



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Staff Recognized for Safe Response to Flash Flood

A group of seven wildland firefighters stationed at Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Oklahoma were recently awarded the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) National Fire Safety Award for sustained safe performance during flash flood recovery efforts in May 2015.

The Oklahoma/North Texas Fire District operations staff at the time of the flood -- Aaron Roper, T.J. Lowder, Darren Proctor, Howard Boss, Steven Natho, Kimberly Frey, and Derrick Nahill – are professional wildland firefighters who respond to wildfires on the Refuge and elsewhere in the country, and help meet other Refuge management goals.

Weeks of record rainfall in southwest Oklahoma and heavy rain on May 23 (2015) led to severe flooding on and around the Refuge, displacing staff and visitors. The fire staff immediately responded that night by helping other staff and law enforcement close roads into flooded areas.

Over the next week, the group worked with about 30 other responders -- mostly firefighters and other Service staff from Texas and New Mexico -- to conduct damage assessments, clear debris from roads and bridges, and patch damaged fence to keep bison and longhorn on the Refuge.

“I’m extremely proud of our team and their response to this emergency,” stated Aaron Archibeque, Refuge Chief for the Service’s Southwest Region. “Their commitment to the Refuge and its visitors was demonstrated through their hard work and desire to get the Refuge cleaned up and back open to the public as quickly and safely as possible. This award is very well deserved.”

Flood recovery was completed May 31. While wildland firefighters primarily manage fire, this team-oriented workforce is also called upon to help respond to other natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, due to the ability to mobilize quickly and work effectively in dangerous environments. Firefighter and public safety is the top priority wildland fire management.

The award was presented March 22, 2016 at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Fire Management Workshop in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The annual National Fire Safety Award was created by the Service’s national and regional fire management leadership, to recognize outstanding leadership and promote the continual pursuit of a safety culture.

For more information about the Oklahoma/North Texas Fire District, please visit its website at [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Wichita Mountains/resource_mgmt/fire_mgmt.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Wichita_Mountains/resource_mgmt/fire_mgmt.html) or its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/wmwr.fire>.

The Service's wildland fire management program has maintained an exemplary safety record, with no deaths in the line of duty since 1981. For more information about the award, contact Ted Mason at 208-387-5831, Theodore.Mason@fws.gov.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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