The men and women who battle America's wildland blazes

Defending America's Great Outdoors

Nearing each month of every year, somewhere in the United States, wildland firefighters are called to defend the nation's precious natural resource, America's extensive wildland areas. Each year, firefighters are called on to fight against fires in areas ranging from the Rocky Mountains to the Florida Everglades, from the deserts of the West to the forests of the East. These dedicated men and women are called to defend the nation's natural resources from the ravages of uncontrolled wildfires.

Making The Tough Calls

In the United States, there are nearly 400,000 volunteers and professionals who make up the nation's wildland fire management workforce. These firefighters are called to defend the nation's natural resources from the ravages of uncontrolled wildfires.

ON THE LINE OF FIRE

The Right Stuff

Wildland firefighters reflect the rich diversity of America's population. Men and women from all walks of life, from all cultures, and all parts of the country, all cultures, and all walks of life have chosen to work as firefighters for the various state and federal government agencies charged with wildland fire suppression responsibilities. Although wildland firefighters come from different backgrounds, most have two things in common--love of the outdoors and an ability to endure challenging working and living conditions.

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Firefighters Need Your Help

You can help protect the nation's wildlands, and ensure that the time and energy of America's wildland firefighters is well spent, by doing your part to prevent wildfires when you visit the outdoors:

- Find out about fire conditions before you visit an area and strictly observe any restrictions that may be in effect.
- Clear all vegetation and debris within ten feet of your campfire before you light it.
- Keep a shovel or bucket on hand in case your campfire starts to get out of control.
- Make a mud puddle out of your campfire when you put it out by stirring water and dirt into coals with a shovel or stick. Make sure the fire is "dead out" before you leave - the ashes should be cold enough to touch with your hands.
- Don't park your car, truck, or recreational vehicle on dry grass or brush even for a minute. The exhaust system on a vehicle can reach a temperature of more than 1,000 degrees. It only takes 500 degrees to start a wildfire in fire season.
- Put out cigarettes, cigars, or pipes only in cleared areas free of vegetation or debris.
- Use approved spark arresters on chain saws, off-road vehicles, and other internal combustion powered equipment. This screen, that fits between the exhaust port of the piston and the muffler, helps ensure that sparks generated by vehicles and equipment don't start wildfires.
- Never use fireworks in wildland areas.

For more information about how to prevent wildfires, contact your nearest state or federal wildland fire agency.
Helitack crews - Helicopter Attack, or “Helitack,” crews are specially trained in the tactical and logistical use of helicopters in fire suppression. They typically consist of between 3 and 10 firefighters, depending on the local situation and the type of helicopter. Because helitack crews can be rapidly deployed, they are often the first to respond to a wildfire. After sizing up the situation and reporting to the home unit from the air, the helicopter usually lands and the crew attacks the fire. If the helicopter cannot land due to rough terrain or the presence of trees and other obstacles, firefighters may rappel, or descend on specialized equipment, to start fighting the blaze.

Smokejumpers - These airborne firefighters parachute from planes to attack wildfires in remote and inaccessible areas when they first start. The nearly 400 smokejumpers in the United States, based in Alaska, Montana, Idaho, California, and Washington, are highly skilled and mobile. They may be called to fight fires all over the country when assistance is needed. Smokejumpers are often supported by para-cargo drops of personal gear, food, water, and specialized equipment to help them suppress blazes.

Bulldozers and Tractor Plows - Tracked vehicles with plows for clearing vegetation and mechanical equipment can build fireline faster and more efficiently than human firefighters. However, because bulldozers, tractors, and plows leave significant impacts on the land, they cannot be used in environmentally sensitive areas. Some vehicles also carry water to douse wildfires and equipment to burn out.
Incident Management Teams - These teams consist of fire managers whose primary responsibility is to develop and implement strategies to suppress wildfires and provide the food, equipment, transportation, and other goods and services that wildland firefighters need. There are four types of incident management teams, ranging from small, local teams of three to five fire managers which supervise fire suppression when a blaze first starts to large, national teams of about 35 fire managers that oversee the most difficult, complex wildfires in the country.

If You Live In Wildfire Country
Give wildland firefighters a "fighting chance" by making your home as defensible as possible if you live in an area that is subject to wildfires:

- Remove leaves, brush, and dry grass within 30 feet of your house and other structures and clear a space of at least 10 feet around them.
- Post your address along the roadway entrance as well as on the house. Numbers should be at least four inches tall and mounted on a high, contrast, noncombustible background material.
- Apply a fire retardant solution, such as phosphate salt, to wood shingle and shake roofs.
- Clean your roof and rain gutters regularly, keeping them free of twigs, leaves, and pine needles.
- Remove all tree limbs within 10 feet of your chimney or stove pipe.
- Store flammable and other combustible materials like picnic tables at least 30 feet away from your house and other structures.
- Keep a space of at least 10 feet around them.
- Post your address along the road at the driveway entrance as well as on the home. Numbers should be at least four inches tall and mounted on a high, contrast, noncombustible background material.
- Apply a fire retardant solution, such as phosphate salt, to wood shingle and shake roofs.

Firefighting Tools of the Trade

- Fire Shovel - These shovels, specifically designed for fireline, feature a tapered blade with both cutting, and throwing dirt.
- Pulaski - Firefighters use this tool, which combines a single-bitted axe blade for chopping with a narrow sawback for sawing, digging, grubbing, clearing, and throwing dirt.
- Fire Pack - Firefighters use these to carry tools, equipment, and supplies on their backs.
- Fire Shelters - Firefighters use this personal protection item as a last resort if a wildfire traps them and they cannot escape. Fire shelters can get you into the near-term shelter, made of heat reflective material, in about 25 seconds.
- Helicopters - Helicopters fitted with fixed tanks or suspended buckets that range in size from 100 to 2,200 gallons also support firefighters on the ground by dropping water, foam, or retardant on flaming trees, brush, and tree carcasses to cut fire spots and prevent a fire from spreading. Helicopters also drop water and/or chemical retardants to construct "wet line," a fireline designed to slow low intensity blazes, and start fires in burn out operations.
- Air Tankers - These large planes, fitted with tanks, provide direct support to firegrounds on the ground by dropping up to several thousand gallons of water or chemical retardant ahead of an advancing wildfire. The retardant, a red liquid that contains phosphate fertilizers, helps slow and cool down the fire, buying time for firefighters to build fireline.
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