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# THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

Issue 04-13—Nov 2013



Nebraska Forest Service

## Nebraska Wildfire Control Act Update

It's been downright busy since the Nebraska Wildfire Control Act of 2013 was signed into law by the Governor! Here's the latest regarding implementation of the Act.

The **Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) bases** at Miller Field in Valentine, Chadron Municipal

Airport and Alliance Municipal Airport are fully operational. All have been winterized but with just a couple people and a couple hours next spring, they will be up and running again. The mobile SEAT base is also complete. Airports that could support operation of the mobile base

if needed have been identified. Efforts are underway to have necessary information and agreements in place to seamlessly enable the use of the mobile base for the 2014 fire season.

Training has occurred with fire departments near Valentine and other training opportunities are in the planning stages for the 2014 Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy. Classes proposed, but not yet confirmed, are S-273 SEAT Base Manager and possibly a course on coordination of air/ground operations.

In addition, two Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) staff members have initiated position

task books and are working toward national certifications as SEAT Managers. If fire personnel are interested in becoming SEAT Managers, please contact Casey McCoy for more information.

To meet the legislative mandate to "provide

expanded training programs," two

**Fire Management Specialist positions** were recently filled.

Seth Peterson will be based in Valentine and Mike Doherty will be based in Chadron.

We'll introduce them to everyone in the

next issue of *The Rural Firefighter*. In

addition to greatly boosting training capacity, these positions will manage SEAT bases during fire season, provide Firewise/fire prevention outreach and inventory equipment/property on loan to fire departments.

Legislative direction included an **expansion of federal excess property programs** managed by NFS, adding two positions. Glen Curtis (see page three) is the new lead mechanic at the NFS Fire Shop and Darla Huff is our new fire shop project assistant. She will be on board by the time you receive this issue. We'll introduce Darla to everyone in the next issue as well.



The Miller Field SEAT base, along with Tanker 463 earlier this year.

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*The Nebraska Forest Service: Enriching lives by protecting, restoring and utilizing Nebraska's tree and forest resources.*

"Update" continued from page 1

Funding for the NFS **Fuel Reduction** program was expanded with the passage of this legislation. Procedures are already in place to allow this funding to hit the ground running. The funding was also leveraged to apply for matching federal grants, increasing the amount available to Nebraska landowners. The goal is to increase the number of acres treated to reduce fuel available for the next active Nebraska wildland fire season.

Rather than simply disposing (burning) the significant volume of material being removed from Nebraska's forests, NFS is ramping up **wood utilization** programs. In addition to powering wood-fired boilers at Chadron State College and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, there are many other potential uses. All of these markets will be explored and encouraged in support of reducing fuel loads and fire danger.

Even though burned areas may have the look of devastation, some trees survived. These trees will be the seed source for the next Pine Ridge or Niobrara forest. The goal of forest **rehabilitation and restoration efforts** is to reduce the long-term impact on the acres burned, improve the ability of the forest to regenerate itself and lessen the "downstream" impacts of future large rain events such as the one that followed the 1989 Fort Robinson Fire. Details are still being developed for this program.

It's been exciting to see so many new things happening to increase wildland fire suppression capacity in Nebraska. Stay in touch through *The Rural Firefighter* and/or the NFS webpage as these projects continue moving forward. And please contact us with any questions you have.



## Yarnell Hill Fire Investigation Conclusions

No doubt most have heard of the horrific incident that took place within the Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona on June 30, 2013. In addition to losing over 100 homes, 19 of the 20 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots, the only municipally sponsored hotshot crew in the nation, were killed in a burnover.

While we will never know the full story, as the only people who do know are no longer with us, the investigation does offer some insight. The lessons learned came at an unbelievably high price and we would all do well to heed them. Here are a few of the conclusions (with emphasis added) drawn by the investigation team. The full report is at <https://sites.google.com/site/yarnellreport/>

- The Granite Mountain IHC was a fully **qualified, staffed and trained** hotshot crew. They were current with the required training and met work/rest guidelines.

- The Yarnell Hill area had not experienced wildfire in over 45 years.

- Although Yavapai County had a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, **many structures were not defensible** by firefighters responding to the Yarnell Hill Fire.

- Radio **communications were challenging** throughout the incident. Radio traffic was heavy during critical times on the fire.

- The fire's **complexity increased in a very short time**, challenging all firefighting resources to keep pace with the rapidly expanding incident. As complexity dramatically increased starting Saturday evening, fire management went through multiple transitions from a Type 4 through a Type 1 incident in fewer than 20 hours.

- The Granite Mountain IHC **did not perceive** excessive risk in repositioning to Boulder Springs Ranch.

- The Team found no indication that the Granite Mountain IHC doubted the black was a valid safety zone, or that they moved toward the Boulder Springs Ranch because they feared for their safety if they stayed in the black.

- Based on radio conversations, Operations and other resources had concluded the Granite Mountain IHC was located in the black.

- During some limited times, aircraft were not available due to adverse weather and refueling needs.

- At the time of the shelter deployment, a very large airtanker was on station over the fire waiting to drop retardant as soon as the crew's location was determined.



- The judgments and decisions of the incident management organizations managing this fire were reasonable. Firefighters performed within their scope of duty, as defined by their respective organizations.

The Yarnell Hill Fire fatalities illustrate why training is essential to firefighters. Even highly trained firefighters can make mistakes. Few of us will face fire behavior of this magnitude often enough to develop "mental slide sets" that enable us to deal with it effectively. Training will help bridge that gap. Don't allow "we didn't train" to be the first mistake.



## New Face at NFS Wildland Fire Protection

Glen Curtis has joined the staff as the new Lead Mechanic/Shop Foreman. Recently retired from the Nebraska National Guard, Glen comes with 28 years of maintenance experience and a willingness to get the job done.



Glen and his wife Debra live in Papillion, Neb. with their two daughters nearby. His former shop in the National Guard is only two miles down the road from the fire shop, so his car already knows the way and Glen has settled in very quickly.

As always, for your maintenance needs, call the shop anytime at 402.624.8061 to speak to Glen directly.



### *Nugget of the Day*

**The art of leadership is saying no, not saying yes.**

**It is very easy to say yes.**

**~ Tony Blair**

## 2013 Wildfire Training Year in Review

Given the extreme 2012 fire season, the 2013 fire training season was busier than any in recent memory. Although the year isn't over, here's a look at wildfire training offered in 2013.

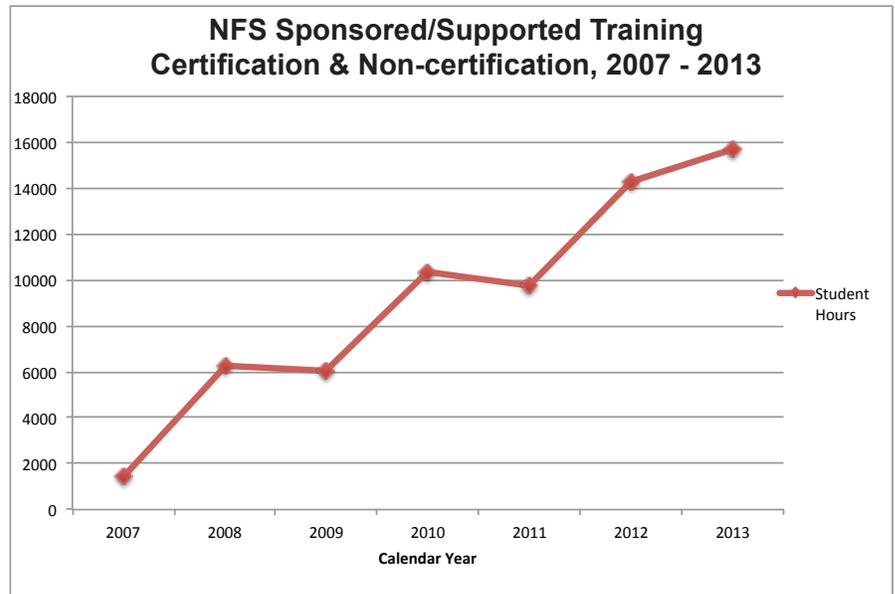
Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) delivers a variety of training, directly and through our partners. NFS supports partner delivery of certification courses by providing student materials, course logistics, registration and/or coordination and, for the Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy and some individual courses, financial support (lodging, meals, wages). Emphasis is placed on wildfire training that enables a firefighter to be nationally certified, but NFS and our partners also offer wildland fire management courses that do not lead to certification.

Delivery Method (2013)	Hours	Students	Training Hours*
NFS direct delivery (certification)	244	217	5,468
Partner delivery (certification) **			
- State Fire Marshal Training Div.	96	249	2,953
- Other partners (NEMA, USFS, etc)	288	333	4,776
Non-certification (NFS delivery only)	62	648	4,571

\* "Training Hours" is the sum of the no. of students multiplied by the no. of hrs. in an individual class.

\*\* Training submitted for firefighter red card records, not all sponsored/supported by NFS.

Overall, NFS wildland fire training has grown considerably since 2007. This year was unique in that the "fall off" from previous high years did not occur. The new NFS Fire Management Specialist positions (see story page 1) will deliver a significant amount of training, increasing training available to fire departments. If you need wildland fire training, please don't hesitate to give us a call!



### Calendar of Events

Feb. 8-10  
Apr 26-May 4

Les Lukert Winter Conference, Kearney  
Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy, Fort Robinson State Park, Crawford

May 16-18  
June 2014

Nebraska State Fire School, Grand Island  
Nebraska Wildfire Awareness Month

For additional wildfire training, visit [nfs.unl.edu](http://nfs.unl.edu)

## Sandy's Corner



Well, it is finally time for me to say g o o d - b y e and thank you to all of

you. On Thursday, Oct. 3, at 5:00 p.m., I closed the door of Forestry Hall and began a walk down a different path, retirement, one I hope will bring me just as much happiness as this job has brought me. I've been a part of Forestry Fisheries & Wildlife and the Nebraska Forest Service for nearly 33 years, and I can honestly say I have enjoyed my job each and every day.

The last 20 of those years have been spent with you, Fire Control and Excess Property, and up until a few years ago Fire Prevention, in addition to being the staff assistant to the State Forester. I've

begged, hounded, pleaded for fire reports, checks, contracts and MOUs from most of you during that time. I've made friends with many of you along the way and had a lot of fun.

Being brought up in a small town environment, I could relate very much to the many hours and sacrifices you have made for your community. I've appreciated each and every one of you and I'm going to miss our conversations and our interaction at Fire School.

Anytime an employee leaves at the University, it is time to reevaluate positions. Duties are being "switched, moved and combined in a variety of ways." It will take a while for everything to fall in place, but it will eventually. I'm asking for your patience in this transfer of duties. Best wishes to all of you. It has truly been a joy and my privilege to have had the opportunity to work with all of you. We made a good team, didn't we? I am going to miss all of you.

God speed and stay safe. ---sandy

P.S. If you haven't gotten your fire reports in, please do before the end of this year. We've been very fortunate this year not to have many fires, but we still need to record those we do have.

*Editor's Note: Sandy was much more than a "staff assistant." She was the glue holding the front office together. She was the voice on the other end of the line. No doubt for many of you, what may have started as an information update at Fire School or a call about a fire report turned into an opportunity to talk with a genuinely good person. We will surely miss her and wish her all the best in retirement.*



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