *Fire Safety Award*, given by the Chief, Branch of Fire Management to maintenance supervisor Rocky Chesser, who has supported safe fire management operations as a collateral duty employee for many years at Okefenokee NWR.

**First National Fire Safety Award** (left to right) Southeast Regional Director Cindy Dohner, with maintenance supervisor Rocky Chesser from Okefenokee NWR, and Chief, Branch of Fire Management John Segar. Chesser was recognized for his consistent leadership, professionalism, longstanding safety record, and significant contributions to the Okefenokee NWR fire management program, including during the year-long Honey Prairie Fire in 2011-2012. Credit: Tom MacKenzie, USFWS



In addition, Service Director Dan Ashe granted a Department of the Interior (DOI) *Citation for Exemplary Action* to Larry (Kaili) McCray, Wildland Fire Medical Standards Program Manager with the Branch of Fire Management in Boise, Idaho. McCray was awarded this honor for heroic acts, in part using an automated external defibrillator (AED) to save a life.



**Firefighter Recognized for Heroic Acts**. DOI Medical Standards Program Director Larry (Kaili) McCray saved the life of a fire crew member during an interagency wildfire assignment. Kaili poses with a BLM engine and Branch Chief John Segar, who awarding him the DOI Citation for Exemplary Action, on behalf of Service Director Dan Ashe. Credits: (left): Michelle Moore, BLM (right): Kenneth Frederick, BLM

## *HEADQUARTERS – Branch of Fire Management*



**Branch of Fire Management Staff** (left to right): John Segar, (back row): Russ Babiak, Fred Wetzel, Chris Wilcox, Curt Tjomsland, Ted Patterson (IT contractor), Kevin Conn, Cameron Tongier, (front row): Billie Farrell, Karen Miranda Gleason, Becky Brooks, Andrea Olsen, Kim Van Hemelryck, Bob Eaton, Lou Ballard, Cal Gale. Not pictured: Kaili McCray, Ted Mason, and Kathy Perez. Photo Credit; Kenneth Frederick, BLM.

### **Branch Overview**

The Branch administered the FY14 FWS Fire Management Budget (\$27.6 million in Preparedness and \$20.5 million in Hazardous Fuels) involving a Continuing Resolution, provisions for automatic spending cuts per the Budget Control Act of 2011, and a 17-day furlough from October 1-17, 2013. The Branch represented FWS to the DOI Office of Wildland Fire (OWF), Interior Fire Executive Council (IFEC), National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG), National Multiple-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC), and other interagency governance groups.

Branch staff worked continually throughout the fiscal year with the National Fire Leadership Team (NFLT), National Fire Operations and Safety Team, and the National FWS Fuels Team. The Branch continued to supervise the DOI Medical Standards Coordinator position and fund the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Smoke Management Specialist in the Division of Air Quality. Branch staff hosted Refuges HQ leadership during a one-day off-site annual Branch retreat, conducting a panel Q&A session on the future of the FWS fire program.

*Headquarters – Branch of Fire Management, continued...*



**A FWS view of Fire HQ.** from FWS offices at the National Interagency Fire Center. Credit: Karen Miranda Gleason, FWS.

**Personnel:** Branch staff continued to support workforce planning efforts and preparedness funds allocation through ongoing workload analysis and categorization of refuges. The Fuels Specialist completed a four-month detail to OWF. The Fire Planning Specialist became a permanently shared position in February with NPS. The Budget and Planning Program Lead completed the Advance Leadership Development Program (ALDP) and relocated to the Refuges HQ office in Fairfax, Virginia. The Branch had detailer support from Regional and local specialists assisting in national efforts.

Eight Branch staff supported national wildfire incidents in various roles primarily in the Great Basin and Northwest geographic areas. Four staff completed position task books for incident qualifications, including Incident Commander Type 2 (Chris Wilcox), Incident Business Advisor (Billie Farrell), and Situation Unit Leader (Lou Ballard and Cameron Tongier).

**Wildland Fire Management:** In FY14, several Service units across the nation experienced elevated fire danger conditions that resulted severity resources responding to a total of 21 fires on or adjacent to service lands. Regionally managed short-term severity expenditures totaled \$222,153 out of \$2,400,000 available for FY14, and a total of \$324,996 in long-term severity funds were expended for the Service nationally, out of \$1,322,515 in requests approved for:

- Region 8 California Refuges (late January -early February, and August-September);
- Region 1 Inland North West NWRC, Sheldon/Hart Mtn. NWRC, Mid-Columbia NWCR, and Malheur NWR (late July and August);
- Region 4 Caribbean Refuges (August).

The Service now currently maintains 36 fire vehicles within the Working Capital Fund Program, with a current replacement value of \$6.7 million for the equipment managed within the program. One Service project was funded through the DOI Facilities Construction and Maintenance Program at \$380,000 -- replacement of an Equipment Storage Facility at Malheur NWR.

The Branch approved three Emergency Stabilization projects (Funny River Fire – Kenai NWR, AK; Tract 17 and School Fires on Sacramento and Bitter Creeks NWRs, CA), totaling \$115,851, and three Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) projects, all on California refuges, totaling \$83,711.

A contract was awarded to Comprehensive Health Services (CHS) to administer the medical exam process for all DOI arduous fitness rated wildland firefighters. The first phase of implementation will begin January 1, 2015.

*Headquarters – Branch of Fire Management, continued...*

**Fuels Management:** The Service fuels management program provided significant time and expertise to DOI OWF efforts such as: moving Hazardous Fuels Program Allocation System into a holistic risk-based allocation system; addressing Office of Inspector General (OIG) concerns for Community Assistance; and participation for ongoing project(s) such as National Fuels Prioritizations and Reporting System (NFPORS). The NFLT’s task team for determining future fuels funding allocation to the Regions made great progress and results are expected to be used in the FY 2016 allocation cycle.

Regional staff supported national workload: Brett Fay, R1, represented the Service on the NWCG Fire Use Sub-Committee and on the NWCG Fuels Management Task Team responsible for reviewing and updating the PMS-424, Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide. Neal Beetch, R6, and Jon Wallace, R4, supported the Branch while the Fuels Management Specialist was on a 4-month detail with OWF. Wallace also served as Chair of the NWCG Fire Danger Sub-Committee, successfully demonstrating and leading the NWCG Executive Board to make changes to the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) in order to improve the data that fire managers need in wildland fire decision-making.

**Training:** The Branch organized and sponsored two staff rides for Service personnel at the Battlement Creek and South Canyon fire fatality sites. Thirteen FWS personnel were in attendance with five regions represented. The Branch also sponsored five employee development activities through the fire program’s employee development grant program this year, including sending students to the National Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC) in Tallahassee, FL; attendance at University of Idaho online courses, and an employee detail to PFTC Operations in support of a R6 prescribed fire training exchange.



**2014 FWS Staff Ride to Colorado fire fatality sites** (from left to right): Jim Krizman (R3, Neal Smith NWR), Aaron Roper (R2, Wichita Mountains NWR), Bart Rye (R4, St. Marks NWR), Andy Lopez (R2, Bosque del Apache NWR), John Krueger (R2, Chenier Plain NWR), Andy Schell (R6 Rainwater Basin WMD), Reggie Forcine (R4, Okefenokee NWR), Justin Pyle (R1, Klamath Basin NWRC), Ted Mason (HQ), Geoff Wilson (R1, Sheldon/Hart NWRC), Russ Babiak (HQ), Ryan Sharpe (R4, Merritt Island NWR), Collin McCabe (R1, Mid-Columbia NWRC). Credit: Mike Blair, Grand Valley VFD.

*Headquarters – Branch of Fire Management, continued...*

**Communications/Outreach:** The Branch facilitated national coverage of Service fire program activities, including wildfire, fuels, and partnerships in various publications and online social media. All refuges with burnable lands are now entered into the Inciweb system, allowing posting of incident information. Branch staff hosted interagency colleagues during Spring and Fall barbecues at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) and supported Wildland Firefighter Foundation (WFF) annual Family Weekend.



**Visiting an incident command post.** FWS Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ES&R) Coordinator Lou Ballard briefs visitors at mock fire camp, Wildland Firefighter Foundation(WFF) Family Weekend 2014. Credit: Karen Miranda Gleason, USFWS.



The Communication Coordinator completed a case study of prescribed fire communications at Merritt Island NWR, earned a professional Accreditation in Public Relations, and served as interagency PIO on multiple wildfire assignments in Idaho and Oregon.

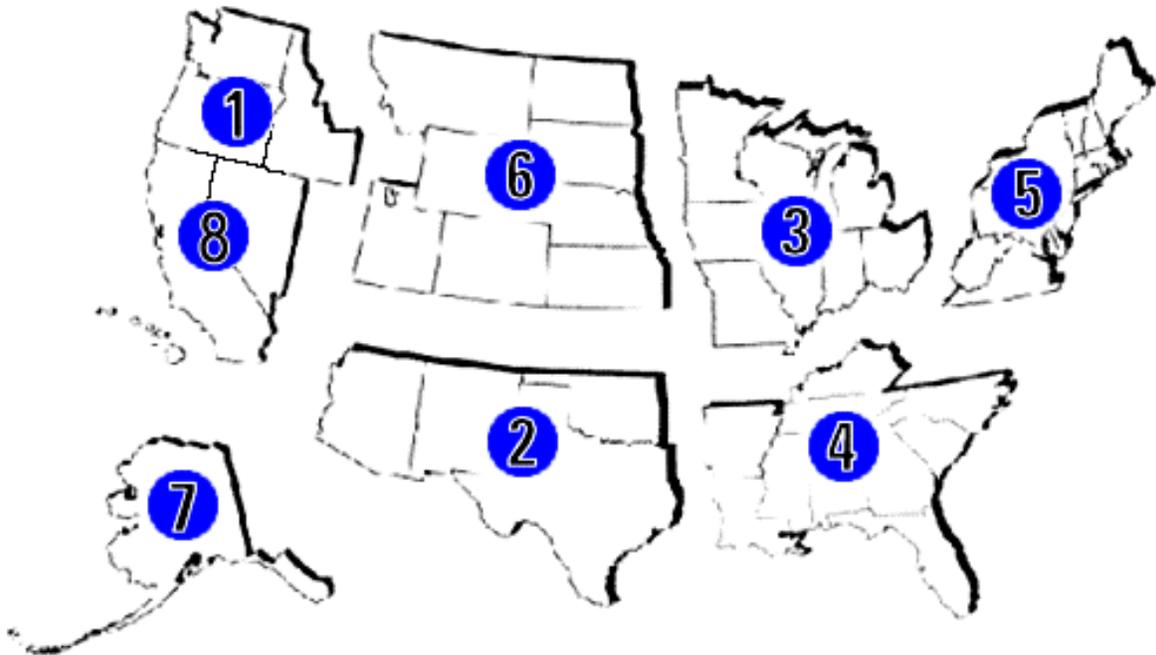
**Incident information officer at work.**(At left) Karen Miranda Gleason explains fire map to Wanda Winegar, owner of Bar WB Western Wear in Prairie City, OR during the nearby Bald Sisters Fire. Credit: Robert Brady, USFS.

**Planning:** Branch staff continued to support two regional Service spatial fire management planning (SFMP) efforts: an interagency SFMP in Region 5, with NPS, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and Department of Defense (DOD), and a SFMP in Region 6 (more than 90% complete) covering three Wetland Management Districts, two refuges and one fish hatchery. The National Fire Planner gave a SFMP presentation at the Association of Fire Ecology Convention in May and worked with a team to complete the last phase of the national Cohesive Strategy document.

**All-Hazard Response:** The Branch assisted the DOI Emergency Management (EM) office with updating the DOI Incident Position Qualification Guide (IPQG), to become fully compliant with the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The Branch's Wildland Fire & Emergency Management Advisor also assisted the Service's Emergency Management office with completing the FWS Implementation Plan for the IPQG, available at [www.fws.gov/emergency](http://www.fws.gov/emergency). The Branch also participated with Service Law Enforcement, along with DOI's Emergency Management program and OWF, on a pilot Interior Incident Coordination Team (ICT) during the Alaska Shield earthquake training exercise in Anchorage in the spring. The pilot team created standard procedures for the new ICT to interface with the Department on major DOI incidents.

###

*Regional Reports*



## REGION 1 - Pacific Region



### General Overview

FY2014 was a year of change for the Region 1 Fire Program. The Region said “farewell” to six of its senior fire leaders, including the Fire Coordinator and three Fire Management Officers. Many individuals stepped up to collectively partner with cooperators on Service and neighboring lands to manage fire on the landscape in the Pacific Northwest, Great Basin, and Pacific Islands. The focus towards partnerships promoted an efficient and aligned management response to fire activities within the geographic area. These relationships allowed the Region to continue to meet the mission of having a successful fire management program with continued dedication to firefighter and public safety, conservation, and employee development.

**Wildland Fire Management:** The Pacific Northwest experienced a more active fire season than in previous years with over 1.2 million acres burned. Fortunately, the states of Idaho, and Hawaii experienced average burning conditions this fire season. In the Region, Service resources managed 34 wildfire starts on Service lands that burned 560 acres.

Three National Fish Hatcheries were threatened by wildfire and hosted Incident Management Command Posts for multiple weeks. The Region was busy supporting its interagency partners; managing 33 non-Service fires and additionally responding to 78 support actions. The Region received approval for five long-term fire severity requests and approved several short-term requests in Eastern Oregon and Washington, all helping to keep Service fires at or lower than Type 3 complexity.

Region 1, Pacific, continued...



**Working in the Pacific Region fire environment** (left to right). Helicopter bucket work near Entiat National Fish Hatchery. Lightning at Bingham Complex. W.L. Finley Fire Operations. Photo Credit: USFWS.

**Fuels Management:** Targeted treatments were identified and prioritized as mutually beneficial for hazardous fuel reduction and habitat restoration. Interagency partnerships were instrumental in implementation of many of the prescribed fire treatments on Service lands. New partnerships were formed with The Nature Conservancy and local fire districts to support the use of wildland fire as a land management tool in new areas within the Region.



2014 Treatment Accomplishments		
# of Treatments	NFPORS Acreage	Habitat acreage
47	8,352	1,384

**Prescribed fire on Pacific Refuges** (left to right). Trumpeter swans at Oxford Slough WPA post-burn. Hazardous fuels reduction at Inland Northwest NWRC. Photo credit: USFWS.

**Training:** The Region emphasized personal and career development to enforce the importance of leadership concepts in wildland fire management. Two individuals participated in programs at the Prescribed Fire Training Center, one completed the Redmond Interagency Hotshot Crew detail, and many others participated in various staff-rides. The Region continues to actively participate in numerous interagency training opportunities by attending and instructing courses at the 100-500 levels.

Region 1, Pacific, continued...



**Pacific Region Staff at Work** (left to right). Deputy Project Leader at the Prescribed Fire Training Center. Pathways student at Redmond Interagency Hot Shot Crew. Photo credit: USFWS.

### **Planning:**

The Fire Program, through the support of Regional leadership, continued to implement its multi-year workforce plan to allocate diminished funds to priority areas within the Region. This planning effort will require the continued commitment from all levels of management within the Region to ensure that we provide a highly skilled organization dedicated to resource protection. Adaptability will be essential as the Region continues its effort to meet the Fire Program's organizational principles.

The Regional Office continues to support its fire management zones in fire management planning activities. This year, numerous fire management plans from around the Region were re-written and approved by leadership.

### **Communications/Outreach:**

Using social media to our advantage, Fire Management continues to post photographs and highlighted information onto its Facebook Webpages (<<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pacific-Region-Fire-Management/258086100939186>>and<<https://www.facebook.com/WillametteValleyPrescribedFire>>), as well as post photographs onto the Service Pacific Region Flickr webpage (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/>), where alongside photographs of endangered species, there are now approximately 150 photographs capturing fire management related activities. Furthermore, Fire Management teamed up with External Affairs to publish a 9-part story highlighting fire management topics onto the Service Pacific Region Tumblr Page during the fire season (<http://usfwspacific.tumblr.com/>).

###

## **REGION 2 – Southwest Region**

**General Overview:** Strategic workforce planning has been underway during this time, with Regional staffing dropped from approximately 106 to 79 FTE's. Despite these reductions, the Region was able to accomplish critical work and prepare to meet future fire and habitat conservation needs, with no significant lost time accidents by any fire personnel. However, the Regional ecological need for prescribed fire is 3-4 times greater than what was funded or accomplished this year. Our three primary budget program areas Preparedness, Fuels, and Burned Area Rehabilitation were obligated between 99% and 100% for FY-14, with no over expenditures. The Region is in the process of recovering suppression costs from the Las Conchas and Thompson Ridge wildfires in NM, Yarnell Hill in AZ, and is working on the final trespass settlement for the 2011 Ferguson fire on Wichita Mountains NWR.

**Personnel:** Region 2's Division of Fire Management is led by Regional FMO, Loren DeRose and Deputy Mark Kaib. Butch Wilson is our Prescribed Fire Coordinator. Kari Gromatsky is our Fire Geospatial Coordinator, Ralph Godfrey our Fire Ecologist, and Chuck Maxwell our Chief of Predictive Services at the Southwest Coordination Center. Mary Blake and Nancy Cunningham complete the regional fire team, as our Fire Budget Lead and Administrative Assistant respectively. Ryan Whiteaker, our Fire Planner accepted a position with the USFS this year in Southern NM. Workforce planning has initiated regional reorganization into 7 fire districts, where the bulk of the wildfire and prescribed fire workloads exist (e.g., Texas Chienier Plains, Texas Mid-Coast, South Texas, Balcones, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona ). The majority of the Region's fire personnel are strategically located within these districts, and all Refuges and Fish Hatcheries Fire Management needs are accounted for under this organization. The workforce has also been shifted to include more temporary, seasonal, and student positions.



**Kevin Carter doing what he does best - burning for habitat.** He has 35 years of service and more than 660 prescribed burns under his belt. He plans to retire at the end of 2014 from Balcones Canyonlands NWR. Left, burning grasslands. Right, with horned lizard.

*Region 2, Southwest, continued...*

**Wildland Fire Management:** The Region had a moderate wildfire season overall, with a total of 64 wildfires that burned 24,695 acres. Initial attack success rate exceeded 95%. At least three wildfires interacted with prior hazardous fuels treatments (e.g., Texas Chenier Plains and Oklahoma Fire Districts), enabling more rapid suppression with fewer acres burned, less impacts to our resources, and at a lower cost. Region 2 continued implementation of four Burned Area Rehabilitation projects for approximately 2,000 acres. Many of the District Fire personnel participated on Incident Management Teams, assisting Regional and National large wildfire efforts.

*Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) Projects* – Approximately 2000 acres have been treated and rehabilitated to native and less-flammable vegetation/wildlife habitat on completed or ongoing projects. Island Lake BAR Project Imperial NWR – First year completed with approximately 175 acres treated and or prepared for rehabilitation treatments. Planning and environmental compliance were also completed for these acres. Temporary project leadership was hired and plant materials collected for revegetation treatments. Chicharro Banco BAR Project LRGVNR – First year completed approximately 350 acres prepped, treated, exotic species controlled, or monitoring completed. Vegetative material collected or being grown out for future revegetation treatments. Fence line rebuilt and environmental compliance completed. Sam Fordyce BAR, LRGVNR – Last year project completed, 105 acres treated for exotics and revegetated with native species. Teniente Complex BAR, LRGVNR – Last year project complete. Monitoring, exotic species control and native revegetation complete for 485 acres. Ferguson Fire BAR, Wichita Mountains NWR – Third and last year completed, monitoring and exotic species treatment for 200 acres. Big J Fire, Balcones Canyonlands NWR – Last year project is complete. 24 acres monitored, reseeded, and restored to native grassland/woodland. Three Slashes BAR, Cibola NWR – Last year project is complete. Approximately 500 acres monitored, treated for exotics, and revegetated to native species.

**Fuels Management:** Region 2 conducted 97 prescribed fires within the region for approximately 39,758 acres. These prescribed fires included 64 Wildland Urban Interface treatments (ca. 35,891 acres), and 33 hazardous fuels reduction treatments (ca. 3,867 acres). There were a number of these prescribed fires also conducted for strategic wildlife habitat enhancement, including at Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, several for Whooping Crane habitat at Aransas NWR, and Mottled Ducks at Chenier Plains NWR.

**Communications/Outreach:** The New Mexico Fire District led a public prescribed fire at the annual Festival of the Cranes event. Several dozen folks along with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class from the local Socorro school district attended. This educational prescribed burn has become very popular as an outreach tool and should be looked at for replication on other Refuges.

*Region 2, Southwest, continued...*

**Planning:** The Arizona Fire District initiated a Spatial Fire Management Plan (SFMP) and is in the process of working through the written documents and NEPA analysis. The SFMP for New Mexico (NM) District, which currently covers 6 NWRs and 2 NFHs, was updated to reflect accomplishments for FY14 and proposed work for FY15. In addition, draft data has been integrated for the two new NM NWRs that were established after the approved SFMP. Region 2 collected spatial data for all wildfire and prescribed fire incidents of 10 acres or greater, that occurred within FY 2014, and uploaded the files into the new Fire Management Information System (FMIS). Updates in the future will be completed on an annual basis. This standard was proposed by Region 2 leadership, similar to the Fire Atlas Project. The Region continued support for a national standard this year by requiring FMIS GIS polygon data for all prescribed fire and wildfire perimeters. Capturing fire perimeter data on an annual basis will also facilitate the Region's Fire Atlas Project, Spatial Fire Management Planning, and Strategic Habitat Conservation. Please see Region 2 Refuges Fire Management website for more information <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/fire/index.html>

*Remote Sensing to capture FY14 burns* – In cases where it was impractical or impossible for the field to GPS fire perimeters due to topography, ownership, vegetation, etc., or desired analysis of burned vs. unburned fuel, the Regional Office created a fire perimeter via remote sensing analysis. This allowed for better data analysis of the fire, and provided a more accurate perimeter for FMIS.

*Region 2 Asset Database* –Currently, approximately 90% of the asset locations are incorrectly reported in SAMMS for Region 2. Division of Fire Management is in the process of developing a spatial database to identify, correctly locate, and upload approximately 1,500 assets

*LANDFIRE data submission* –Region 2 submitted data that depicted disturbance and treatment activities resulting in long-term fuel conversion, which will be integrated with Monitoring Trends in Burn Severity (MTBS) and used to refine and update existing LANDFIRE products to better represent-on-the ground conditions.

*Fire Atlas* – Using satellite imagery and historical fire records, the Division of Fire Management has developed a completed fire atlas for over 50% of the NWRs and NFHs in Region 2, documenting the location and extent of fires, 10 acres or greater, occurring on or near refuge lands over the past 32 years. This data will be uploaded into FMIS and used in budget scenarios and other agency and interagency analysis models. The fire atlas at Buenos Aires NWR was used for a JFSP proposal formation which was funded. The science project lead by Steve Sesnie, I&M, is still using the Atlas product to plan their sampling design and to organize their findings.

A new science applications project was funded to evaluate dendrochronology opportunities on select refuges in the Service and complete dendro-based historic fire regime analysis on three refuges. This study will provide vital science-based information to the Fire Management Program allowing better informed adaptive management decision processes. Results of this project will be made available to a wide audience (e.g., peer reviewed publication(s) and Oak Woodlands and Forests Fire Consortium) and the university and partners will gain expertise and professional development (e.g., a graduate student is proposed) through participation in this project.

*Region 2, Southwest, continued...*



**Shiloh Battlefield Staff Ride:** FWS group at Shiloh National Military Park, Savannah, Tennessee: (l to r, top to bottom): Josh Clint, USFS, Missoula MT; Judd Baker, OMNA, Commonwealth of Virginia; Neal Beetch, R6 Regional Office; Kim Wahl, R2, Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR; Cameron Tongier, HQ; Thad Herzberger, R2 Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR; Eric Krueger, R2, Balcones Canyonlands NWR; Shane Kasson, R2 Salt Plains NWR; Leann Wilkins, R2 Maxwell NWR, Juliette Fernandez, R2, Buenos Aires NWR; Rich Sterry, R6 Regional Office; Darrin Unruh, R2, Deep Fork NWR; Thomas Harvey, R2, Regional Office; Art Canterbury, R5, Blackwater NWR; Mark Kaib, R2 Regional Office. Credit: Curtis Heaton, USFS

**Training:** Region 2 funded and led a series of Fire Leadership opportunities this year that were opened up at the National Level for Fire and Non-Fire Programs. These courses included L-380 – Fireline Leadership (38 attendees), Shiloh Staff Ride – Mid-Level Leadership Training (60 attendees), with Gettysburg L-580 (42 Attendees) planned for FY2015. Region 2 intends to continue leading these leadership training opportunities and to include all Regions, as long as there is a need and contingent on funding. The overall intent has been to more deliberately invest in our future leadership, and to help better integrate the fire program with other programs in efforts to enhance mutual respect and conservation outcomes.

**All Hazard** – A hurricane preparedness planning meeting was held via webinar in May and a follow up call was held in June to coordinate planning efforts among all coastal refuges in Texas. After these meetings each Texas refuge, the Ecological Services (ES) and law enforcement office developed and submitted Hurricane Plans to the RO. This year, all potentially affected FWS personnel were accounted for in hurricane communications and planning.

###

## **REGION 3 - Midwest Region**

**Overview:** FY2014 was a year with an extended winter, record-setting wet spring, and early snows in the fall. Even with a compressed fire season, reduced budgets, and a shrinking workforce, field stations were able to conduct more than 210 prescribed fires (30,210 acres), with first burns ever at Patoka River NWR led by the Big Oaks fire crew. Field stations conducted initial attack on FWS lands and provided incident support to local and state partners on wildfires. Two new prescribed fire assistance agreements were completed between FWS and the Chippewa and Superior National Forests.

**Personnel:** Many positions are being held vacant due to DOI fire budget reductions. After retirement of our Regional Fire Management Coordinator (RFMC), these duties were assumed by the Region 5 RFMC for a one-year pilot period. Over 43 FWS resources were dispatched to 7 different states this year. Personnel held positions in operations, aviation, plans, finance, dispatching, and command including several trainee assignments as BUYM, FACL, ICT4, ENGB, and CRWB.

Personnel changes included:

- Dan Dearborn retired and moved to Maine.
- Ryan Petersen left Minnesota Valley NWR for the St. Paul city fire department.
- Eric Johnson left Sherburne NWR for an Engine Captain position on Black Hills NF, SD.
- Dan Angelo is now the FMO for both Big Stone NWR and Morris WMD.
- Glen Stratton is now Regional Fire Management Coordinator for FWS Regions 3 & 5.
- Brad Bergman range tech at Horicon took a full time position with FS in Ashland, MT
- Dave Jones moved from Big Oaks to be the new Fire Specialist at Crab Orchard Refuge.
- Paul Charland moved from Leopold to Lansing, MI to a new part-time fire position.

**Training:** The Region coordinated an S-234 class at the MNICS Academy and assisted with other courses. Interagency fire refreshers and other local courses were held at most FWS stations. FWS provided lead instructors or unit instructors for S-215, multiple S-212, S-130/190 for Staff and 30 AmeriCorps, Multiple RT130, RT212, WCT's, First Aid, CPR, assist with Lakeside Lab's Fire Ecology course, S-130/190 Field Day, Smoke Spotter Training, UTV/ATV training. Staff attended S-211, S-290, I-300, I-400, EA IMT, Oil Spill Training, L-381, S-330, S-491, M-580, M-581, Refuge Academy, and staff rides at South Canyon and Shilo.

**All-Hazard Response:** An Oil Spill preparedness planning meeting was held in Wisconsin with many fire staff attending and advising on how our agency would assist in this type of disaster. Staff helping in coordination for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savanna Science Consortium and partners Regional Conference, schedule for Feb 2015 in Dubuque, Iowa.

###

## **REGION 4 – Southeast Region**



**USFWS firefighter patrols the fireline during a prescribed fire** : Pickney Island NWR in March 2014. FWS conducts prescribed fires to help reduce the threat of wildfires on refuges and the impacts to local communities, as well as to manage habitat. Firefighters work with biologists and foresters to determine appropriate times to burn to maximize benefits and maintain healthy ecosystems. Credit: Rob Wood, USFWS

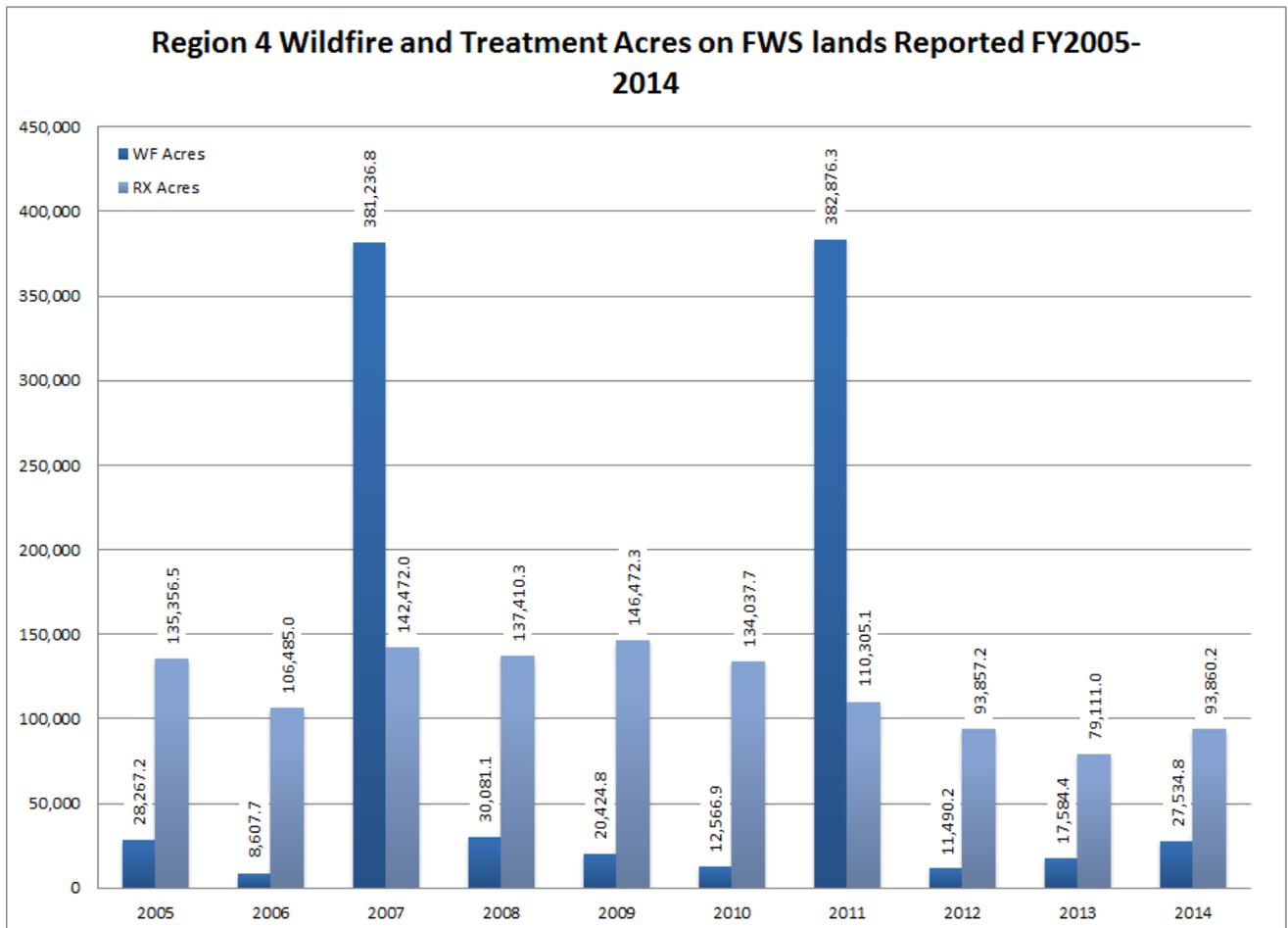
### **Regional Overview**

The Region was funded in FY14 at \$10.3M, a slight increase from the \$10.1 FY13 levels. This level is substantially less than FY09 and FY10, and salary still comprised greater than 75% of the budget. The Region replaced fire equipment that was the highest priority in need of replacement; an accomplishment we were not able to complete in FY13. The Region as a whole is still being encouraged to implement cost-saving measures and prepare for potential future budget reductions.

Strategic workforce planning for FY14 has reduced the FTE workforce over the last FY from 104.06 (Oct 2013) to 97.16 (Oct 2014). The workforce continues to shift to more temporary, seasonal and student-conservation organization positions.

Region 4, Southeast, continued...

**Wildfire Management:** The Southeast Region saw another increase in wildfire numbers during FY14. FWS firefighters responded to 238 wildfires which burned 27,534 acres on FWS lands this year; compared to 192 fires burning 17,584 acres in FY13. Even with the increased workload and the reduced workforce, all these fires were managed in a safe manner with no lost time accidents reported. The Region’s wildfire activity centered in the Caribbean, southwest Louisiana and central Florida. While many of these fires were actively suppressed, there were cases where local management plans allowed the fires to be managed for resource benefit. Thirteen wildfires were managed for resource benefit for a total of 7,849 acres. In addition to the regional workload, Southeast Region personnel accepted numerous assignments to assist with the busy fire season in the Pacific Northwest and California. The Caribbean Refuge Complex was the only unit in the region to request long term severity funding this year. The Caribbean experienced a very active spring fire season both on State protected lands and on Federal Lands with 55 wildfires suppressed by FWS resources. The decision was made to request severity funding to assist the local staff with initial attack efforts due to the size, frequency, and intensity of wildfires. The Caribbean was in severity for 4 weeks during the month of August. Within those 4 weeks, they experienced 7 new wildfires on Federal lands. Severity resources provided the necessary qualified personnel to staff equipment and assist the local staff as well as our cooperators with successful initial attack efforts by keeping 95 percent of all wildfires at ten acres or less.



*Region 4, Southeast, continued...*

**Fuels Management:** Even with continued reductions in hazardous fuels funding and the federal government shutdown the total acres managed through prescribed fire treatments were higher than last year. This fiscal year's target for acreage treated, as determined through the HFPAS process, was a success and the region accomplished 100% (51,653 acres) of the FY 2014 target. Additional funds through interior and exterior partnerships were used to help treat an additional 44,101 acres. All of the treatments were accomplished in a safe and efficient manner, reducing hazardous fuel loading and maintaining the health of our fire dependent landscapes. This year the Region treated approximately 53,881 acres of hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface.



**Prescribed Fire:** USFWS firefighter Brian Pippin from St. Marks NWR carries fire along the marsh edge with a driptorch, just east of the lighthouse on St. Marks NWR on 3/25/14. The fire helped reduce wildfire risk while improving wildlife habitat. Credit: Jennifer Hinckley/USFWS

**Training:** This year, approximately 42 position task books were completed by Service fire personnel in the field and at the regional office. The “interagency priority trainee dispatching process” developed by the Southern Area Training Working Team and implemented at the Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC) was continued this year. The effort was expanded beginning last year (2013) to a national effort. Working in cooperation, geographic area coordination centers have begun sharing priority trainee lists and stepping up efforts to place trainees on fire assignments. The purpose of this process is to better serve the agencies as a more robust trainee prioritization and rotation system. Although the process is still being honed, the number of trainees placed on assignment coupled with the volume of completed task books suggests the process is shaping to be an efficient dispatching tool.

Notable is our involvement in the Tennessee/Kentucky Wildland Fire Academy. This year was the 12<sup>th</sup> annual session. Mike Housh has served on the steering committee as the Service representative since the academy inception 12 years ago. This year FWS sponsored and delivered S-230, Crew Boss (Single Resource) and RX-301 Prescribed Fire Implementation. Eleven Service firefighters attended the academy as students this year.

The training modules at Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC) successfully completed 13 prescribed fires that treated 4,406 acres on 5 refuges in the Southeast Region. Attendance from the Service included; 2 field coordinators (module leaders), 5 trainees working on Burn Boss or Firing Boss qualifications, and 3 Line Officers that attended the Prescribed Fire Workshop for Agency Administrators. PFTC continued to supply the interagency community with 20 burn bosses, 23 firing bosses, and 5 fire effects monitors returning to their home unit recommended for certification for their position. These skills were honed on 157 burns totaling 56,168 acres of which 11,920 acres were in the Wildland/Urban Interface zone. These burns were conducted in 5 states on 35 different cooperators' lands, including state and private land.

*Region 4, Southeast, continued...*

**Planning:** The Southeast Region of the FWS has 71 field units requiring Fire Management Plans (FMP). These are maintained in a database at the regional office. Field units are responsible for performing annual FMP reviews and providing updates as necessary.

A database for statewide master fire agreements with the 10 southeastern states and Puerto Rico is maintained annually. The Agreements with Alabama and Florida were renewed this year. An Operations Plan for Prescribed Burning Activities was established between the Service and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. This plan will facilitate the prescribed burning of the checkerboard of private inholdings and easements associated with the Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area.

At the tail end of last fiscal year an interagency agreement between the US Forest Service Region 8 and the Service Southeast Region was established. This agreement tiered off the agreement for the Interagency Fair Share Program for the Southern Area. The primary purpose of the agreement is to streamline the funds transfer process for assistance in prescribed fire, aviation usage, training, and other fire management functions. A clear, concise process for utilization of the agreement ensuring adherence to policy and fiscal accountability was identified and distributed to the field this year.

Two of the primary DOI WUI mitigation programs, The Rural Fire Assistance Program and the Ready Reserve Program, received no funding for FY2014. Although no funding was allocated, administrative work was still completed within both programs. Namely, ensuring funds obligated in the past were appropriately being utilized and facilitating the proper closing of the grant agreements.

This year the Region provided a steering committee member for the further development of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and SouthWRAP, which is a web based application of the program. This assessment is an interagency cooperative tool utilized at federal, state and local levels. Some fuels data calibration workshops were conducted in various states. The Service participated where it was warranted. Field units continue to work with cooperators, predominantly the state fire protection/forestry agencies, in development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans. These plans continue to be developed on a wide array of spatial levels which include single small communities up to county wide.

**All-Hazard Response:** The Region Division of Fire Management has been working in cooperation with the Regional safety program to reevaluate incident communications capabilities and costs. Alternatives are being explored to the satellite phones and the service provider contract. Incident command trailers with communication equipment -- purchased and outfitted after Hurricane Katrina -- are stationed strategically throughout the Region and maintained by field staff; plans are in place for on-site communications training for field personnel most likely to respond to incidents with the trailer. At that time, Regional safety and fire staff will discuss future incident communications options and scenarios to ensure we are utilizing the most updated and cost efficient communication technology practical. ###

## REGION 5 - Northeast Region

As a result of declining budgets, Region 5 partnered with Region 3 to conduct a one-year pilot to share the Regional Fire Management Coordinator position. Prescribed Fire Specialist Kyle Krzywicki completed a 120-day detail to Kenai NWR as acting Assistant Fire Management Officer. His detail coincided with the 200,000-acre Funny River Fire at Kenai, and Kyle provided great support to the refuge during this time.

Above-average precipitation in the region kept the wildfire risk and occurrence in the coastal plain low throughout the year. Fire staff from the Region provided assistance to on-going fires in California and the Pacific Northwest by supporting crew mobilizations, and overhead positions.

The Region had 43 prescribed fires for a total of 4397 acres and 5 wildfires for a total of 43 acres (4 at Blackwater and 1 on Montezuma). The Virginia-West Virginia Zone had a successful prescribed fire season, completing projects on three refuges within the Zone and providing assistance on partner projects on State and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) lands. The Zone program also hosted TNC's Training Exchange (TREN) program at Great Dismal Swamp in March. TREN completed 13 burns for 1170 acres on multiple properties in a one-week period, and provided many developmental assignments to personnel from around the country.

On November 19, 2014, fire staff from Great Dismal Swamp NWR and staff from the NASA Langley Research Center Small Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Laboratory conducted field tests to determine the feasibility of using Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) for fire detection and other fire support missions on the refuge. Testing was conducted at Great Dismal Swamp NWR. Prior testing of the systems were conducted off-site by NASA staff, but this did not involve field work on actual vegetation fires or in a forested environment. This effort is part of an ongoing project between NASA Langley and the Great Dismal Swamp fire program, which started with discussions in late 2011.



**AmeriCorp firefighters get large-fire experience:** (left to right) Tyler Davis from North Carolina, Alessandro Seghieri from Maryland, Nicolay Petrov, also from North Carolina, and Francisco Orellana Menendez from California in camp, while on assignment with the Virginia #4 hand crew during the Ochoco Complex in Prineville, Oregon. Credit: Patrick Lair, USFS

Region 5 trained 29 AmeriCorp firefighters that were deployed on 27 prescribed fires and 4 wildfires for a salary savings of \$69,000. Also, Gerald Vickers participated as unit instructor for RT13, M581, LFML and lead instructor for S215 and S404.

###

## REGION 6 – Mountain-Prairie Region



***Patriotic Scene:** The photo of the flag is a picture taken in front of the office at Marais des Cygnes during the Headquarters East prescribed burn. Credit: Patrick Martin, USFWS*

**Regional Overview:** FY2014 was a challenging year for the Region 6 Fire Program. The new fiscal year started with a 3-week furlough in October, hiring freeze, and subsequent waiver requirement for important seasonal firefighter hiring. Long-time Regional Fire Coordinator (RFMC), Jim Kelton, retired in January and the duties were assumed by the Deputy RFMC for the remainder of the year. Anticipated budget cuts were curtailed as a “bump” in fuels funding arrived in mid-March. Actions to address expected future funding levels and settle the employment and job security concerns of existing employees were initiated with help from the Refuge system, which placed several qualified fire employees into non-fire positions.

Except for brief periods of localized fire danger, weather conditions were generally moist throughout the region, leading to widespread low/moderate fire danger, wild fire occurrence, and prescribed fire accomplishments.

*Region 6, Mountain-Prairie, continued...*

The North Dakota Dispatch Center (managed by FWS Region 6) received a new Center Manager in May and then suffered through the beginnings of a location move, starting in September. The move will finalize in December, 2014.

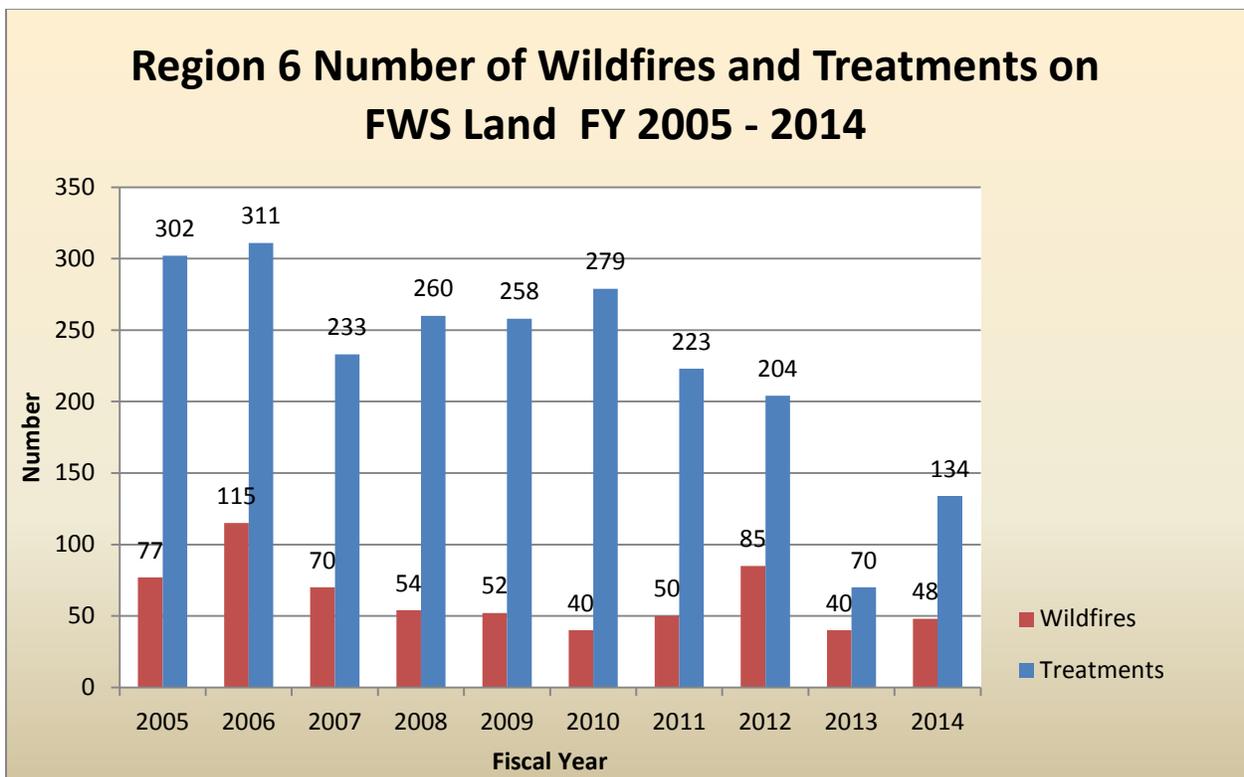
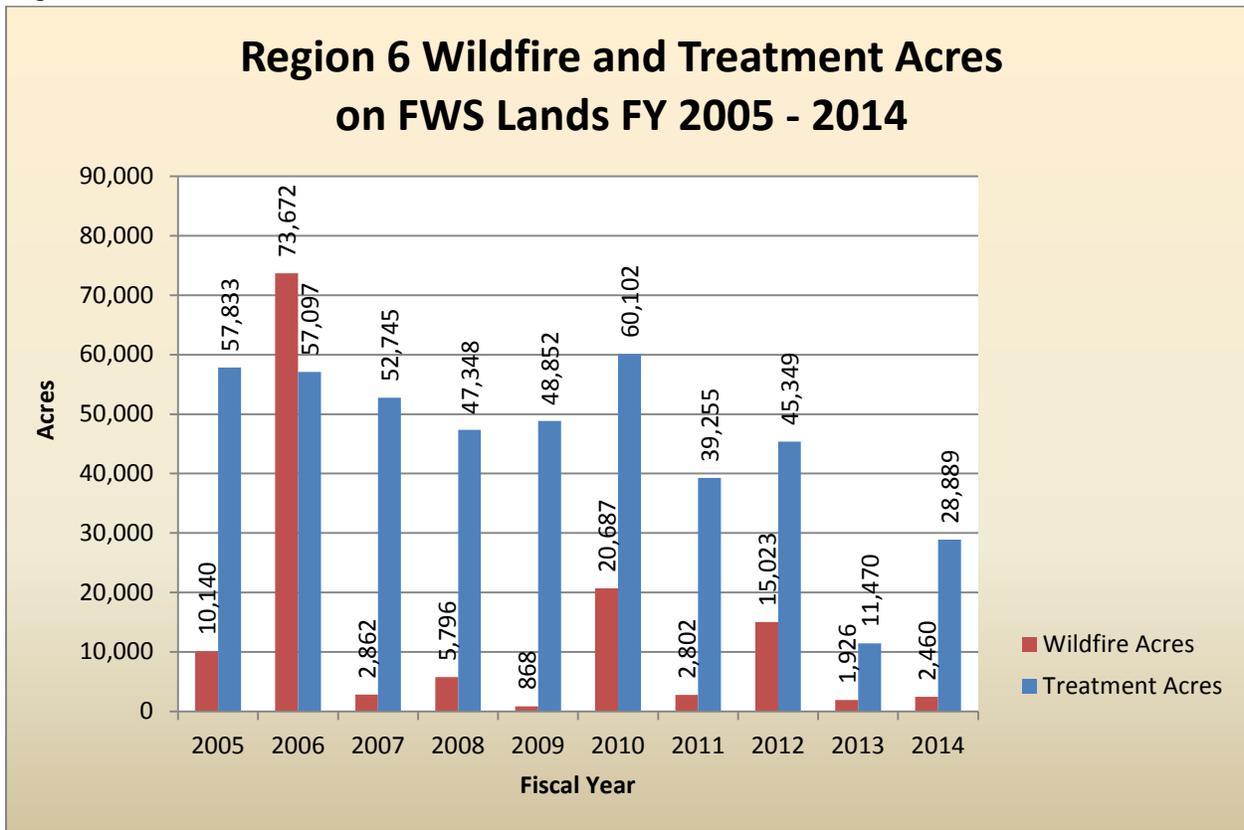
**Personnel:** In April 2014, the merger of the Mid Dakota Fire Management District and the Sandhills Fire Management District began as management of fire operations was solidified under one FMO. The creation of the new Great Plains Zone will be completed in FY 2015 when two stations in North Dakota (Tewaukon NWRC and Kulm WMD) are moved into the North Dakota Fire Management Zone and funding for the new Great Plains Zone is consolidated under one budget.

Personnel moves in the Region included: Jim Kelton retired as RFMC; Michael Richmond was selected as Northern Rockies Meteorologist; Mardell Dahlin was selected as the NDC Dispatch Center Manager; Jason Wagner was directly re-assigned from Waubay NWR to Devils Lake WMD; Jeff Olson resigned as Fire Program Technician at Tewaukon NWR; Garrett Welch resigned as Fire Program Technician at Huron WMD; Jason Pankratz resigned as Fire Program Tech at Fling Hills NWR; Paul Pallas was re-assigned from Asst. FMO at CMR to a Natural Resources Specialist position at CMR; Jeff Bortner was hired as the Lead Fire Range Tech at Fort Peck MT, and Mike Hayden was selected as the new Region 6 RFMC.

**Planning:** Fire Management Plans (FMPs) completed during Fiscal Year 2014 include: Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWRC FMP (Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, Rocky Flats NWR, and Two Ponds NWR) (November 2013), and Fish Springs NWR FMP (March 2014). Two additional FMPs (Lost Trail NWR and NW Montana WMD Flathead County FMP; and Ouray NWR and Ouray NFH FMP) were completed within first 10 days of October 2014.

**Table 1: FY 2014 totals by Zone (data as of 11/13/14)**

<b>Fire Management Zone</b>	<b>Number of Treatments</b>	<b>FWS Acres Treated</b>	<b>Total Acres Treated</b>	<b>Number of Wildfires</b>	<b>FWS Acres Burned by Wildfire</b>
Great Plains	50	11,873.9	11,873.9	4	127.4
Mid-Plains	30	3,124.0	3,807.0	25	1,164.5
Montana	13	4,044.6	4,040.6	11	1,149.2
North Dakota	36	7,499.1	7,537.8	3	17.8
Rocky Basin	5	2,351.8	2,361.3	5	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>28,889.4</b>	<b>29,620.6</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>2,460.4</b>



Wildfire data includes wildfires that were suppressed on FWS lands and also Natural Outs.

*Region 6, Mountain-Prairie, continued...*

**Fuels Management:** Many of the Zones had difficulty accomplishing planned fuels treatments because of unfavorable weather conditions through much of the spring and early summer. A total of 134 fuels treatments were completed in FY 2014. This number is the second lowest number of treatments completed in last 10 years but still nearly doubled the number done in FY 2013. Historically, the 10-year average for the Region is 227 treatments/yr. In FY2014, 28,889 acres of FWS lands were treated, which is about 2 ½ times the acreage completed in 2013. However, the 2014 accomplishment is still the second lowest in last 10 years. The 10-year average of Service acres treated in the Region is 44,894 acres/year.

A prescribed fire was completed on Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR near Denver on March 12, 2014. Although the burn was relatively routine, a fire-whirl formed on the edge of the burn unit which picked up a large number of tumbleweeds from a ditch and spread fire across the control line. A video of the “tumbleweed tornado” went viral on the internet (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAC2091iPXs> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcUnE0tHcaI> ) and even appeared on NBC Nightly News. The resulting spot fire, however, was only 1.5 acres in size and was easily controlled with on-site resources, which included FWS and local fire crews.



**Firenado:** Fire-whirl develops during prescribed burn on the prairie at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. Credit: Rich Sterry, USFWS.

*Region 6, Mountain-Prairie, continued...*

In FY 2014, two prescribed fires were declared wildfires in the Region. The first occurred on February 18, 2014 when snow cover melted leading to an escape of burned brush piles on Atlanta WPA within the Rainwater Basin WMD. The Atlanta Wildfire burned 217 acres of Service land plus an additional 21 acres of private land. The second escaped prescribed fire occurred May 7 on Dennert WPA within the Sand Lake WMD. The prescribed fire was declared a wildfire due to it burning private lands. This escaped prescribed fire was named the Corn Stalk Fire and was caught with on-site resources after burning about 5 acres of private land.

**Wildfire Management:** In FY 2014, 48 wildfires occurred on Service lands compared to 10-year average of 63 wildfires per year. If 2006 (year with highest wildfire occurrence (115)) and 2010 (year with lowest occurrence (40)) are excluded from analysis, then the average number of wildfires for the Region decreases to 60 wildfires per year.

A total of 2,460 acres burned in FY 2014 compared to 10-year average of 13,623 acres. The 2,460 acres burned in FY 2014 is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in the last 10 years. The 10-year average for wildfire acres burned is currently being heavily influenced by 2006 where 54% of the 10-year total acreage burned. If 2006 (high - 73,672 acres) and 2009 (low - 868 acres) are excluded from the analysis, then the average wildfire acres burned for the Region is 7,712 acres. In FY 2014, the Mid-Plains Zone had the most wildfires (25) as well as most acres burned (1,165). It is not un-common for the Mid-Plains Zone to have the most wildfire occurrence in the Region; however, it is unusual for this Zone to also have the most acres burned. The single largest acreage fire (Olin) burned a total of 1,204 acres of which 730 acres was on Charles M. Russell NWR.

**Training:** The Region hosted numerous fire training courses and supported interagency training opportunities by assisting in the instruction of courses at the 100-400 NWCG course levels. Region 6 also supports and participates annually in the spring and winter Colorado Wildfire Academy by providing instructors and participants. This year the Region had 15 individuals complete their taskbook which ranged from TFLD, ICT4, RXB2, ENG, and FFT1. Rich Sterry and Neal Beetch attended the Shiloh Staff Ride; Andrew Schell attended the South Canyon/Battlement Mountain Staff Ride

**Communications/Outreach:** The Regional staff hosted a field visit from Stephen Pyne, noted professor and fire historian. Mr. Pyne met with local Service fire personnel, and other local interagency cooperators to compile information on the on the history of Fire in the Prairie Pothole Region for the last 50 years. The result of his visit and writings will serve as part of a sequel to his book *Fire in America*, published in 1982.

###

## REGION 7 – Alaska Region



**Fighting Funny River Fire:** Firefighters conduct burn-out operation near a fuel break to protect homes in forested subdivisions at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska last spring. Credit: USFWS

### Regional Overview:

Despite a lower than average number of acres burned statewide, the Region had an average year in terms of acreage burned due to the Funny River Fire on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Despite the relatively low fire activity, work continued on a number of different fronts, much of it with intra- and interagency partners. Managers continued workforce planning to meet future budget challenges. The RFMC and Southwest Area FMO joined other delegates from Arctic and Kenai NWRs as guests of the Peoples Republic of China to attend the International Ecological Forum and view Changbia Mountain Nature Reserve, serving as subject matter experts in fire management.

### Personnel:

There were significant personnel changes within the Region. In the Regional Office, Jan Passek, the Regional Fire Management Planner, retired in April. This position has morphed into a shared planner position with the Alaska Fire Service, to be located in Anchorage or Fairbanks; it will be filled in FY15. Maureen Clark, the Regional Fire Information Specialist, accepted a position with the Alaska BLM in the Office of Communications in June following a 4 month detail as a Public Affairs Officer with the BLM. On the Kenai Refuge, Diane Mclean, Assistant Fire Management Officer, retired in April and Karen McGann, Fire Prevention Technician, resigned prior to fire season to continue on with the family mining business.

**Wildland Fire Management:**

The season got off to an anxious start, with an early breakup in many areas of the state resulting in an extended dry period prior to green-up. This was followed quickly by record high temperatures in south-central Alaska. Fire conditions became extreme in short order, and a human caused event on the Kenai Peninsula started the Funny River Fire. The dry spring was followed by record rainfall in the interior portion of the state, however, and lack of lightning kept ignitions in check. Alaska did not move into Preparedness Level 4 during the 2014 season. Statewide, 389 fires burned 232,777 acres – way below the 2 million acre average. Twenty-five fires were started on Service land. Ten of these fires were human caused, 2 were false alarms, and the rest were ignited by lightning.

Total Service acreage burned was a bit above average at 196,862 acres. Most of the fires were in areas where no resources were threatened and, as a result, they were simply monitored in accordance with the Limited Fire Management Option. Most of the acreage on Service land was attributed to the Funny River Fire, which began May 19 and burned 194,419 acres within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. This incident was managed by the Alaska Type 2 Incident Management Team and received national attention. Structure protection measures were taken when the fire threatened residences of Funny River, Soldotna and numerous cabins. Four recreational cabins and 2 outbuildings were lost during the fire.

Alaska Region of the Service provided support to Alaska fire protection agencies. Four fire staff supported the Alaska Incident Management Team (IMT) on two incidents and one provided pre-position support to the Alaska Division of Forestry. In addition, six staff provided operational support on fires in Alaska (Bear Guards, Resource advisors, Engine overhead and Technical Specialists) and in the Lower 48 (interagency Type 2IA crew, FBAN, LTAN, SOPL).

**Fuels Management:**

The Kenai NWR fire staff managed or collaborated in several WUI hazard fuel reduction treatments in FY14. Twenty acres were mechanically treated and piles were burned on 10 acres. About 288 acres of Refuge land were treated by suppression resources during management of the Funny River Fire using a combination of techniques. An additional 100 acres were mechanically treated within the Refuge boundary by partners at the Moose Research Station. The Eastern Interior Refuges district completed three mechanical WUI treatments on 9 acres.

**Training:**

Red cards were issued to 17 FWS staff. Three managers attended the National Fire Management for Leadership class in Tucson. Three staff attended S-482, one attended Facilitated Learning Analysis training, and one assisted with prescribed burn and smoke management training. Three 3 webinars presented in the state by interagency cooperators for WFDSS were attended by numerous Refuge managers and fire staff. FMOs, Regional fire staff, and Refuge managers attended the annual spring Interagency IMT and FMO meeting.

*Region 7 – Alaska, continued...*

**Communications/Outreach:** The Regional Fire Information Specialist oversaw translation of a poster explaining the role of fire into Yup'ik– the third and finale poster about the natural role of fire in Alaska to be translated to Native Alaska languages. Two Service Field Notes entries concerning fire and one about follow-up to a 2013 all-hazard flooding event were produced by fire staff. The Southwest Area FMO taught a section on fire ecology and fire management at a science camp.

The Funny River Fire generated a lot of press and outreach. Perhaps the most significant Service communications/outreach accomplishment from the fire were the products developed by a team of three Service fire management specialists from Regions 1, 4 and 7, who analyzed and documented the effectiveness of WUI fuels treatments completed by the Refuge and its interagency partners prior to the fire. Four products were developed: an informational sheet for the public about the treatments and their effectiveness as fuels breaks; a short video about the fuelbreak which was posted on YouTube and shared on numerous other sites and Facebook pages; a 4-page briefing paper about the history and funding of the treatments; and a more in-depth analysis of the treated areas and their effectiveness against fire spread. All of these products can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/alaska/nwr/visitor/fire/planning.htm>

**Planning:** The Kodiak NWR Fire Management Plan (FMP) was completed and is awaiting final review and signature. The Kenai NWR FMP and Environmental Assessment were completed and signed. Annual plan updates were performed for all FMPs and delegations and Intra-refuge agreements were in place for the season. The Statewide Master Agreement with the State of Alaska, Annual Operating Plan, was completed before the fire season began. Assessment and Burned Area Emergency Stabilization Plans were developed for the Funny River Fire. On the Kenai NWR a project was initiated to use the Interagency Fuel Treatment Decision Support System (IFTDSS) for fuel treatment planning.

Regional and Refuge fire staff continued to participate in the following Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG) committees, with several individuals serving in leadership roles: Geographic Multiagency Coordination, Wildland Fire Decision Support System Geographic Editor, Fire Research Development and Application, Fire Modeling and Analysis, Education and Prevention, Operations, Fire Weather, Smoke Management, GIS, and Safety. Participation in other local/regional groups included the Kenai Peninsula Interagency All Lands All Hands Committee, and local emergency and fire organizations. National workgroup participation by staff includes: National Fire Safety Operations Team, Service National Fuels Group, Service National Fire Ecologist Group, Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation, Geographic Area Coordinating Group Advisory Council, and the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee Wildfire Implementation Team

**All-Hazard Response:** There were no all-hazard events to report. The Refuge System presented the Alaska Fire Service (AFS) with the Regional Director's Teamwork and Partnership award for their efforts during the 2013 flooding of the Yukon River in Galena. AFS was also recognized for their support during the spring FMO/IMT meetings.

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## *REGION 8 - Pacific Southwest Region*



***Pacific Southwest Region Fire Management Staff, 2014***

*(left to right): Lee Rickard, Southern California Zone FMO; James Roberts, Regional Fire Ecologist/Fuels Specialist; Dave Goheen, Klamath Basin Zone FMO; Jessica Wade, Regional Fire Operations Specialist; Peter Kelly, South Central Valley Zone FMO; Richard Hadley, Regional Fire Planner/Budget Specialist; Tim Rash, Nevada Zone FMO; Glenn Gibson, Regional FMO. Missing: Dale Shippelhoue, North Central Valley FMO. Photo credit: USFWS*

**General Overview:** 2014 was another year of change, challenge, and success for the Region 8 fire program. Our fire staff accomplished an amazing amount of work this year in spite of having reduced our workforce by almost 46% in the past few years. We continued to improve our integration with refuges, both in the field and at the regional levels. Lastly, and most importantly, we had a very safe fire season with only a small number of very minor injuries in spite of conducting many thousands of hours of dangerous work.

**Personnel:** Region 8 has nearly achieved its workforce reduction plan to reduce its fire staff from 50 to 27 career employees. We have four fire people in the region that are now funded out of 126X dollars, at least for the near term. Hopefully this will become the model as we as an agency solve the problem of how to treat habitat with fire. One real plus in Region 8 is that our collateral fire capability continues to increase, both in the prescribed fire and wildfire arena.

**Wildland Fire Management:**



The states of California, Nevada and Oregon experienced unprecedented levels of drought conditions. This led to extreme burning conditions this fire season, and a fire season that has just never ended. We used short-term severity at one or more fire zones

nearly every month this year, including January of 2014. We are nearly at Thanksgiving and are still using short term severity in our Southern California zone as Santa Ana winds blow through the area. In the Region, our resources suppressed 60 wildfire starts on or adjacent to refuge lands that burned around 1320 acres. Three of these fires required ES&R funding (Afton, School, and Tract 17). In addition, we responded to numerous other local fires in support of our partner agencies. The Region approved \$47K in short-term fire severity requests on 4 of our 5 fire zones and the national office supported us with two long-term severity allocations totaling around \$72K. Collateral fire duty refuge personnel spent 234 days conducting large fire support and many more days supporting local fire management needs, including initial attack and prescribed burning. Most of Region 8’s large fire support efforts this year were focused primarily in California, Oregon, and Washington.

**Fuels Management:** Region 8 completed a total of 78 fuels treatments, totaling 15,830 acres. We had one escaped prescribed fire. The Tract 17 prescribed fire escaped and did minor damage to infrastructure on the refuge as well as on a small acreage of non-service lands. We conducted a review of the escape and shared the lessons learned widely.



*Region 8 – Pacific Southwest, continued...*

**Training:** Region 8 of the Service led or took part in numerous employee development opportunities this year, ranging from details to staff rides. Among the staff rides attended by R-8 personnel this year were South Canyon, Cedar fire, Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Inaja fire. In addition, Region 8 supported numerous interagency training opportunities by instructing courses at the 100-400 levels.

**Communications/Outreach:** Due to budget reductions, the Region lost our Communications and Outreach Specialist so capability in this area was severely reduced. Prior to that individual leaving, several outreach efforts were ongoing with organizations such as the Central Valley Joint Venture and California Ducks Unlimited. These efforts will see limited attention until funding supports increased staffing.

**Planning:** We finalized two Fire Management Plans (FMPs) and associated NEPA. In addition, we made significant progress on several more FMP's. Region 8 continues to participate in the California Wildland Fire Coordinating Group and Great Basin Coordinating Group agreements to facilitate interagency coordination efforts.

Region 8 policy for using prescribed fire on off-service lands was signed by the Regional Director and two Partners Program staff have been delegated the authority to approve burn plans and Go/No-Go checklists.



**Fire Ecology/Monitoring:** The Regional Fire Ecologist served as chair of the Service National Fire Ecology Team in 2013, and chair of the FWS National Fuels Team for part of the year. The Region continued to develop a fuels treatment and fire effects monitoring framework and protocols based on new national-level guidance and templates. The Fire Ecologist along with Nevada Zone fire staff and the Desert NWR manager did fire effects monitoring on the 2011 “Mormon” fire.

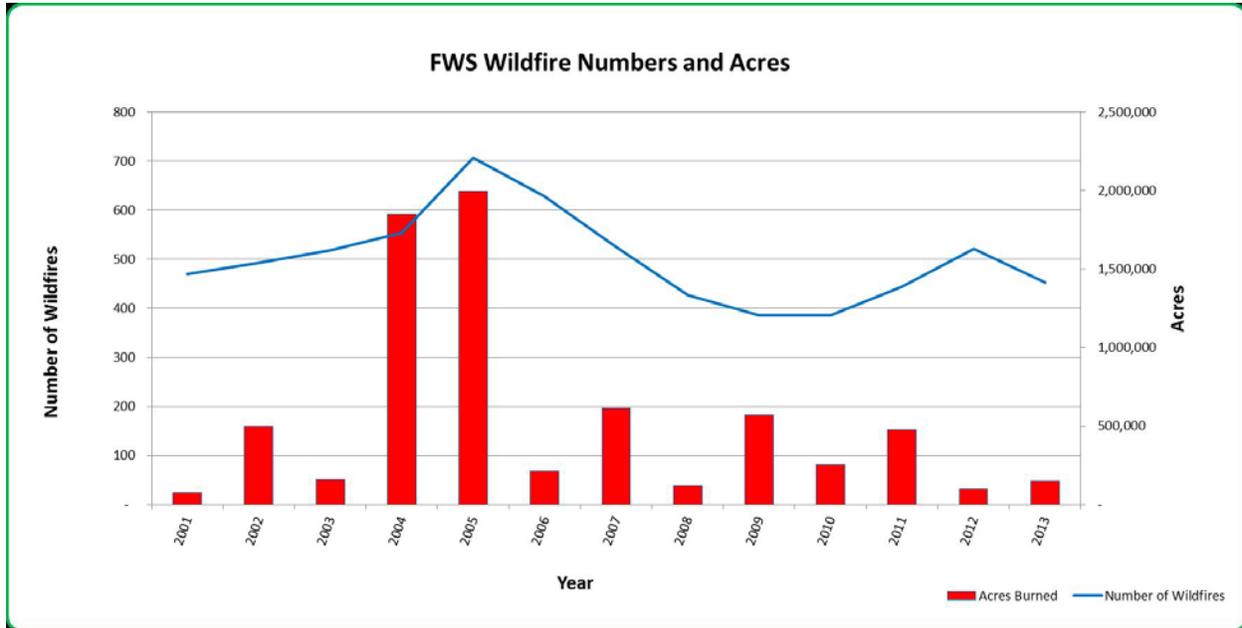
**All-Hazard Incident Response:** While Region 8 staff did not respond to any all-hazard incidents, regional employees continued to maintain qualifications and participated in training exercises including oil spill response to ensure readiness. A draft regional emergency response plan is now in place in the region.

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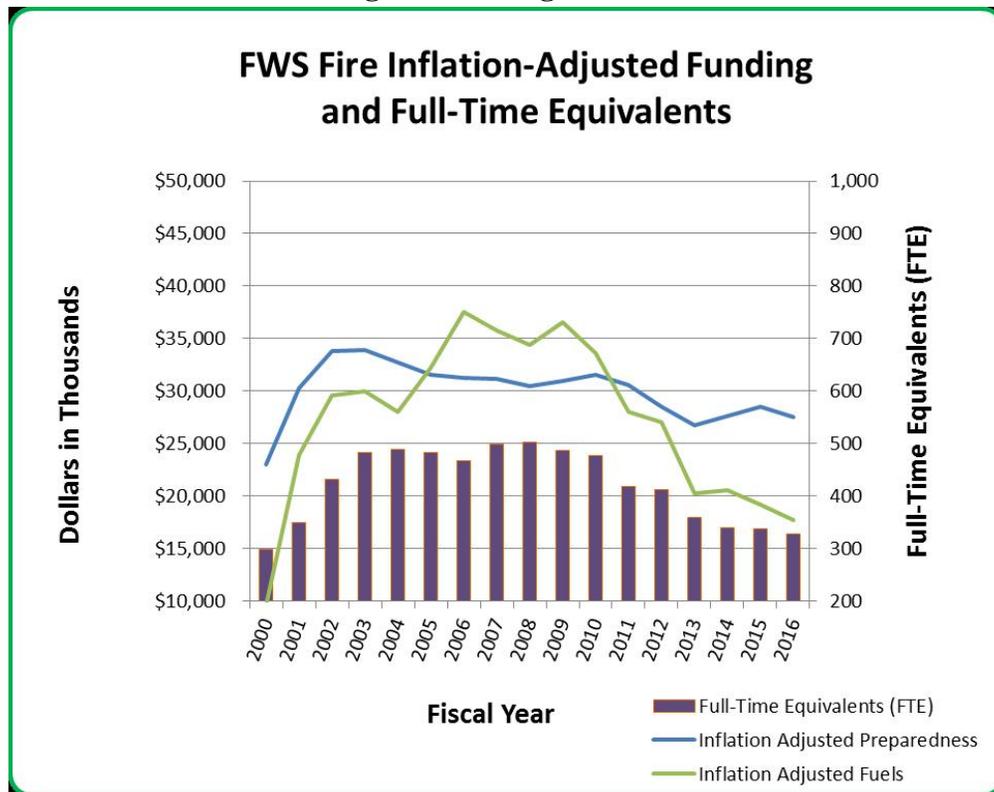
## LONG-TERM TRENDS - Since 2000

The following graphs show trends in the occurrence of wildfires, fire funding and staffing, and fuels treatments on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands over 13+ years, since 2000-2001.

### Wildfires on Service Lands



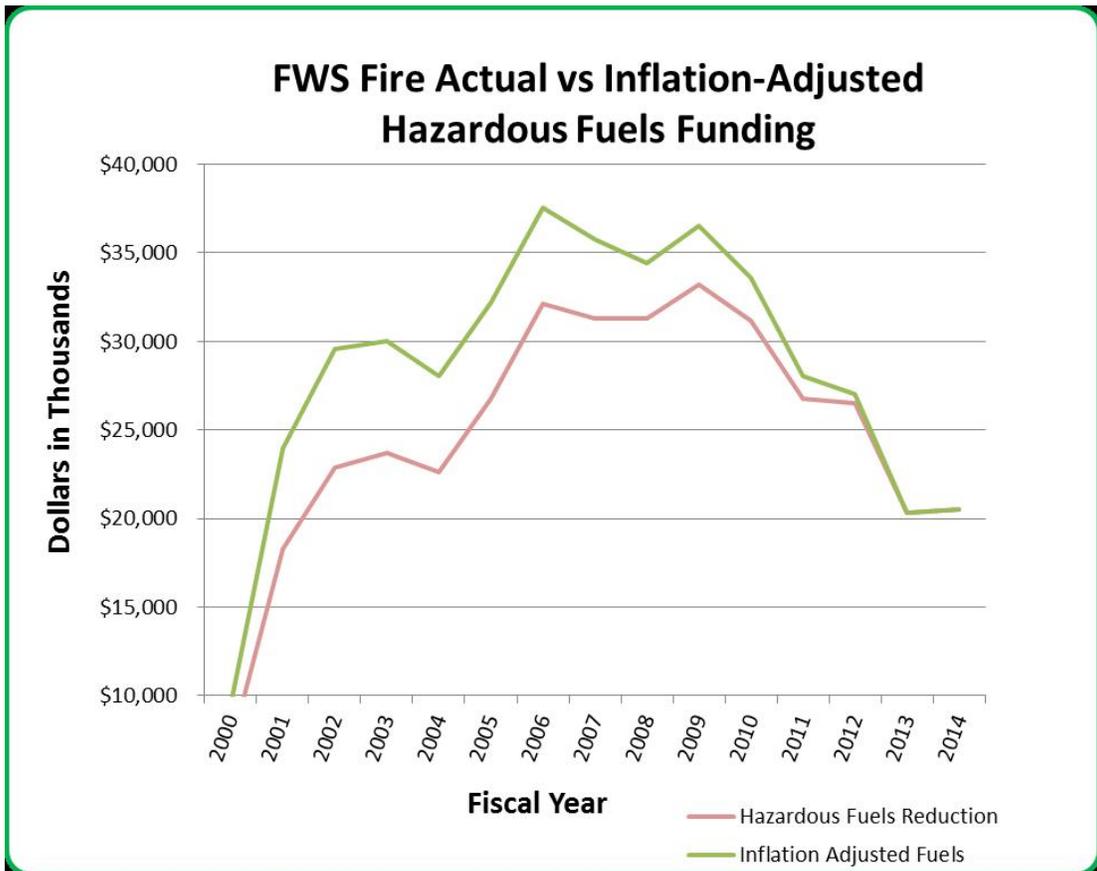
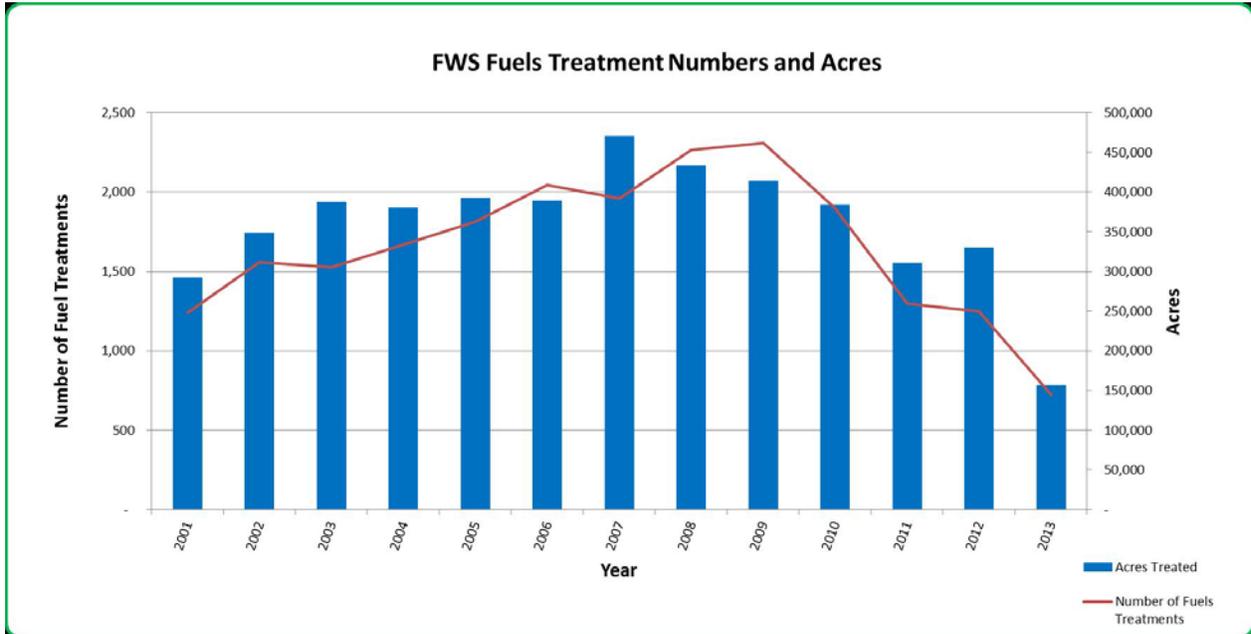
### Fire Funding and Staffing on Service Lands\*



\*2014, 2015 and 2016 projected

*LONG-TERM TRENDS – since 2000, continued*

**Fuels Treatments and Funding on Service Lands**



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### Regional Fire Management Coordinators (FY2014)

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#### Region 8 - California and Nevada (Pacific Southwest)

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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Locations/Numbers of Fire-Funded Staff, FY2014

(Note: Location colors/categories refer to 10-year average wildfire occurrence: Category 1 (red) = 4 or more wildfires/year; Category 2 (yellow) = 2-3 wildfires/year; Category 3 (green) = Less than 2 wildfires/year)

### USFWS: 2014 Fire Funded Staff

