



Forestry Division
Fire and Aviation

2015 Wildfire Season

Safety, Success, Teamwork



The 2015 fire season posed many challenges while providing new opportunities to improve and work collaboratively with all wildland fire partners. Forest and rangeland fuels were very dry by mid-summer. Once significant lightning storms arrived in August, fire season was in full swing threatening many Montana communities. Concurrently with Montana's activity, numerous large fires in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and other western states significantly stretched the supply of all suppression resources. The DNRC worked within the Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination Group to prioritize wildfire incidents and obtain more engines, crews, helicopters, and incident management teams to meet the ever increasing demand. Utilizing agreements and relationships across other US states and Canadian provinces brought additional resources to bear for the highest priority fires. The Montana Army National Guard and privately contracted equipment and crews were also used extensively. Hard work, long days, and numerous dedicated firefighters brought success and met the challenges of the 2015 fire season while always keeping the number one priority out front: firefighter and public safety. Thank you to all firefighters and everyone who assisted this year in Montana!

- Ted Mead, Fire and Aviation Bureau Chief

Overview

- NO FATALITIES OR SERIOUS INJURIES
- 380 MT DNRC FIRES BURNING 106,898 ACRES
- \$10.9 MILLION ESTIMATED 2015 FIRE COST
- NUMBER OF FIRES THIS YEAR IS 26% ABOVE OUR FIVE YEAR AVERAGE
- ACRES BURNED THIS YEAR IS 18% BELOW OUR FIVE YEAR AVERAGE
- 94% SUCCESS RATE AT KEEPING FIRES <10 ACRES
- 25 COUNTY ASSISTS; 355 DIRECT PROTECTION & 98 MUTUAL AID RESPONSE FIRES
- 17 COUNTIES ENACTED FIRE RESTRICTIONS



Eustis Fire, Central Land Office, Helena Unit, County Assist Team

2015 Wildfire Season

\$10.9 million
Estimated net
fire costs to
the state of
Montana

First Fire: March 9
Last Fire: October 27
Busiest Day: August 14;
18 new fires
Busiest Week: August 10-16;
76 new fires

DNRC protect lives, property and natural resources on state and private lands by providing resources, leadership and coordination to ensure safe and aggressive fire suppression.

Severity funding totaled \$1.67 million

Fire Causes:
63% Person
36% Lightning
1 % Unknown

The Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group was activated on August 15 due to the high volume of large wildfires within the Geographic Area and lack of available firefighting resources. The MAC was composed of representatives from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish Wildlife Service, Park Service, Idaho Department of Lands, US Forest Service, Montana Disaster & Emergency Services, Montana State Fire Chiefs Association, Montana County Fire Wardens Association, Montana Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association, North Dakota Forest Service, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The MAC group met twice daily, once for administrative matters and again to prioritize wildland fire incidents and allocate resources. The MAC group disbanded on September 9th. The last time a geographic MAC group was activated was in 2007.

MT Army National Guard, CH-247 Helicopter



The Northwest Compact in the Northern Rockies is utilized by the DNRC when additional help is needed. Through agreements with neighboring states and Canada the Northwest Compact serves as the instrument to make resources available. In 2015, Alberta provided two initial attack dispatchers, two four-person initial attack modules and one Type I rappel crew with a Type II helicopter.

The Northern Rockies Interagency Incident Management Teams played a vital role in this year's fire season and remained very busy into September. The DNRC is committed to involvement with the Northern Rockies Interagency Incident Management Teams (IMTs). When wildfires exceed local management capabilities, IMTs are called upon to provide assistance. This year Northern Rockies IMTs managed thirty-six incidents compared to twenty-three in 2014. Team assignments totaled 408 days compared to 136 days in 2014. The average assignment length was eleven days. In 2014 the average days on assignment was twelve. There were five assignments in AK, sixteen in MT, one in CA, two in WA, one in OR and eleven in ID.



Monture Hill Fire, Southwestern Land Office, Clearwater Unit

The Montana Army National Guard was activated on August 16, after Governor Bullock issued an executive order declaring a fire emergency in Montana. The National Guard provided two Type I engines, two Black Hawk helicopters and two CH-47 Chinook helicopters along with fuel tenders and numerous support personnel. A total of 171 hours were flown and 1,850,200 gallons of water were dropped by helicopter.

Highlights

March 9 *March 28* *April 22*
1st Fire *Pine Crest Fire* *Harris Creek Rx Burn*

July 3 - Stage I Fire
Restrictions start for
western MT

July 2—26 Graveyard, South Sarpy,
Missouri River Island, Ranch
Creek and Beaver fires

March

April

May

June

July



Holter Complex, Central Land Office, Helena Unit, County Assist Team

The Department of Corrections Type II Hand Crew is possible due to the DNRC and Department of Corrections (DOC) good partnership. This partnership has a long history of cooperation in providing personnel for fire duty dating back to 1969. Currently, DOC provides a Type II fireline hand crew, made up of inmates with both DNRC and DOC supervision. During the fire season of 2015, when resources were hard to come by, this crew played a critical role supporting the suppression efforts for the DNRC and our interagency partners. The crew was assigned for a total of thirty-six days on fourteen different incidents.

The County Assist Team “CAT” is a DNRC sponsored All-Hazard IMT. The team was formed in 1990 to help rural and volunteer fire departments with wildfires when local resources become stretched beyond their capacity.

2015 CAT Assignments

March 28	Pine Crest Fire	3,000 acres	Columbus, MT
July 11	Bales Fire	6,000 acres	Ashland, MT
August 14	Eustis Fire	9,000 acres	Toston, MT
August 30	Holter Complex	750 acres	Wolf Creek, MT

The Equipment Development and Communications Center, in 2015, acquired \$2.8 million worth of federal property, built twenty-five fire engines, one helitack crew carrier, one flatbed puller; fifteen pump heads and thirty pumping platforms which include: flatbed, panels, foam brackets, steps and racks. Of the twenty-five engines the Equipment Development Center built, thirteen engines were delivered to fire departments in Lincoln, Lake, Cascade, Gallatin, Chouteau, Blaine, Prairie, Custer, Ravalli, Yellowstone, Treasure, Granite and Powell Counties as part of the county cooperative program. This year the CAT was assigned to four fires.

Number of fires and acres broken out by DNRC land offices

Central Land Office	49 fires 75,502 acres
Northwestern Land Office	152 fires 649 acres
Southwestern Land Office	159 fires 200 acres
Eastern Land Office	8 fires 12,589 acres
Northeastern Land Office	5 fires 4,848 acres
Southern Land Office	7 fires 13,110 acres



Eustis Fire, Central Land Office, Helena Unit, County Assist Team

August 11—30 Weigel, Dunn, Sunflower, Family Peak Complex, Eustis, Cabin Creek, Adel, Richards Coulee, Trophy Ridge, Squeezer, Holter Complex fires

August 20 - Stage II Fire Restrictions start for western MT

*October 11 Cottonwood Gulch Fire
October 12 Red Rock Fire
October 27 last reported fire*

August

September

October

Safety is always the top priority in the DNRC Fire & Aviation Management Program. During the 2015 fire season, there were thirty-three reports of injury to fire personnel. The majority, fourteen, of the injuries were related to sprains/strains. All of the reported injuries were minor and did not result in significant loss of work time. Reported injuries were across all fire & aviation functions, including aircraft operations, motor vehicles, hiking, use of hand tools and work in fire camp. We will continue to learn from the injuries reported this year and, where possible, take measures to mitigate the risks of these injuries occurring in the future.

DNRC's Top Priority is Safety
33 injuries reported

Cause of Injury/Illness:
Sprains/Strains: 13
Blisters: 1
Heat Related: 4
Insect Bites: 3
Hammer to the Hand: 1
Animal Bite: 1
Injury to the Eye: 5
Slip/Trip/Fall: 1
Allergic Reaction: 1
Hit in the Face: 2
ATV Rollover: 1



Fisher Mountain Fire, Northwestern Land Office, Libby Unit

Aviation had a very busy year, logging over 1,465 flight hours. Our aircraft dropped 2.2 million gallons of water on the fireline, hauled 181,000 pounds of cargo and transported 1,462 firefighters. Five MT-205 helicopters are the work horses of the aviation program. During the summer, these aircraft are stationed in Missoula, Kalispell and Helena, along with two additional MT-205 helicopters



available statewide for initial attack support. The aviation staff is made up of six full-time mechanics; four full-time pilots and fifteen seasonal pilots.

Training in 2015 for DNRC consisted of over 3,100 participants. Participants included: internal employees, local government firefighters, partnering agencies and



Governor Bullock and MT Army National Guard

private individuals who want to learn how to protect their own property. Training courses ranged from introductory wildland firefighting courses to advanced incident management and leadership. Most positions in fire management require an experience based component to training and development. The fire season is the time when individuals who are in training get a chance to observe and practice how the principles they learned in the classroom are applied to a specific fire situation. Task

proficiency is documented in position task books (PTB). During the 2015 fire season, over 100 PTBs were completed.

The Fire Prevention and Community Preparedness program objectives are to raise awareness, be a resource, educate, and change behavior with regards to reducing human caused wildfires and safety in Montana's wildland urban interface. This year's efforts included a statewide Keep Montana Green K-12 art contest with over 2,300 participants from 106 schools, a statewide debris burn media campaign, Wildfire Awareness Month with a multi-state proclamation in May and much more. The DNRC worked with multiple agencies and partners to combine efforts and coordinate a cohesive message. This year's overarching theme was *One Less Spark One Less Wildfire*. The theme was widely used (billboards, radio, social media, vehicle magnets, can cozies, license holders, shooting targets, stickers). The 2015 DNRC Prevention and Preparedness Program reached over 28,000 people alone and collaboratively with other partners another 7,500. This was done through ten workshops, forty school programs, five parades, seven conferences, several statewide media campaigns, media interviews, and news releases. Fire prevention is an integral part of the overall fire program and everyone's efforts lead to a successful year.



Firefighter Challenge & Expo, Libby, Spring 2015