



Australian/New Zealand US Wildfire Suppression Deployment 2003

Situation Report Tuesday September 2nd, 2003

The crews have all now experienced at least one day on the job with the 34 operational crews being out on the line for two days. The general trend is for long days on the line due to the difficult access and the long control lines that are required.

Conditions in the camps are a new experience for most crews as the logistics of organizing facilities for 1 000 firefighters is never going to be easy. It is interesting to see a lot of the tasks being contracted out and large scale catering units providing meals to seemingly endless lines of firefighters. These lines are repeated at the showers and also the telephones.

Some crews have been coming in around 2100hrs and families at home may be wondering why they may not have heard from our guys and one girl. Well the lines at the phone can explain that problem.

Most activity on the fire line appears to be in the North West Montana Area Command with the Wedge Canyon Complex and the Blackfoot Lake Complex. Carters, Clark, Bailey, Helleman, Boyd-Law and McCrae are on the Blackfoot Lake and are wearing out their boots and getting some blisters walking some steep and elevated fire lines. Brent Bailey has reported seeing a Chipmunk as being his wildlife highlight so far. The line crews have seen Grizzly bear sign but no bear and that is probably the way they want it to stay. Tony Zofrea reports he has a new vision of what hand crews can do and his crews back in NPWS NSW are in for a shock this fire season.

The Wedge Canyon Complex is only a few miles from the Canadian border and Loy, Mitchell, Murdoch, G. Williams and Geoff Pike are enjoying the views through the smoke. These crews are also spending a long day on the lines as this fire is active with the afternoon inversion change. It must be tough because Phil Murdoch has already requested a new set of boots from Boise!!

The Incident Management Team members are also fitting in well. In the daily briefings to the Multi agency Co-ordinating group Dennis Ward has been presenting the report for Central Montana Area Command. The general feeling was that his Australian accent is

easier to understand than some of those of the Southern US states. Rob Price at the Roberts Fire has been responsible for organising logistics for the Coyote teams. A Coyote team is flown out to a remote section of the line or a new fire and camped on the line for 3-5 days with supplies flown when possible.

The Air Support team has been quick to take up their roles in all locations and most have benefited from being over here before. The team (Vaskess, Franks and Phelps) at Livingstone are supporting the Rough Draw Complex of fires and the Slippery Fire with one Erickson Sky Crane, a Llama and a Bell Long Ranger. They have been conducting cargo support, aerial recon and air support roles. The two Ops Chiefs (Sutton and Hands) have been out on the line regularly. One ATV (4wd Motorbike) has been a casualty of this exposure to the line and perhaps the NZ driving style. The vehicle has conceded defeat. Jenny Burfitt is getting a good introduction to a Type 3 Planning Chief role at the same fire.

The weather forecast remains unhelpful with high temperatures and very low humidities. A feature of these inland mountainous fires that is different to ANZ is the tendency for very low recovery rates overnight. The recovery of moisture from the air by the vegetation has been very slow and subsequently fuels remain very dry and available to burn when the temperatures and winds increase through the day. Fire Weather Specialists at the MAC briefings in Missoula indicate that the values we are seeing are record breaking values for energy release potential for fuels in the Northern Rockies.

A change of sorts is expected on Thursday/Friday but that is likely to bringing increased winds and possible lightning storms. Not the change we were hoping for but longer range forecast show the possibility of some rain between Sunday and next Monday, Tuesday.

The IR group is still very busy in the Boise IR Workshop. The assembly of the base station for linking data from aircraft to the NIFC Computer system at Boise is complete. A couple of portable ground stations have been put together to be sent to the field. After some challenges with the two scanner systems everything is now ready for down linking from the Jet which hopefully will begin its first trials tonight over Montana.

Refer to this website for information on the Australian and New Zealand contingent arrival at NIFC and the deployment Photo Gallery.

<http://www.nifc.gov/>

Refer to this website for more information on fires where the Australian and New Zealand contingent are deployed within the Northern Rockies. Includes maps and incident information.

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/2003fires/>