

Western Great Basin 2000 Fire Season Overview

Weather and Fuels

La Nina continued to dominate the area through the fall and winter of 1999-2000. Temperatures in much of Nevada from September through April were the warmest on record. After a very dry autumn, precipitation amounts from mid-January through February were in the normal range, but a dry March left snow pack levels below normal in all but extreme western Nevada (Sierra Front). With snow confined to the upper elevations, there was little to no compaction of the grasses, while heavy loadings of residual fine fuels remained throughout most of northern Nevada.

Early snow melt and light precipitation in mid-April influenced growth in the annual grasses, with green-up being reported up to the 6,500 ft. level statewide about a month ahead of normal. Precipitation in early May resulted in a second heavy crop of cheatgrass, but then warm temperatures combined with dry, windy surface conditions, causing the fine fuels to dry quickly. This trend was especially apparent in southern Nevada, where burning conditions were 4-6 weeks ahead of schedule and both live and dead fuels up to 6 inches in diameter were being totally consumed.

Southern and eastern Nevada entered the season with 50-66% of normal precipitation for the water year. 1,000 hr. fuel moisture values were below normal statewide. By the end of June, most of the fine fuels had already cured, with significantly below average moisture readings also being reported in the live fuels. New all-time maximum ERC and BI values were created as the severity of fuel conditions surpassed the 1999 season.

Although La Nina was dissipating, it still shifted the potential wet weather systems further to the east, directing the monsoonal flow away from Nevada for most of the summer. Weather conditions throughout the season were both hotter and drier than normal, while recurring high-based lightning storms brought little precipitation. Cloudy skies, cooler temperatures, and higher humidities at the end of August helped to moderate fire activity, while significant amounts of rain in southern and eastern Nevada effectively brought an end to the fire season in those areas.

Large Fire Activity

Due to the severe weather and fuel conditions that were prevalent during 2000, fire activity through the end of July outpaced the 1999 season statistics (151% of the fires, 122% of the acres, and 144% of the large fires had been reported). Ultimately, however, the 2000 season resulted in fewer total acres burned because the widespread, severe dry lightning that overwhelmed firefighting resources in early August of 1999 did not materialize in 2000.

The first large fire (and team mobilization) of the year began on June 3rd in the southern portion of the Humboldt-Toiyabe NF. From late June through mid August, large fire activity remained steady. The last large fire of the season was controlled on October 23rd. By that date, 85 large fires had burned a total of 494,034 acres (all agencies plus private). All but 13 of these fires were

lightning caused. This compares to an average of 59 large fires occurring each year from 1995 to 1999. As is generally the case, large fires make up the majority of the total acreage burned; in 2000, large fires accounted for 70% of the total acres burned.

Incident Management Teams

Roughly two-thirds as many team mobilizations occurred within the Western Great Basin Area in 2000 as in 1999. In all, 18 Type 2 Incident Management Team assignments occurred, while 3 Type 1 Teams also saw assignments within the Area. Teams from outside of the Great Basin filled 6 of these assignments (for a total of 43 days), and the 2 Western Great Basin IMTs filled 7 of the assignments (for a total of 54 days).

The national demand for and shortage of Incident Management Teams was a factor in the number of assignments that occurred; if not for the shortage, more team assignments might have taken place within the Area.

Western Great Basin incidents with Incident Management Teams assigned can be broken down as follows:

<u>Agency</u>	<u># of Large Fires</u>	<u># of Team Assignments</u>
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	70	16
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)	10	4
Nevada (State) Division of Forestry (NDF)	2	1
BIA/Tribe	1	0
Department of Defense (DoD)	1	0
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS)	1	0

Historical Comparison

The 2000 season ranks third (behind 1999 and 1996) among the past 15 years for the largest number of acres affected by fire. At 1,171, the total number of fires was 131% of the 5-year average of 895 fires, while the total of 699,210 acres burned was 122% of the 5-year average of 574,992 acres.

Fire Rehabilitation Efforts

As in 1999, Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Teams were used to assess the fire damage and provide recommendations for mitigation and restoration in accordance with existing land management plans. Though the resource damage which resulted in 2000 was not as extensive as that seen in 1999, it still raised concerns that cheatgrass and other exotic species would continue to spread, native grasses and plants would decrease, and erosion and riparian area damage would result. The first seed contract was awarded for a total of 1.74 million pounds, covering 237,657 acres.