

# Giving thanks for the 2006 National Fire Management Workshop

by Doug Newbould

Last week I was privileged to attend and participate in the 2006 National Fire Management Workshop at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. This U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service event brought together national and regional office fire management staff, fire management officers, prescribed fire specialists, wildland-urban interface coordinators and fire planners from every region of the United States. We were joined by the Regional Refuge Chiefs and the Refuge System Division Chiefs, who along with Refuge Managers are those most responsible for the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

I felt a very real sense of honor and pride in spending a week with more than 250 of my brother and sister—wildland firefighters and our leaders, many of whom are unsung American heroes. The workshop theme was “Leadership, Vision and Skills for the Future” and our guiding vision was “We commit to safety and invest in current and future leaders to provide the excellence in Fire Management needed to help fulfill the mission and promise of the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

This was only the second time in our history that FWS fire managers have gathered in one place. The first was in March 1999, when less than 100 gathered in Nevada. Much has changed in the fire management world in the last seven and a half years. In response to global climate change, hazardous accumulations of forest fuels and an ever-increasing wildland-urban interface across the country, wildfire seasons are lasting

longer and burning more structures and acres, and extreme fire seasons are occurring more frequently.

Since 1999, the National Fire Plan (2001), the President’s Healthy Forest Initiative and the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan were developed to guide all public land management agencies in addressing these wildfire and fuels management issues. In the face of these and other changes, a national meeting of some of the best wildland fire management minds in the country—was the right thing to do.

Throughout the week we discussed the strategic issues we all face as fire managers, learned about some of the new technologies and tools we can use, developed a list of fire management priorities and looked at how to become a highly reliable organization. And several times during the week we paid tribute to the 22 wildland firefighters who have perished in the line of duty in 2006.

I saw many old friends for the first time in years and met many new ones as well. I was humbled by the stories of sacrifice and success shared by my peers, and I am thankful and proud to be their brother. And if by chance you meet one of these unsung heroes one day, please remember to thank them for their service to you and the nation.

*Doug Newbould has lived and worked on the Kenai Peninsula since 1991, and involved in Refuge fire management since 1997. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*