

Western Great Basin 2001 Fire Season Overview

Weather and Fuels

For most of Nevada, 2001 was the driest water year since the 1870's. In the western third of the state, precipitation and snow pack amounts for October through March were less than 70% of normal. The exception to this pattern was southern Nevada, where water totals were 132% of normal for the same period. The other major weather factor influencing the 2001 season was the continued warm temperatures, which sometimes were up to 10 degrees above normal. It was the third year in a row for such warm, dry conditions.

With snow accumulations limited and, once again, confined to the upper elevations, there was minimal compaction of the grasses, and residual loadings of fine fuels remained throughout much of northern Nevada. Windy conditions combined with record high temperatures and well below normal relative humidity values in May to dry out the fuels at a rapid rate. By early June, the fine fuels had cured below the 6,000 ft. level (about a month ahead of normal). Campfire and smoking restrictions went into effect June 11th, 4-5 weeks earlier than usual. Reports from the Warrior fire in late May were that fire behavior was more typical of August.

A very heavy crop of annual grasses and forbs in southeastern and extreme southern Nevada created concern for a severe fire season in those areas, but monsoonal flow brought significant amounts of rain in early July, dramatically reducing fire activity for the remainder of the season.

Northern Nevada remained in a deficit precipitation situation throughout the season. From mid-June into October, NFDRS Burning Indices at most of the stations throughout northern Nevada were at or near maximum levels, and all fuels supported very active fire spread and high resistance to control. Although fuel conditions remained conducive to large fire activity into October, fire occurrence tapered off as the number of ignitions decreased, the days became shorter, and the nights became cooler and more humid.

Large Fire Activity

With heavy fire activity occurring throughout the West, fewer resources were available for repositioning and active fires again this year. Despite this, initial attack efforts were successful 95% of the time, with only 5% of the fires reaching 300+ acres in size.

All but 5 of this year's large fires were lightning caused. The first large fire of the year began May 11th on Carson City BLM land. After one more large fire in late May, there was a lull in large fire activity until the first week of July, when dry lightning touched off numerous large fires in northern Nevada. The greatest concentration (40%) of large fire activity occurred as a result of lightning during the 2-week period from August 6-19. These fires were responsible for 457,060 acres burned, 75% of the total acreage burned by large fires during the entire season. The last large fire of the season was contained on September 22nd. By that date, 69 large fires had burned a total of 601,485 acres (all agencies plus private). This compares to an average of 71 large fires occurring each year from 1996 to 2000. As is generally the case, large fires make up the majority of the total acreage burned; in 2001, large fires accounted for 92% of the total acres burned.

Large fire workload by dispatch center was as follows:

<u>Dispatch Center</u>	<u># of Large Fires</u>	<u># of Acres Burned</u>
Elko Interagency Dispatch Center	26	301,402
Central Nevada Interagency Dispatch Center	24	236,961
Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center	7	44,886
Ely Interagency Communication Center	12	18,236

Incident Management Teams

Three-quarters as many Incident Management Team (IMT) mobilizations occurred within the Western Great Basin Area in 2001 as in 2000, and IMT use was at roughly half the level seen in 1999. In all, 15 Type 2 IMT assignments occurred, but there were no Type 1 IMT assignments within the Area. Teams from outside of the Great Basin filled 2 of these assignments (for a total of 10 days), and the 2 Western Great Basin IMTs filled 7 of the assignments (for a total of 53 days).

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)	53	11
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)	5	3
Nevada (State) Division of Forestry (NDF)	8	0
BIA/Tribe	2	1
National Park Service (NPS)	1	0

Historical Comparison

The 2001 season ranks fourth (behind 1999, 1996 and 2000) among the past 15 years for the largest number of acres affected by fire. At 1,277, the total number of fires was 125% of the 5-year average of 1,021 fires, while the total of 654,253 acres burned was 94% of the 5-year average of 699,316 acres.

Fire Rehabilitation Efforts

In 2001, Bumed Area Emergency Rehabilitation Teams were formed at 4 Field Offices to develop mitigation and rehabilitation plans for 74 fires. Resource damages in total acres were similar to the 2000 fire season, with a total of 204,430 acres planned for re-seeding. The mild and wet conditions expected for the Winter and Spring of 2002 should create optimum growing conditions to support re-seeding efforts, as well as continuing to support the rehabilitation efforts of 2000 and 2001.