

FIRE HISTORY AND RESEARCH
BIG BAR RANGER DISTRICT
NORTHWESTERN TRINITY COUNTY
CALIFORNIA

Critique of Fire Suppression Practices

REPORT TO CONGRESSMAN WALLY HERGER

October 2008

by

Concerned Citizens for Responsible Fire Management

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* added after October 10 meeting with Congressman Herger

Concerned Citizens for
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October 10, 2008
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Honorable Wally Herger
House of Representatives
410 Hemsted Drive, Suite 115
Redding, CA 96002

Dear Wally:

We seriously appreciate your taking the time to meet with us and we hope what we have to offer will, in turn, be seriously considered by you. This letter explains our observations and also explains the enclosures and attachments for you to look over, documents and articles that support our analysis that the radical change in fire suppression tactics from several years ago is the primary reason there are more large fires now. The letter also brings out points we think the Forest Service will refer to in explanation or as an excuse for failures in fire management. If these management policies in suppression are not addressed and changed, then we can look forward to the same catastrophic fire scenario each summer until our Trinity forest is no longer a forest.

Our committee focuses primarily on the management of fires by the U.S. Forest Service and those other agencies which are part of the Incident Command teams. We believe we can show a lack of responsible suppression policies and actions. These management practices in the past several years have caused great damage and negative impacts to private property (timber, watersheds, water lines), the local economy, watersheds and soils, wildlife, aesthetics, cultural resources, and air quality—sometimes in radical proportions. Safety in firefighting is also challenged. When fires continue for such long periods of time, there is increased potential for accidents and, yes, fatalities.

We strongly believe an investigation should be conducted into this very complex and crucial situation.

Forest Service "Talking Points"

Mark Rey, Undersecretary of Agriculture who oversees the Forest Service attended a meeting in Weaverville on Friday, September 19, 2008, with the Board of Supervisors and a group of people concerned with the recent fires. The group, which also included Shasta-Trinity National Forest Supervisor Sharon Heywood, also visited a couple of field locations and Rey additionally was taken on a helicopter flight over some of the fire areas. Rey and Heywood made several statements we would disagree with. In this letter we would like to specifically address these statements as we believe these are the "talking points" or excuses the Forest Service will also use when you ask that agency's staff about these things.

1. The June 21, 2008 thunderstorm and resulting hundreds of fires was unprecedented. (Rey) [Interpretation: The continuing burning of the fires is not the fault of the Forest Service fire suppression practices, but only Mother Nature.]

It is realized this started as an unusual and unprecedented natural phenomenon. We know that similar large-scale lightning strikes and resulting fires did happen before but not quite to this scale. One member of our committee remembers an instance in the early 1980s when the Stanislaus National Forest experienced 130 fires in one weekend. One of its districts, the Calaveras, experienced about 35 fires from one storm. Here in Trinity County, the Big Bar District matched this or has been close.

Even though the fires were unprecedented in numbers for one storm episode over such a large area in northern California this past summer, we did get resources, although in smaller numbers the first couple of weeks. Eighty to ninety percent of all Forest Service firefighters nationwide and 21,000 firefighters total were in California during this time.

Rey stated that the magnitude of these lightning fires drained firefighting resources which required using a triage system to prioritize fires. It is recognized using the Forest Service triage process that these fires in Trinity County were low priority, since fires burning in heavier populated areas took priority over the fires here.

What was not considered in their triage process was that if you leave these fires unattended they will become your “worst nightmare.”

Fire suppression on the Trinity side of this forest has always been a challenge. Steep, rugged terrain and heavy fuel loads require that all fires, including those in the wilderness, get immediate attention and be controlled while still small.

It also requires skilled, knowledgeable, and physically fit fire personnel to attack and control fires in this area.

We do not know what system the Mad River Ranger District on the neighboring Six Rivers National Forest used during this event; whatever it was, it worked at suppressing 28 fires at a total of 3,700 acres. This is compared with the 105,555 acres on the Iron and Alps Complex (Big Bar District) and about 98,715 on the Lime Complex (Hayfork District). The Mad River District is in an even more remote area than Big Bar and may have been a lot further down the triage list.

Most of the fires on the Big Bar District, those in the Iron and Alps Complex, crept along the first several days and even the first few weeks—with exception of when the Eagle Fire hit some heavy dry fuels during a wind and swept from the Eagle Creek area over toward Junction City, and the beginning of the Zeigler Fire when it started in a more flammable area.

Once enough resources were available, they should have been used to put out those fires which held the larger potential of spreading and causing damage.

This could have been accomplished if more aggressive actions, such as were widely and effectively used several years ago, had been taken.

The group of fires that made up the Eagle Fire was created from five individual lightning strikes. Three of these were within a mile of each other. A road system to the Eagle Ranch provides access to the area where these fires were. Initially, these fires were named the Eagle, Cadillac and Sailor fires. The Pigeon Fire (not to be confused with the similar-named fire of 2006) which was south of the Trinity River, across from Pigeon Point, was approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile up Miller Creek and accessible from Highway 299 near Pigeon Point. The Hocker Fire which was nearest to Junction City was near Forest Road 33N29, "A" Spur, which was very accessible and easy to get to. These fires should have been a priority and had they been dealt with in the first few days, could have been extinguished, eliminating the threat to the Junction City area which would have then precluded the manmade burn outs and the evacuation of the community.

The Chaparral, Canadian, and Cedar fires, which eventually became the Cedar Fire, were also close to road systems which should have allowed easy, fast access to them. The Monument Fire just to the east of these three was also close to a road and located near a ridge top. Had these fires been attacked early on, there may not have been the need for the large burn outs that damaged water systems at Big Bar and Junction City, and over 10 million board feet of timber on private land. There would have been no evacuations of Big Bar and Corral Bottom.

Fires north of the Trinity River outside the Trinity Alps Wilderness were not a large threat to private lands or structures in the beginning, but, left burning, did destroy a small cabin in Big French Creek. The fires burned together and became the Buckhorn Fire, eventually burning all the way to Highway 299 and threatening the Big Bar, Big Flat, and Del Loma communities.

Frank Walden, a resident of Prairie Creek, lost a hydroelectric system and a pipeline supplying water to his property. According to him, this was due to one of the burn outs set near his property, damages he values at approximately \$150,000.

Again, many of these roads were near road systems and could have been suppressed easily had manpower and equipment been made available early on.

Fires in the wilderness were the hardest to attack because of the remote areas they were in and lack of a road system to access them. These fires were put on the back burner because of their locations and low public risk. After the fires had been established and had spread, man power finally became available to attack them. The wilderness fire that burned the longest and largest was the Carey Fire which covered much of the Old Denny Historic District in the upper New River watershed, burning 3,698 acres.

The Forest Service's MIST system—"Minimal Impact Suppression Tactics"—requires a "light hand on the land." It also means not using regular suppression tactics used outside the wilderness, such as aircraft, chainsaws, and portable pumps.

The MIST tactics are fine when a fire is small and a crew can be placed on it immediately to monitor on-site conditions. These fires can then be allowed to burn in the right type of fuels and favorable weather conditions. When they are not attended to early on, they are just as hazardous as fires outside the wilderness and require aggressive action to control.

Historically, large fires in the Trinity Alps Wilderness—especially in the western portion on the Big Bar District—have been extremely hard and very costly to suppress, so it makes sense to suppress them when they are small. The Forest Service helicopter rappel crews are ideal for these types of missions.

Again, Rey stated during his September 19 presentation that nothing has changed in suppression tactics and the difference was from the unprecedented nature of the 2008 fires, weather, and fuel conditions. He was not correct—tactics have changed.

It appears that liability fears, developed in part from fatalities suffered in recent years, have had a lot to do with the way fires are handled now. The fire suppression organization has been adversely affected due to retirement of many of the older, more experienced people in the last 20 years. This has left a void in the top incident command management positions as well as in line personnel. As I was leaving the organization in 1990, it was trying to fill positions in fire management with people who did not necessarily have the knowledge and experience, but had the ability to gain the knowledge to do the job. In many positions this may be okay, but not in fire suppression positions where it is imperative that the person already have the skills and knowledge for the job. This was certainly due to be a failure from the beginning and has probably contributed to some of the fatalities in recent years. You cannot just attend a training class and then become qualified to do a fire suppression job. It requires numerous training assignments under the direction of a highly qualified person to gain the knowledge before becoming qualified to strike out on your own.

2. The goal of fire suppression is to have 98% of the fires put out on initial attack and, according to Mark Rey, they are doing just that.

Nation-wide maybe this is true. Locally, no. California annually has more fires and more acres burned. Ninety-eight percent of the fires in California and in Trinity were not put out on initial attack.

3. Nothing has changed in suppression actions, the difference here is due to weather conditions. Mark Rey said that the agency's climatological data shows the first part of the past century was wetter than the last half and this lends to increased flammability now.

Suppression actions have changed, radically—and the weather conditions in this part of California do not seem to be much different from earlier years as Rey suggests. As already mentioned, the fires mostly burned slowly during the first part of the many weeks of wild fire and burn outs, fairly normal for this area and

time of year. Attached is rainfall data for the Big Bar Ranger Station which shows little if any change in patterns of rainfall amounts since 1913.

The June 21, 2008, event started 35 fires on the Big Bar Ranger District. Total acreage burned at the conclusion of this event, 81 days later, was approximately 105,555.

During the July Fourth weekend of 1976, a dry lightning storm that was widespread over Trinity and Shasta counties produced 28 lightning fires on the Big Bar Ranger District. These fires were controlled in five days, mostly with local forces. The largest of these fires was eight acres, and the smallest, a single snag.

Rainfall for 1975-76 was 27.96 inches, well below the average for this area. Rainfall for 2007-08 was 31.25. Our last rainfall this summer was in late May, less than a month before the June 21 thunderstorm.

**2007-08 Rainfall
Big Bar Ranger Station**

Month	Amount in Inches
July 2007	0.20
Aug. 2007	0.01
Sept. 2007	0.00
Oct. 2007	4.54
Nov. 2007	1.22
Dec. 2007	5.65
Jan. 2008	10.69
Feb. 2008	5.04
Mar. 2008	1.49
Apr. 2008	.78
May 2008	1.03
Jun. 2008	0.00
Total	31.25"

Big Bar Weather Station
BGB on website http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow_rain.html

Our experience in this area—over many years of time—and our familiarity with the area’s history, tell us that climate change was not the cause of the catastrophic fires this summer.

Certain ways of planning and fighting fires that proved efficient and effective some years ago, don’t seem to be applied now. A few of the questions we would like to ask the Forest Service include:

Does the Forest Service still use the “10 a.m. policy”?

Is the Forest Service unwilling to work on fires on steep slopes?

What is the present Forest Service policy regarding deploying firefighters for night shifts, when the fire is usually laid back?

4. Priorities are set for protection of populations. (Rey)

Trinity County is small in population numbers but large in land mass, of which 73% is Federal lands. The Forest Service's goals in fire management has been as a wildland fire organization, trained and equipped to suppress forest fires. The past 20 years seem to have slowly moved toward structure and private property protection. This is not to say that in years past there was not a concern for structures and private property. The wildland fire mission was to get to the fire, assess the situation if a structure was threatened, and try to protect it. If the structure was totally involved, they concentrated efforts on keeping the fire out of the forest.

Keep in mind that during this period engine crews were not equipped to deal with structure fires, lacking proper equipment and in many cases, training. But the Forest Service in these rural areas has always tackled fires in private residences and other structures bordering or within the National Forest as any helpful fire department would. The Forest Service fire crews for scores of years here were the only organized crews that could respond to these fires—and they did.

Now, what is the definition of what private property the Forest Service protects? Why does the Forest Service protect a \$200,000 home and let burn (or conduct a burn out on) \$2 million of private timber? This does not mean the home has no value to the homeowner, but this story line seems to have actually occurred on the fires here this summer.

If the tactics were as aggressive and reasonable as they were several years ago, these fires would have been contained several ridges over from where they were finally stopped—precluding the necessity of having to protect these structures and private timber land at all.

5. On fuels treatment, the FS is doing a lot, but there are 60-70 million acres of fuel treatment needed. (Rey)

However, Mark Rey failed to say where these areas are located and what type of treatment is prescribed. Fuel treatment projects cost money, something that is in short supply in the present economy, especially when it has to come from appropriated dollars. Once a fuels management project is completed, there needs to be reoccurring funds to maintain it at that level, or the original investment is lost. This especially applies to fuel breaks and “fire safe” projects occurring in urban interface zones. Back when the forests were being managed, much of this fuel reduction work was paid for out of timber sales. The problem was that no maintenance money was ever available after the close of the timber sale to continue maintenance on these projects.

Regarding fuels suppression, we wonder if there is an underlying effort to burn the forest ground fuels and just let the fires burn partially for that reason. *Are fire suppression dollars being used to reduce fuels?* Is the Forest Service purposely burning these additional acres in order to meet a goal of burning up fuels? Does this mean the Forest Service is using suppression dollars illegally to try to get rid of fuels?

Although we agree fuels are a problem, something to consider in fire management, they are not THE cause of these large-scale and long-enduring fires—the cause is the changes in fire suppression practices. The fuels presently found on the Trinity Forest are not substantially different from what would have been found 20 and 30 years ago.

6. The liaison between an IC team and the local FS is sufficient in gathering local information on water sources, old roads and trails, old fuel breaks, etc. (Heywood)

There were three or four Trinity River Management Unit employees helping on the Iron/Alps Complex in providing information. Sharon Heywood said she thought the people involved as liaison or resource specialist on the Iron and Alps Complex were adequate.

Present liaison positions are apparently only a “resources” specialist and not someone who can observe and advise about conditions for suppression. None, however, would have been able to help make decisions in suppression.

Although these four people had some good knowledge about the fire areas, especially one of them, they couldn't be everywhere for everything, and apparently weren't. There were many instances where the fire crews did not know where helpful resources were (water sources, old roads, etc.). This is where a well-organized “pre-attack plan” with descriptions and maps would have been useful, too.

7. Fire is beneficial. (Found in some news releases and general Forest Service statements)

A few people think all fires are beneficial, irregardless of the reality. This is what is promoted by many environmental groups who do not seem to want any management of the National Forests.

Under controlled circumstances, such as the attached article about the 1976 prescribed wildlife burn on the Big Bar District, fire can be beneficial. Uncontrolled wildfire is NOT beneficial.

Other Negative Effects of the Fires

Besides negative effects the fires had this summer on watersheds, wildlife, timber, local economy and recreation, cultural resources, aesthetics, and private property, there were serious and costly health issues from the many weeks of heavy smoke. This was also true in 1987, 1999 and 2006 in this area. The

cumulative effects of the smoke upon local citizens is being ignored by the Forest Service in its choices of suppression methods it employs.

Some of the wildlife studied in response to President Clinton's Northwest Plan Option 9, the "survey and manage" work that was done for several years, were part of the casualties from these fires. Many plantations of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir that the Big Bar District spent many decades and money on to establish, of which much pride was felt, were burned.

Attachments

Following is a brief explanation of the attachments in this package, which support the statements in this letter. Please let us know if you have any questions about any of them.

- **Meet the Committee.** Who we are
- **Big Bar Ranger District Fire Location Map.** Showing 1999, 2003, 2006, & 2008 fires
- **One-Page Summary of the Catastrophic Fire Situation.**
- **2006 Analysis.** A good summary of the fires of 1987, 1999, and 2006. We have sent this to you before, but we have updated it from 2006 and it provides a comprehensive background in our area, how things have changed in fire suppression, and how the present management is not working. In 1987, even though many of the fires were not staffed within the first several days (because of priorities elsewhere in the state, and then the smoke that prevented early air attack), they were still put out—and at acreages less than in the next example years. In 1987 we were still using aggressive fire suppression actions. Beginning in 1999 we were not.
- **Fire and Forest Management on the Big Bar Ranger District by David Rhodes.** A history of how fire management worked in association with all the other district functions in the 1970s through the 1980s
- **Sample Local Business Statements on Fire Losses.** Here are four samples, the only ones we have collected in the time we had to prepare for this meeting. The owners' contact information is included in case you or someone else would like to follow up later to gather additional data. There were dozens of local businesses who depend on recreation in order to survive and who were adversely affected by the weeks of smoke and closed roads and trails: motels and RV parks who afford lodging and camping spots for fishermen, whitewater rafters, and hunters; rafting businesses to take customers out on the Trinity River; community stores, and so on. These various small businesses experienced losses in 1999, 2003 (Loma Fire), 2006, and now 2008. *
- **Heritage Resources in the Iron and Alps Complex 2008.** A short report on valuable nonrenewable cultural sites within the fire areas by Dr. Eric Ritter, a Redding archaeologist with experience in Trinity County
- **Big Bar Ranger Station Annual Rainfall 1913-Present.**
- **Typical Fire Suppression 1930s-1970s.** Information from many news articles on how fires were usually responded to and put out, most of them in northwestern Trinity County.
- **Jim Jam Fire of 1951.** Information and news articles on large fire above Denny and how, even though it was in rough country, heavy fuels, and only fought with hand tools, it was put out.
- **Jim Jam Fire Map.** *
- **Forest Service Conducts Controlled Burns.** * Article about controlled burn for wildlife near Big Bar in 1976.
- **Letter Explaining Background of Denny Guard Station Removal.** Example of poor management and decision-making.

- **Fire-line Mistakes Can Lead to Prosecution.** * Article by Author John Maclean on how liability fears have dramatically altered level of aggression in firefighting.
- **Aggressive Policy Needed.** * Letter by Michael Jameson regarding 2008 fires.
- **Better Ways to Handle Fires.** * Letter by Stan Stetson on fire and timber management in Trinity County.
- **Forest Official Defends Fire Policy.** *Trinity Journal article about Mark Rey visit on September 19.

* *These are not included in this version of the report.*

In Summary

Mark Rey probably believes most of what he said while here in Trinity County, and feels that the Forest Service is doing a good job suppressing fires on National Forest lands. The people of Trinity County are not happy with the mismanagement in the way fires are being suppressed, and the way the Forest Service is being managed. Something needs to change.

We need to (1) get the Forest Service back to managing the timber and other resources on National Forest lands, (2) change fire management suppression tactics—if this includes adding more firefighters, then that is what should be done, (3) re-staff stations in remote areas, and (4) have the Forest Service address and resolve the “liability” issue.

There is a lot more documentation that we can provide or find for you if we are given more time. Please look this over and let us know what additional information you would like to see. There are also many other individuals who would be willing to relate similar observances as ours, if you wish to talk with them, too. Just say the word, and they would be available.

As stated at the beginning of this letter, we believe it is imperative that this issue be thoroughly investigated. We also believe it is imperative not to allow this to be an in-house (that is, within the Forest Service or involving people presently working for the Forest Service) investigation and report.

We look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

DAVID RHODES
Chairperson

MEET THE COMMITTEE

CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBLE FIRE MANAGEMENT

David Rhodes, Committee Chairperson, Lewiston, 37 years in Trinity County, retired, 30 years with the U. S. Forest Service (all in fire and fuels management); 11 years on the Angeles National Forest with 5 of those years as Hotshot Crew Foreman and the remainder as Fire Prevention Technician and Engine Captain. 19 years on the Big Bar Ranger District in Fire, Fuels Management and Law Enforcement, the last 15 of those years as Fire Management Officer. Large Fire Qualifications, Class I Operations Chief, Class II Incident Commander, Division Supervisor, Helitorch Burn Boss, and Fire Behavior Officer, and Class II Planning Section Chief. Incident Commander on the Shasta-Trinity Class II Fire Team for 14 years. Fuels Management Qualifications: Prescribed Fire Manager for Multi-Burns, Burn Boss, and Helitorch Burn Boss.

Charley Fitch, Redding, California resident for the last 42 years, having lived in Southern, Central and Northern California amongst the National Forests, employed by the Forest Service. Twenty of the years were in Trinity County as District Ranger for the Big Bar Ranger District, later incorporated into the Trinity River Management Unit, before retiring in January 1999. Fire suppression experience with the Forest Service included fire assignments ranging over 35 years. Positions included Crew Boss, Sector Boss, Division Supervisor, Forest Supervisor's Representative, Planning Section Chief Type II, Liaison Officer for both Type I and Type II Incident Teams as well as Line Officer for fires located within my Ranger District. I am a professional forester with a degree from Colorado State University in Forest Management. Other experience with fire beyond being a firefighter was as a project leader for controlled burns and a land manager dealing with post-fire land management.

Michael Jameson, Weaverville, resident of Trinity County for 18 years, retired California Department of Forestry (CALFIRE). Started with CDF as a seasonal firefighter in 1978 with the San Bernardino Ranger Unit. Promoted to Engineer in San Bernardino and worked in both schedule A and schedule B contracts (Structure and Wildland Fires). Promoted to Captain in 1987 at the Fenner Canyon Camp in Los Angeles County, transferred to the Pilot Rock Camp in San Bernardino and then Trinity River Camp in Lewiston in 1990. Qualified for Division/Group Supervisor, Map display processor, Field Observer, Strike Team Leader and Task Force Leader. 25 years all in fire control.

Clarence Rose, Weaverville, Trinity County resident since 1974. Oregon State University graduate, B.S. in Forest Engineering, 1974. California Registered Professional Forester since 1977. Member of California Board of Forestry, 1985-89. Founder and co-owner of R&R Timber Co., Inc., a logging company which was active in contract logging in Trinity County from 1979-1998, averaging 2000+ truckloads of logs per year, and which provided contract heavy equipment (dozers, water tenders) to CDF and USFS. Currently owner and manager of 1,000 acres of sustainably managed commercial timberland in Trinity and Shasta County. Member of Weaverville Community Forest steering committee, which works with Trinity County Resource Conservation District to attain fire-safe, fire-resilient forests on public lands in the Weaverville basin. Volunteer missionary in Russia (1994-95) and Ukraine (2001-2005). Member of initial board of directors of Mountain Communities Healthcare District, which owns and operates the formerly county-owned Trinity Hospital.

Jerry McDonald, Lewiston, 40 years in Trinity County, retired, 30 years with the Forest Service, 27 of those years in fire and fuels management. District Fire Management Officer, Calaveras and Miwok districts, 4 years; retired as Stanislaus National Forest fire staff operations; Type II Team Deputy Incident Commander and, Operations Section and Safety Officer, Type I Team Safety Officer; prescribed fire manager for helitorch and hand fire; Interdisciplinary team leader and NEPA

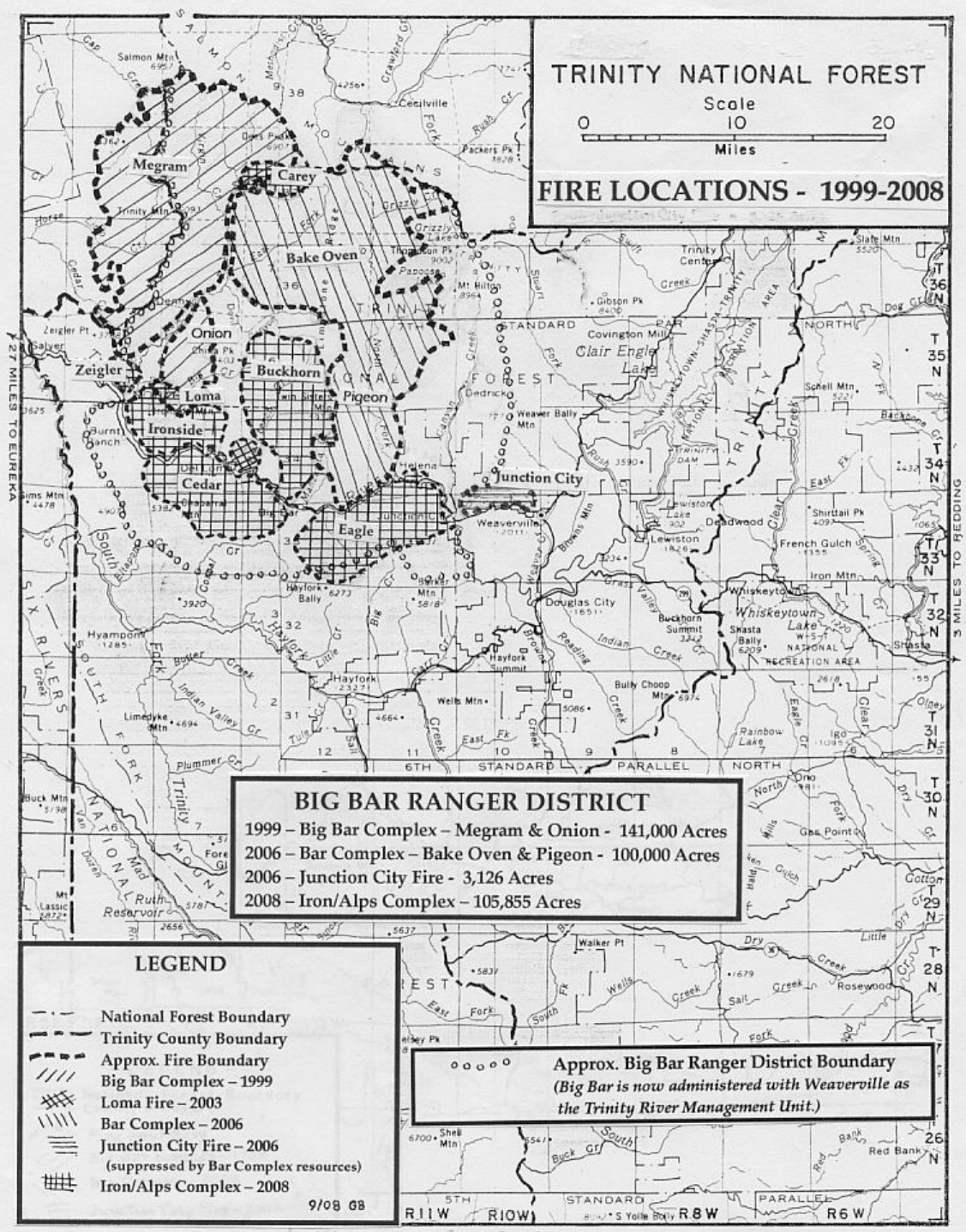
team leader for fuels and fire projects; fuels committee chair for Stanislaus National Forest for 5 years; member of Forest Service Southwest Region fuels committee for 6 years; HAZMAT coordinator, Spill Response coordinator; agency representative on fires and other projects, including with CDF; Forest representative for local fire companies in Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

Frank Grovers, Big Bar, 11 years in Trinity County with an RV park business along the Trinity River; 40 years in sales experience in the U.S. and foreign countries, dealt with different teenagers in a counseling capacity, involved with church and local community; three children, five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren. 2008-09 Trinity County Grand Jury.

Stan Stetson, Hayfork, in 1968 began working summers for the U.S. Forest Service in Trinity County while attending Humboldt State College. Upon graduating continued to work seasonally in fire prevention, fuels and fire suppression until 1973 when I received a permanent appointment. Worked as Engine Foreman until 1979 when I became a Timber Sale Administrator. Retired after 36 years, all in Trinity County, having served as Division Supervisor, Strike Team Leader, Burn Boss, Logistics and Ground Support Leader in Fire organization and Supervisor in Timber sale preparation and administration. Three years with Watershed Center as Project Coordinator for fuels reduction and thinning operations. Present Commissioner of the Hayfork Fire Protection District. Currently retired and concerned citizen.

Dana Hord, Junction City, Trinity County resident 1993-present, business owner, Trinity River Rafting, Big Flat. Trinity River Rafting features scenic quality of the Wild and Scenic Trinity River and is tourism based. Appointed Member of Trinity Adaptive Management Working Group for Trinity River Restoration Program, 2001-present, representing Big Bar Community Development Group. Dana has been actively involved in the transition of the local economy from one focused on commodity production to one that is more dependent on tourism and recreation. Ms. Hord has a degree in sociology, and experience in small business management, grants administration, and public relations. Junction City Volunteer Fire Dept., 2002-present, trained in wildland fire suppression, and structural fire protection. Former Aide, U.S. Senator S.I. Hayakawa. Daughter of Donna Hord, deceased, Shasta County GOP delegate.

Gay Berrien, Committee Secretary, Big Bar, 45 years in Trinity County in Denny and Big Bar; retired U.S. Forest Service employee, clerk and archaeological technician for 30 years mostly Big Bar Ranger District; wrote all news releases for Big Bar for first several years of 1970s including articles on fire suppression, fuels reduction, controlled burns, special high elevation fire study (study by a fire behavior specialist, first such study in Forest Service Southwest Region), attended 32-hour fire training (but only participated in one controlled burn from 9 a.m. one morning until 9 a.m. the next and was on fire standby at Denny Guard Station one day), responded to fire assignments as initial attack and communications dispatcher, fire information officer, personnel time recorder, and procurement officer; Trinity County Historical Society board of directors, 2008-09 Trinity County Grand Jury.



TRINITY NATIONAL FOREST

Scale
0 10 20
Miles

FIRE LOCATIONS - 1999-2008

BIG BAR RANGER DISTRICT

1999 - Big Bar Complex - Megram & Onion - 141,000 Acres
 2006 - Bar Complex - Bake Oven & Pigeon - 100,000 Acres
 2006 - Junction City Fire - 3,126 Acres
 2008 - Iron/Alps Complex - 105,855 Acres

LEGEND

- - - National Forest Boundary
- - - Trinity County Boundary
- - - Approx. Fire Boundary
- //// Big Bar Complex - 1999
- //// Loma Fire - 2003
- //// Bar Complex - 2006
- //// Junction City Fire - 2006 (suppressed by Bar Complex resources)
- //// Iron/Alps Complex - 2008

9/08 GB

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Approx. Big Bar Ranger District Boundary
(Big Bar is now administered with Weaverville as the Trinity River Management Unit.)

ONE-PAGE SUMMARY

CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRES – SUPPRESSION STRATEGIES FAIL

The management of fires by the Forest Service and other wildland firefighting agencies is the major factor in past years that has allowed for the continuing spread of fires. When a fire has not been put out during the first hours or day, it starts growing and the methods used in responding to this are not as aggressive or organized as in earlier years. This change in how fires are managed is the one main contributor to the large-scale fires: not heavy fuels, not lack of resources, and not global warming. Firefighters are not allowed to be as “hands on” during suppression of fires as they were several years ago and instead of constructing handlines or tractor lines close to a fire in order to contain it at a smaller size, lines are often constructed miles away from the active fire: thus, many hundreds of extra acres are burned when the wildfire finally meets the firebreak. “Burn outs,” those firefighter-caused fires to make a wide black line to contain a fire, include hundreds of extra acres than what would have been burned in earlier years.

Among the main elements in this change to less aggressive management were the Storm King Mountain, Colorado, fatalities several years ago and a subsequent year when there was a large number of additional fire fatalities. Although the Forest Service’s safety standards and guidelines have stood up through the years, a is created when a crew or individual neglects some of the safety standards and guidelines. Liability fears of fire supervisors have led to an increased indirect approach to fire suppression where crews are kept away from areas in which years ago they would have worked. An incident commander in charge of a fire complex now is personally liable in the event of any fatality under his/her management. This is one reason for the radically changed management of large fires.

Two years ago a group of individuals, people with many years’ experience in fire management including incident commanders on large complexes, put together a report on this “catastrophic fire” situation. This report states the situation as it applies to northwestern Trinity County, focusing on 1987, 1999, and 2006 as well as using earlier fires for comparison. The report included information gathered from interviews, fire maps, historic fire records, and news articles. The information can apply to the recent 2008 fire event. Following is a summary of what was found:

WHY THE FIRES NOW GET SO LARGE:

1. **Inadequate response to lightning fires (putting them out before they begin to spread)**
2. **Natural heavy fuels**
3. **Insufficient aggressiveness in firefighting policy and activity**
4. **Lack of natural defense areas—continuous heavy fuels**
5. **Liability concerns that hamstring firefighting aggressiveness**
6. **Insufficient resources**
7. **Poor judgment of managers; impaired firefighting policy for wilderness area**
8. **Insufficient follow-up and maintenance of land condition information—inventory of things that aid firefighting, such as locations of water sources, old roads that can be reopened, helispots, etc.**
9. **Insufficient communication between district and fire team, and then insufficient follow-up/understanding between subsequent fire teams.**

It is time for Congress to understand that the management of fires needs to be seriously looked into—and changed. Not only is the situation burning up valuable forest resources, but it is certainly costing massive amounts of money. (For example, the fires in northwestern Trinity in 2006 cost over \$89 million; the 2008 fires have exceeded this.)

SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT CATASTROPHIC FIRES:

Redistribute funds into potential costs for upcoming years, spending some millions of dollars as a preventive measure rather than for much larger suppression costs. Spend this preventive funding to get firefighting units back to where they were on the National Forest in the mid-1970s in the same locations and numbers (or provide equal numbers in local contract crews). Additionally, (1) totally review the present suppression policies and rethink it all in regard to the liability issues—are there ways to remove some of this liability emphasis and return to most of the former more aggressive practices? and (2) along with the additional Forest Service or contract fire crews, reinstall strong presuppression (“preattack”) documentation into the system so that when a large fire team does have to come into an area, it already has the informational package needed to work in any area and know where all the resources are (roads, water sources, any fuelbreaks or old cat roads, private lands, etc.). Hand-in-hand with these improvements in fire suppression would be the return to strong overall forest management.

ANALYSIS OF CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRES **IN NORTHWESTERN TRINITY COUNTY**

BACKGROUND

The northwestern portion of Trinity County, including the western and middle portions of the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area and most of the territory of the Big Bar Ranger District (now managed with the Weaverville Ranger District under the control of the Trinity River Management Unit), is known to have heavy fuels. Dead snags, heavy brush, and often heavy forest litter lend high flammability to the forest in this area.

The heavy fuels seem to be a natural condition for this area. The New River and North Fork of the Trinity watersheds were inhabited by bands of Indians who were mostly small family groups. It is doubtful in this rugged area that these few numbers of Native Americans performed any sort of burning procedure in this particular region. The forest here had heavy fuels when Euro-american miners first came into the general area in 1849 (1851 in New River). In the 1890s to early 1900s during the hardrock mining boom of upper New River, there continued to be heavy fuels, as indicated from photographs taken in that time period. There seemed to continue to be lots of brush, heavy forest litter, and dead snags.

There were wild fires, ignited from lightning, during all these time periods—the occupations by Native Americans, miners, and settlers—but the fires did not seem to “clean up” the forest floor as would ideal.

A study by the Forest Service which focused on fire management in the Trinity Alps (August 1995 *Trinity Alps Wilderness Management Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, “Trinity Alps Wilderness Fire Management Plan” by Steve Ryberg (South Fork Management Unit Fire Management Officer, retired) supports this observation: that in the middle and western portions of the wilderness there are large amounts of heavy continuous fuels with almost no natural breaks without vegetation. *Any fires started in these areas would spread without hope of natural containment if suppression is not initiated within the first burning period.*

The Forest Service has managed the Trinity area since 1905, with one of its priorities being the suppression of forest fires. With lookouts and guard stations located at numerous spots on the forest, and with the early policy of picking up non-Forest Service people to help on fires, most lightning fires were accessed within a short time and were kept to small sizes.

Up through the 1970s and most of the 1980s fires were mostly kept small. In northwestern Trinity in the area of the Big Bar Ranger District, there were a few exceptions. In 1945 the Peacock Fire between Big Flat and Helena burned 9,000 acres. In 1951, the Jim Jam Fire above Denny, burned 8,000 acres. (According the Forest Service records it was 8,000 acres; newspaper articles reported 7,000 acres.) These fires were contained and controlled within a relatively short time. The Jim Jam Fire additionally required crews to hike in eight miles from Denny, and they only had hand tools.

The largest fire during the 1970s was the Virgin Fire above Denny which reached 725 acres before suppression.

1987 Fires

The summer and fall of 1987 was “California’s worst fire season in history” up to that time period. (*Pacific Southwest News Log*, U. S. Forest Service newsletter, October 1, 1987)

Series of thunderstorms caused fires literally all over California. By the time the Big Bar District and the other districts in Trinity County got “hit” by the storms, many of their firefighters had been dispatched elsewhere in California. The Big Bar District had only one remaining fire crew— the Denny crew— along with Forest Service personnel of other disciplines who were qualified to fight fire and work on the local blazes. However, the fires that were sparked from lightning up the North Fork of the Trinity, including Rattlesnake and Grizzly creeks—all of these on the Big Bar District—could not be responded to because of the lack of personnel. By the time any aircraft or smokejumpers were available, the smoke from the fires that had been allowed to burn, was so thick, it was not safe to work on them. These fires together were called the North Complex. Other fires up Canyon Creek on the Big Bar District were located within the Bally Complex which extended into the Weaverville District. Other fire complexes (besides the North and the Bally) being fought at the same time in Trinity County included Weaverville, Limesdyke/Flume, Gulch, and Lazyman.

By the time personnel were able to get in to the fires and begin aggressive work on them, they had developed into large-scale conflagrations. By the time the smoke had settled, and the fires were contained, the fires on the North Complex had burned 12,200 acres and the Bally Complex 14,170, totaling about 26,370 acres on the Big Bar District. The total acres for Trinity County were:

North	12,200
Weaverville	2,576
Limesdyke/Flume	39,584
Gulch	18,000
Lazyman	3,740 (Mendocino N.F.)
Bally	<u>14,170</u>
Total	90,270 acres burned in Trinity County

(about 26,370 acres on Big Bar District)

1999 Fires

On August 23, 1999, a thunderstorm ignited fires in the New River backcountry. Four were spotted right away, and a fifth one (Dees Fire, controlled within a few days) was spotted on August 2. Fire fighting resources were already limited because of other fire activity in the state, and so priorities precluded the immediate response to these. The result was that the Onion Fire, originating near Big Mountain, burned 16,602 acres, while three of the other four—the Megram, Soldier, and Fawn fires—eventually grew together. This mega-fire, now called the Megram Fire, burned 124,998 acres. This included most of the

western Trinity Alps west of Slide Creek extending into Humboldt County toward the Willow Creek and Hoopa communities. The Megram Fire wasn't controlled until early November when the winter weather came.

The fires together were called the Big Bar Complex, and total acreage was 141,000 acres.

2006 Fires

On the evening of July 23, 2006, a thunderstorm caused several fires up New River above Denny, up Canyon Creek, and up the North Fork of the Trinity. The latter two were responded to fairly soon, with Canyon Creek's "Little Fire" spreading to just over 200 acres while North Fork's "Martin Fire" was only 2 1/2 acres. Because of these and other fires, the New River fires were put low on the list of priorities and were not addressed with firefighting personnel until they had been burning for two or three days. Two that started near Jim Jam Ridge burned together and eventually joined the fire on the other side of the East Fork of the New River, to become the Bake Oven Fire.

On September 5 another fire—this one man-caused—ignited from the edge of Highway 299 between Big Flat and Pigeon Point and spread up the steep hillside before it could be responded to. Called the Pigeon Fire, it soon became uncontrollable. It joined with the Bake Oven.

Together, both fires (the Bar Complex) burned over 100,000 acres and cost over \$89 million.

There is a lack of real "ownership" by Forest Service managers over large tracks of National Forest lands. When districts merge—such as Big Bar with Weaverville and Yolla Bolla with Hayfork—there are fewer managers to take care of much larger areas, and much of the management is lost or disregarded. This includes the planning and care that goes into fire prevention and suppression in certain watersheds. There is not sufficient personnel—and sometimes not sufficient interest—to adequately handle these concerns.

Denny/New River Fire Coverage

In 2005 the Trinity River Management Unit District Ranger Joyce Andersen made the decision that a fire crew in Denny, covering the New River watershed, was no longer needed. This crew was moved to the Forest Service office in downtown Weaverville

This move placed the engine and crew in an area in which the California Department of Forestry (CDF) and the Weaverville Volunteer Fire Department already shared suppression responsibilities. The area already had adequate fire protection provided by those entities. This move cut daily initial attack strength on the Big Bar Ranger District portion of the Trinity River Management Unit by one engine and five people. This means that the initial attack forces for this part of Trinity County were cut from 20 each day to 15, and bolstered CDF forces in Weaverville, which according to CDF was already adequate. (They did, however, thank the Forest Service.)

Leaving the Denny area unprotected was bound to eventually turn into a situation like what happened on July 23, 2006. Because of no fire crew coverage in Denny, the lightning fires went unattended through that afternoon and evening and continued with no response into the next day's burning period and perhaps longer.

When the fires were eventually attacked they had grown in size and because of their remoteness were hard to access and extinguish. The end result is a fire that was close to 100,000 acres and cost over \$89 million.

Had the Denny crew been in place and not in Weaverville, their response time to the fires including hiking in would only have been a matter of hours. They would have arrived when these fires were still small and easily extinguished or at least knocked down until reinforcements could arrive and help. The closest other fire station is at Burnt Ranch, which takes an hour response time just to reach the Denny Station.

It is not known what data was used by the District Ranger to come to the conclusion that the Denny/New River area has low fire occurrence or that the chosen strategy was to move the engine and crew to Weaverville. Forest Service records list numerous past fires in that area and because of its remoteness, suppression of these fires is a problem. The best practice is to hit the fires hard with everything you can muster, and keep them small.

The Virgin Fire in 1974 which burned some 725 acres proved to fire officials at that time that if the crew in Denny had been a full five-person module with an engine capable of hauling 300 gallons of water, the fire would have been stopped at an acre or less. As it was, the crew was only two people and a pickup truck with a 50-gallon water tank in back. Even then they almost controlled the fire.

In 1975 the Forest upgraded the Denny Station to a 7-man crew, five people effective seven days a week. This upgrade also included two Class III engines with water-carrying capacity of 200 gallons each. This remained in force until about 1996 or 1997 when the Big Bar Ranger District was merged with the Weaverville Ranger District and the Denny Station was closed.

After the 141,000-acre Megram and Onion fires in the Denny area in 1999, the station was reopened—in 2000—with a large engine and 5-person crew.

Why did the same District Ranger that reopened the station in 2000 close it again in 2005 and remove all of the structures and other improvements? It does not make sense to remove a crew from a very remote area and move them to an area that already had adequate fire protection.

Fire Statistics 1987-2008

Fire Episode	Start	End*	Approx. Days	Approx. Acreage
1987	8/31/87	10/6/87	37	26,370
1999	8/23/99	11/1/99	70	141,000
2006	7/23/06	10/15/06	115	100,000
2008	6/21/08	9/10/08	81	105,555

*** Approximate Containment Date**

In summary, the northwestern portion of Trinity County has had heavily fueled forest for hundreds of years, and when a fire burns here, it does not result in less heavy fuels. In the past several years changes in Forest Service policy in firefighting and reduction in fire personnel have set the scene for massive forest fires that were not allowed many years ago.

WHY THE FIRES GET SO LARGE

- 1. Inadequate response to lightning fires**
- 2. Natural heavy fuels**
- 3. Insufficient aggressiveness in firefighting policy and activity**
- 4. Lack of natural defense areas—continuous heavy fuels**
- 5. Liability concerns that hamstring firefighting aggressiveness**
- 6. Insufficient resources**
- 7. Poor judgment of managers; impaired firefighting policy for wilderness area**
- 8. Insufficient follow-up and maintenance of land condition information—inventory of things that aid firefighting, such as locations of water sources, old roads that can be reopened, helispots, etc.**
- 9. Insufficient communication between district and fire team, and then insufficient follow-up/understanding between subsequent fire teams**

IF AND HOW THESE PROBLEMS CAN BE RESOLVED

1. Inadequate response. It is imperative to provide early suppression to lightning fires in northwestern Trinity County. Otherwise, they grow rapidly and soon are difficult to control, especially with policies that don't allow aggressive action.

In the Forest Service's present prioritizing for initial attack forces, it seems to only look at the concerned area as "wilderness," without considering additional needed criteria. Wilderness is thought of as being high elevation, cooler, with heavier moisture and relatively low fuels. Additional criteria needs to be included such as (1) the likelihood of fire getting to a size over 3,000 acres (or using another reasonable figure for acreage expectation) and (2) lower elevation such as in the middle and western portions of the Trinity Alps Wilderness that has such heavy fuels.

Returning Forest Service fire crews to the locations and numbers that they were in the mid-1970s would provide a needed workforce for initial attack. Daily work activities, when they are not responding to a lightning fire, could include work such as the Forest Service performed in the 1970s: (1) building fuel breaks on strategic ridges, (2) reconstructing and signing water sources, helispots, old access roads, (3) cutting and piling forest debris, brush, etc., in certain areas to work toward reducing the flammable materials, (4) cutting grass along Highway 299 to reduce chances of man-caused fires there, (5) recording and placing all these suppression assets on maps and reports that are kept updated and available for fire personnel when there is a large fire.

2. Natural heavy fuels. As already mentioned, northwestern Trinity County has heavy “continuous” fuels that burn exceedingly well once a fire takes hold.

Returning fire crews to the National Forests in the numbers they were in the mid-1970s, as described above could help reduce some of this situation in certain areas.

3. Insufficient aggressiveness in firefighting policy and activity. Because of policies and liability concerns, the fires are not addressed as aggressively as fires of several years ago.

This is a problem that is not easy to resolve until all the causative factors are defined and altered. This includes management personnel who make poor decisions, serious liability issues that make for less aggressive suppression techniques, and lack of effective resources when other fires are burning at the same time and which take priority over our local fires.

4. Lack of natural defense areas—continuous heavy fuels. Current fire suppression policy in the wilderness area calls for firelines along “natural defense areas” such as ridges and water courses. In this part of the country, as already explained, these natural defenses are few and far between.

Additional fire crews could work on some strategic locations to make for defensible fuel breaks. This may require changes in policy. As it is, the policy has cost us millions of dollars.

5. Liability concerns that hamstring firefighting aggressiveness.

Among the main elements in the change to less aggressive management were the Storm King Mountain, Colorado, fatalities several years ago and a subsequent year when there was a large number of additional fire fatalities. These liability fears have led to an increased safety approach with crews kept away from areas in which normally years ago they would have worked. An incident commander in charge of a fire complex now is personally liable in the event of any fatality under his/her management. This has radically changed the way in which large fires are handled.

The Forest Service’s safety standards and guidelines have stood up through the years and the problem usually is when a crew or individual neglects some of them. A review of the directives and legislation that have come from the Storm King, Thirty Mile, and Cramer investigations should be reevaluated. We need to fight fire aggressively, and we can do this and still provide for safety first.

6. Insufficient resources. The Forest Service has been downsized radically in past years, making for less fire crews and less fire stations over all. This, along with the fact that less FS personnel of other disciplines actively fight fire—as most employees did years ago—reduces the number of available resources.

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest has shifted resources over the last few years. On the Trinity side they’ve removed engine stations including the Denny Station last year, as already mentioned. One of the explanations is that a

computer program recommended this, that the Denny engine crew was not needed here. Instead, the Forest Service moved the crew to Weaverville. Several years ago a computer program recommended that the water tender at Big Bar was not needed. A petition signed by local residents requested the Forest Service not to move it, and it stayed—fortunately, for the many times since then it has assisted in fire suppression incidents.

While the Trinity side has had a reduction in engine crews, a 20-person hand crew has been established at Lake Shore on the Shasta side. This does not seem to be something that would help the Trinity side.

A solution to this would be to return fire crews to the previous locations that have been abandoned, and generally put more resources into Forest Service forest and fire management.

7. Poor judgment of managers; impaired firefighting policy for wilderness area. This is a fact that seems to bear on the continuing large fire situation.

As mentioned earlier in this analysis, the “Trinity Alps Wilderness Fire Management Plan” by Steve Ryberg relates that in the middle and western portions of the wilderness there are large amounts of heavy continuous fuels with almost no natural breaks without vegetation. *Any fires started in these areas would spread without hope of natural containment if suppression is not initiated within the first burning period.* The Shasta-Trinity National Forest has not been respecting this reality and its fire suppression policy in the wilderness has not been sufficient.

8. Insufficient follow-up and maintenance of land condition information—inventory of things that aid firefighting, such as locations of water sources, old roads that can be reopened, helispots, etc.

The Forest Service used to keep comprehensive data and maps showing all these things that greatly assist in the suppression of large fires; this was called *preattack planning*. The fire teams of 1999 and now 2006 seem to falter by not knowing what is really on the ground here. More than a couple times members of the fire team have mentioned where they happened to find a local person who identified the location of a helpful old skid road, or the presence of another access route. On the Bake Oven Fire, personnel had no idea there was a piped water source on the Jim Jam Heliport.

Each Forest Service unit or district should maintain this record and keep it available, but this does not seem to be happening—at least not to a sufficient degree.

9. Insufficient communication between district and fire team, and then insufficient follow-up/understanding between subsequent fire teams.

There is a lack of communication from the District employees and the team, and then between teams. There are two failures. (1) The District is not providing an inventory of facilities and (2) the fire team is not interfacing satisfactorily with knowledgeable people.

There is a lack of local intelligence. The Forest Service needs to implement a policy of providing a knowledgeable local resource (person) to assist during initial attack operations. This would be someone who understands this particular area, its particular geography and fuel types and how to handle a fire here.

(Written by Charley Fitch, David Rhodes, and Gay Berrien originally in October 2006)

**FIRE SUPPRESSION AND FOREST MANAGEMENT
ON THE BIG BAR RANGER DISTRICT,
NORTHWESTERN TRINITY COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**

By David P. Rhodes
Fire Management Officer, 1976-1990
Big Bar Ranger District

Pre-1990

Almost from the Forest Service's beginnings suppression of fires was a priority. Suppressing fires before they became larger saved the forest resources, cut down on firefighter exposure, saved the taxpayers money, and was also beneficial to wildlife and soil erosion.

The 10 a.m.-10-acre suppression objective was adopted as a guideline. The objective of suppressing all fires at 10 acres or less by 10 a.m. of the following day gave fire managers the authority to request and commit needed resources to meet this objective. Most of the time this worked well.

Occasionally one did escape but plans were made to try and control the fire in the next 24-hour period if resources were available. At no time did we just sit back, fold our arms, and say, oh, well, we will back off two ridges and back fire.

Direct attack was the method used on most fires. One foot in the burn was practiced and adhered to. The burn was your safety zone and was used many times. The "Ten Standard Firefighting Orders" and "Thirteen Situations that Shout Watch Out" were the firefighters' Bible.

Any fatality or serious injury was the result of someone failing to adhere to one or more of these standards.

Suppression of fires at night allowed firefighters to get closer to the flames, use burnout practices to strengthen fire lines, and take advantage of higher humidities, cooler temperatures, and less heat. Many fires were contained or controlled using the nighttime tactics, and many 10 a.m.-10-acre objectives met.

Early '90s to Present

In the late 1980s much began to change in the Forest Service. The environmentalists discovered the spotted owl and convinced the general public that the survival of this species would be in doubt if logging in old growth timber was not stopped immediately. The environmentalists had the resources and the media attention and also the ears of "liberal" judges: logging started to slow down on the National Forests and by the early '90s had almost come to a standstill in some areas.

Bill Clinton and Al Gore, along with all of the environmentalists behind them, drove the final nails in the coffin at the great northwest meeting held in Oregon. This pretty much gave the environmentalists and their support groups about everything they needed to kill logging and resource management on National Forest land as we know it.

Prior to the demise of forest management, a ranger district supported an intermix of employees who managed the resources, and were trained at various levels in fire suppression. When the fire bell went off all district resources—both men and women—and equipment went into a fire suppression mode. The district's fire management staff along with the district ranger diverted the suppression activities.

I am using the Big Bar Ranger District on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest as a typical example, having spent 19 years of my career in fire management there, the last 15 of which I was the District Fire Management Officer before retiring in 1990.

Total district manpower on the Big Bar Ranger District in the 1970s and 1980s varied between 85 and 115 depending upon the timber program for that year. Of the district staffing number, fire management supported six suppression crews numbering 27 firefighters seven days a week, two fire staff, three fire prevention units equipped with 75-gallon water tanks, a 15-person hand crew that was considered "fast follow-up" five days a week, and two fire lookouts. On an average day the initial attack fire force would have been approximately 45 people including the fast follow-up brush disposal crew.

The configuration would have been:

1 or 2 fire staff
2 fire prevention
27 firefighters on six fire engines
15 fast follow-up hand crew
45

Additional District Staff Available

10 timber department and marking crew
2 timber administration
8 silviculture
10 engineering staff, equipment operators, road crew
3 recreation department
2 fuels management
5 district office staff and administrative officer
1 lands officer
41

This meant that Monday through Friday there was a total of 86 employees available for suppression duties if needed, and approximately 45 on Saturday or Sunday. However, if needed, many of the off-duty personnel could be and were called back.

During lightning busts the district fire management organization controlled and prioritized the manning of these fires.

Small 2-, 3- and 4-person "smoke chaser" crews were organized, consisting of an experienced crew leader and the crew. The smoke chaser crew was assigned a vehicle, and each member was given a lightning pack consisting of enough food and water for up to two or three days, a sleeping bag, a district map, a roll of flagging, a piece of plastic to fabricate a tent, rope, toilet paper, and

some personal items. Also taken with them were hand tools, a Forest Service radio, a compass, and in some cases, a chain saw. This small crew was assigned a fire, given directions to it, and either drove as close to it as they could and then hiked in to it, or was air lifted in by helicopter if feasible.

Often the lightning activity was late in the afternoon or early evening, requiring the smoke chaser crew to hike in to the fire at night.

Upon the crew's arrival on the fire they were to report the condition of the fire and determine if they could handle it or if they needed more help. If they could handle it they were required to stay on the fire and patrol it for 24 hours after the last smoke was detected, before hiking out.

If more help was needed, the additional manpower was sent as soon as possible. Often this required the crew on the ground to cut a helispot to aid in getting the additional people and supplies on the ground.

During the Fourth of July weekend of 1976 a dry lightning storm in the late afternoon started 28 lightning fires on the Big Bar Ranger District. Using district smoke chaser crews, Redding smokejumpers, and several smoke chaser crews from Mount Shasta, Shasta Lake, and McCloud ranger districts, the Big Bar District extinguished all of the fires within five days. The largest fire was 8 acres and the smallest one was a single snag.

As stated, this was all accomplished with small crews using direct attack methods in very steep terrain with various types of fuel loading and in a year that was quite dry, very similar to conditions in 2008.

Thanks to the spotted owl, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and the environmental groups that stopped forest management and timber harvesting on the National Forests, we have all but given the forest back to nature.

In 2008 the Big Bar Ranger District no longer exists. Although legally it retains its separate boundary it is managed with the Weaverville Ranger District as the Trinity River Management Unit with all administrative decisions coming from one district ranger in Weaverville, beginning in about 1997. The old Big Bar District office can now be classified as a mere work center.

Working in this area now are three engine crews totaling 15 people, one water tender, one or two recreation aids, a receptionist in the office, one assistant fire staff, one special use officer, one law enforcement officer, and one wildlife technician, totaling about 23 people.

This severe drop in people can be blamed on the cutback in timber production.

During the 1970s on a sustained yield program, Big Bar was cutting 50-60 million board feet of timber a year. During this time period the district had a very progressive salvage sale program which eliminated much of the insect damaged timber as it occurred. This program yielded between 1.5 and 3.5 million board feet of timber per year and kept several small timber operators busy cleaning up. It helped control the insect problem. Residue from this timber was piled and then plotted on a map. It was burned in the early spring before the larvae hatched and the bugs flew, thus helping stop insect spread in those areas.

Today little or no insect tree removal is being done. As time marches on you can see the results of this in the larger amounts of standing dead and dying trees scattered around the forest. As this timber decays and falls on the forest

floor, it increases fuel loading and the fire hazard. The bugs move on to healthier trees and the process starts all over again.

The timber program supported the above-mentioned staffing. It also supported local lumber mills, businesses, county schools, and the county road department. Revenues from timber sales provided most of the financing to support the Forest Service and its programs. Twenty-five percent of timber revenues collected in Trinity County was returned to the county to help in financing schools and county road department operations.

County schools and the road department are suffering major setbacks in funding because of the loss of these revenues, not to mention the loss to the local economy. Every business and household in this county has suffered to some degree.

Since the shut-down in timber production, two of the three sawmills in the county have closed their doors, leaving Trinity River Lumber in Weaverville as the only survivor, and they could close their doors in the future if things don't change.

Fires in the years of 1999, 2003, 2006, and now 2008 have caused millions of board feet of timber to be burned in Trinity County. Salvage attempts on this timber prior to this year have been stopped by the courts, and now most of it is not worth the price it would cost to log it. Much of the burned area in 2008 could be logged, but it would have to happen very quickly.

The salvaging of the 2008 burned and dying trees would be hindered, if not totally prohibited, for a number of reasons:

1. Since the Forest Service has been out of the timber business in this area for quite some time, it no longer has the work force or expertise needed to put up the timber sales in a timely manner.

2. The environmentalists will tie up in court timber sales that could be put up for sale, stalling any logging until the timber is not worth harvesting and the bugs have taken over.

3. Timber value is down in the market place at the present time, making fire salvage sales a risk financially.

Instead of recouping any of the millions of dollars spent this summer on fire suppression in Trinity County, it appears that the tax payers will have to stand by and watch the insects harvest the timber and live with the increased fire hazard that all the under-burning and mismanagement of these fires has caused.

The Forest Service will prepare their report and send it to Congressman Herger and Senators Feinstein and Boxer as well as the Forest Service regional office in Vallejo. Then it will be forwarded to the Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. The report will contain a white-washed account justifying who and why the agency spent a billion and a half dollars suppressing these fires, and what a wonderful job everyone did. It probably will not change anything here in Trinity County.

We will still have the charred remains of our once beautiful and scenic landscape, bugs chewing up the timber instead of chain saws, mud slides in the

creeks and rivers this winter, rock slides on the highways, and a lot bigger fire hazard next year when all of the distressed vegetation dies.

Incident Management Teams

Recent changes in incident management teams have also added to the fire suppression problems.

These teams are on a 14-day tour and are rotated out at the end of the 14 days, with a new team replacing them. If the team is not successful in putting out the fire, they are not worried as they can leave it to the replacement team to put it out. There seems to be no accountability in this system, and it is very expensive to replace the team every 14 days.

Under the old system the team remained on the incident until it was controlled. This promoted ownership and cut down on expense. If the team was replaced, it was because it had failed and in most instances was not requested again for any other fire. The incentive was there to put the fire out as soon as possible so everyone could go home.

Most incident management teams were picked because they had expertise and experience suppressing fires in like fuels and terrain. Today's team may come from Florida or North Carolina or Tennessee and the members have no experience suppressing western U.S. fires. They are out of their element from the get-go. Failure to use local expertise in these situations also seems to be a problem. These teams may do well on their home turf and that is where they should stay.

"Light Hand on the Land"

This is a new terminology for handling fires in the wilderness, "MIST," or "Minimal Impact Suppression Tactics." This system has certainly failed in the Trinity Alps Wilderness. Burned area maps of fires since 1999, at least in the western part of the wilderness on the Big Bar District, show that most of it has now burned to one degree or another. In my opinion that is not a "light hand on the land."

Trails are closed to the public because of downed trees, rock slides, and washouts, not to mention the sediment deposited in the creeks and rivers and destruction of wildlife habitat.

If the incident teams had aggressively attacked these fires, using chain saws and portable pumps as we did in the past, suppressing these fires at one acre or less—that is what in my opinion is a light hand on the land.

Crews were only there for a short while, usually four days or less. Then the fire was extinguished and the crew packed out. Most of these fires cost less than \$2500 to suppress if no air craft was used. The watershed was saved. There were no soil erosion problems, trails remained open, and the wildlife flourished.

***SAMPLING OF LOCAL BUSINESSES
AFFECTED BY 2006 & 2008 FIRES
Big Bar Area***

<i>Business</i>	<i>2006 Loss</i>	<i>2008 Loss</i>	<i>Normal Annual Income</i>
Grovers' Gulch RV Park and Campground	\$8,000	\$10,000	\$15,000
Bernard Haus B&B/ Big Dog Guide Service	5,000	7,000	\$18,000
Trinity River Rafting	25,000	75,000	\$120,000
Trinity Adventure Park RV Park, Store, Café, Bar	35%	20%	\$77,500

HOW FIRES AFFECTED BUSINESSES: Smoke, road and trail closures, and proximity of active fire kept the public away from area and caused cancellations of those previously planning to come to the area. For all of these businesses, the fires were burning during the usual peak season of the year.

Some local people did make money from the fire suppression activities, contracting for various jobs and making some sales of supplies from stores. However, present government regulations concerning hiring on fires do not allow locals to work as they did many years ago. Most contract personnel were from out of the area.

This is a very small sampling. We understand there are other organizations that are probably doing a broader survey and these results should be available to you.

Duration of Fires and Exposure to Smoke

Fire Episode	Start	End	Approx. Days
1987	8/31/87	10/6/87	37
1999	8/23/99	11/1/99	70
2006	7/23/06	10/15/06	115
2008	6/21/08	9/10/08	81

HERITAGE RESOURCES WITHIN THE IRON/ALPS COMPLEX *DAMAGE TO NON-RENEWABLE FEATURES CAUSED BY FIRES THAT ARE ALLOWED TO SPREAD AND BY MAN-CAUSED BURN-OUTS*

This summer's fires in Trinity County created widespread damage to the natural resources, wildlife, the local economy, residents' property such as timber, water lines and other interests, aesthetics, and the air quality. Fire practices need modification not only to save these, but also to save another important resource that is not always as evident to the public: heritage resources.

More than thirty-four locations of prehistoric Indian villages, sacred sites and camps, and historic mines, cabins, and ranches were either within or close to the fires that burned within the Iron and Alps Complex. Most lie within the burn areas while a few are located nearby in areas where suppression support activities (equipment parking, spike camps, bulldozed safety areas, fuel breaks, etc.) may have disturbed them.

These sites are part of the National Forest's non-renewable resources. Once they are disturbed they cannot be restored to their original conditions.

According to Ken Wilson, Heritage Resources BAER Team Leader for the Megram Fire in 1999 and Heritage Resources Program Manager for the Six Rivers National Forest, in "A Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Heritage Resources Impacted by the 1999 Megram Fire, Big Bar Complex, Six Rivers and Shasta-Trinity National Forests, Region 5, California," wildfires "clearly have the potential to damage, or destroy, heritage resources." Fires can cause this damage through: (1) direct effects of the fire; (2) ground disturbing suppression activities; and/or (3) erosive movement caused by subsequent storm precipitation.

Results of fire damage may include completely destroyed historic and archaeological resources or surface and subsurface cultural remains that are altered in a way to disallow scientific analysis and interpretation. Artifacts made of glass and ceramics may fracture or break from fire temperatures and, of course, any wood structures or wood remnants in historic sites may burn. This was noticed in historic sites burned during the 1999 Megram Fire.

By burning protective duff, brush, and other natural forest growth over and around artifacts and ground features, wildfires may increase the accessibility and visibility of archaeological site locations making them more susceptible to vandalism/artifact looting and unauthorized recreation activity. These factors, alone or combined, have the potential to impact the qualities of archaeological sites or areas held to be of significance by contemporary cultures such as local Native American communities. The burning of the historic sites in the Old Denny Historic District in 1999 attracted illegal relic collectors to the area the following summer.

Background data for the 1999 Megram Fire area is similar to that for the 2008 Iron and Alps Complex which is also in northwestern Trinity County. Heritage resource sites in the watersheds impacted by fires here are primarily associated with two broad categories of archaeological sites—prehistoric sites consisting primarily of lithic cultural materials including groundstone and flaked tool scatters, and historical sites linked to the gold mining era. Archaeological studies in northwestern California suggest that prehistoric sites in this region date back as much as 5,000 years. The historical period begins in 1849 with the discovery of gold in the Trinity Mountains. Numerous claims were filed along the streams and washes of this region. Ditches were constructed within many of the smaller drainages in the late 1800s to bring water to hydraulic mining areas. There is a network of historic trails connecting the high country with the surrounding river valleys. With the creation of the Klamath and Trinity National Forests in 1905 construction of a number of guard stations and administrative sites were undertaken.

The montane areas have been traditionally used by Native Americans for spiritual and ceremonial purposes. These "spiritual areas" retain their importance to Native Americans and are still utilized for spiritual purposes. These Traditional Cultural Properties are considered critical

heritage resource values to the tribes and traditional practitioners who utilize these areas. The same areas have also been used for gathering of plants by local Native Americans, both in the past and contemporarily.



Fires on Ironside Mountain are shown on June 23, 2008, just a couple of days from the thunderstorm that ignited them, as they start burning together. In the end most of Ironside, a sacred mountain to the Chimariko Indian and a contemporary sacred site to modern Native Americans, burned. A Chimariko legend relates that when old people hiked up this mountain, they would come down young.

On the next page is a list of many of these sites (without specific locations being divulged) that were within the fires of the Iron/Alps Complex. These are valuable and unique resources on National Forest land that have been affected by lack of adequate suppression policies. *

(signed)

ERIC RITTER, PhD
Archaeologist
Shasta College, Redding, California

10/2/08

(Date)

NOTE: The page is not included in this form of the report.

BIG BAR RANGER STATION PRECIP RECORD AND AVERAGES

1913-2008 (Not complete)

(precipitation recorded each year from July 1 through June 30 the following year)

** = annual record not complete; some months missing*

1913-14	31.78*
1914-15	41.43
1915-16	38.19
1916-17	28.59
1917-18	25.56
1918-19	42.69
1919-20	21.26
1920-21	47.72
1921-22	23.32
1922-23	30.67*
1943-44	23.03*
1944-45	35.19
1945-46	38.01
1946-47	28.84
1947-48	35.87
1948-49	29.68
1949-50	34.20
1950-51	51.03
1951-52	48.41
1952-53	50.57
1953-54	43.43
1954-55	24.36
1955-56	57.68
1956-57	44.89
1957-58	60.41
1958-59	29.53
1959-60	30.10
1960-61	34.90
1961-62	26.83
1962-63	37.94
1963-64	27.27
1964-65	45.10
1965-66	33.40
1966-67	36.29
1967-68	31.71
1968-69	49.00
1969-70	55.40
1970-71	49.45
1971-72	40.21
1972-73	35.62
1973-74	57.95
1974-75	41.19
1975-76	27.96
1976-77	16.05
1977-78	47.64
1978-79	25.69
1979-80	41.17

1980-81	26.40
1981-82	50.72
1982-83	64.91
1983-84	46.57
1984-85	30.09
1985-86	43.04
1986-87	30.94
1987-88	31.63
1988-89	36.95
1989-90	30.99
1990-91	21.35
1991-92	25.08
1992-93	43.85
1993-94	21.64
1994-95	55.82
1995-96	47.23
1996-97	41.65
1997-98	56.23
1998-99	39.73
1999-00	35.49
2000-01	20.40
2001-02	35.47
2002-03	44.44
2003-04	36.47
2004-05	33.44
2005-06	47.76
2006-07	25.78
2007-08	31.25

AVERAGES:

1914-1922 (8-yr)	33.60"
1948-1958 (10-yr)	44.47"
1958-1968 (10-yr)	33.31"
1968-1978 (10-yr)	42.05"
1978-1988 (10-yr)	39.12"
1988-1998 (10-yr)	38.38"
1998-2008 (10-yr)	35.02"

Period of 1923-1943 was not obtained. However, there was a period of nation-wide drought in the 1930s.

Part of the data above from:

http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow_rain.html

(BGB is code for Big Bar Ranger Station in this website.)

**HISTORICALLY SUPPRESSED FIRES – AGGRESSIVE
SUPPRESSION, SMALL ACREAGES, FEW OR NO FATALITIES**

***Only two fatalities in Northwestern Trinity County
1905-1987***

Of the literally hundreds of fires suppressed on the Big Bar Ranger District since the inception of the Forest Service system here in 1905, there are only two known fatalities between that year and including 1987—83 years of firefighting activity. In 1987 one firefighter suffered a heart attack while working in the North Fork drainage. The only other one known was in about 1969 (the fire is not in the following list) when a smokejumper named Regginato died in an accident with his parachute.

There were no fatalities in any of the below-mentioned fires, 1933 to 1977. (The news article for the 1969 fatality is not included here.) In the past summer's fire episode (2008) there were 10 fatalities, one involving a tree-falling accident and all the others in result of a helicopter accident.

This part of California is very rugged and steep. And yet, in spite of this, firefighting can be safe on this harsh ground, as can be attested from the documentation here.

Nearly all of the following noted fires were suppressed within just a day or two. The Forest Service can still do this, but the suppression policies have changed and the fires are now allowed to get larger, with little aggressive action to stop them. The longer the time for a fire to be put out, the increased probability for accidents.

**Examples
Typical Fires in Trinity County
Mostly lightning fires and, with exception of one,
In Northwestern Trinity)
1933-1977**

**(From Weaverville, California, *Trinity Journal*
and Willow Creek, California, *Klam-Ity Kourier*)**

August 19, 1933 Fire near Corral Bottom from broken power line, 42 acres, suppressed in two days by 160 Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees. It took men 3 hours to hike in to fire.

July 20, 1939 Fire near Douglas City, 4000 acres brought under control after two days with 300 firefighters including Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees and civilians

July 11, 1940 Fire near Don Juan Creek, 1600 acres along highway, started from broken power line, suppressed in two days with 340 firefighters. No accidents “despite adverse weather and terrain.”

July 31, 1941 15 fires from weekend lightning storm, all held to small areas.

October 11, 1945 7 lightning fires, including one 9,000-acre fire (Peacock Fire) controlled in 5 days (helped with rain on October 9) (“largest fire in twenty years”)

August 23, 1951 8,000-acre Jim Jam Burn, contained in rugged country, requiring 5-7-mile hike one way, by about 511 firefighters in one week; broke out after two more weeks but still completely controlled by September 25—one month. Fire was not discovered until it was about 300-400 acres.

July 8, 1965 Two small lightning fires up New River, men dropped off by helicopter, putting fires out in same day

June 7, 1966 8 or 9 lightning fires over Memorial Day weekend on Big Bar Ranger District, all put out at small sizes

September 7, 1967 26 lightning fires on Big Bar Ranger District, broke out on August 27, all of which were soon put out. One fire, on old Jim Jam Burn, was 7 acres and most difficult to put out—took three days to put it out.

August 26-27, 1971 Ten fires ignited from thunderstorm activity, all controlled by August 29, 1971. Two above Denny, one of these getting to 20 acres. One other was 5 acres—all others “typical small lightning fires” (fractions of an acre)

August 23, 1972 Two man-caused fires in Del Loma and Big Bar areas reported in afternoon of August 11, the first controlled at 525 acres on August 14, and the second at 15 acres on August 12.

August 28, 1972 Two fires ignited from thunderstorm activity, one 7 acres and the other 20 acres, both above Denny

September 3-4, 1972 Ten fires ignited from thunderstorm activity, eight small, one 3 acres and one 83 acres

September 27, 1972 Nine fires from Labor Day weekend thunderstorm, September 2-4, largest on Thurston Peak at 83 acres, all others typical small fires. Thurston Fire reported in afternoon of September 3; controlled morning of September 5.

May 17, 1973 (Date of article) Two fires ignited from thunderstorm activity, one controlled at ¼ acre, the other one green tree on fire.

July 17, 1973 Three fires from thunderstorm activity, all three small (fractions of an acre)

June 13, 1974 86-acre man-caused fire at junction of Pony and Milk creeks above Denny, 220 men, 3 helicopters, and retardant planes.

March 27, 1975 Article summarizing fires in 1974. 130 fires suppressed on National Forest lands within Trinity County, only 4 considered large: Virgin Fire at 725 acres and East Fork at 86 acres, both above Denny; Garden Fire at Hayfork at 550 acres, and Coffee Fire near Coffee Creek at 24 acres.

July 10, 1975 600-acre man-caused fire near China Garden, about 10 miles up North Fork Trail from Hobo Gulch Trailhead, 520 firefighters, 7 helicopters, 2 fixed wing, including smokejumpers

September 13 to September 15, 1975 Twenty fires from thunderstorm activity, 8 in wilderness in New River, others up Underwood, Hennessey, Big Mountain, Allen Creek, and Eagle Rock. All small except one that was 1 acre in size.

September 25, 1975 20 fires from thunderstorm activity September 13 and 15, most of them under one-tenth acre in size. Largest was one acre. Eight in wilderness area above Denny.

July 8, 1976 28 fires on Big Bar Ranger District, each put out by a two- to three-man crew within a few days, the largest 8 acres. All others very small.

July 30, 1977 825-acre man-caused fire around Caraway Creek above Denny, discovered on July 30 and controlled on August 3. 450 firefighters, 2 helicopters, 14 engines, 4 bulldozers, 8 retardant planes, 16 smokejumpers.

Article from July 19, 1945 *Trinity Journal* regarding a rash of lightning fires:

FOREST FIRES EXTINGUISHED

Forest fires that taxed the forces of the Trinity National Forest for eight days are mopped up, and the supplementary crews returned to their posts.

The Forest service took action on 35 fires during the week of July 9 to 16, and had assisting them 25 overhead from outside the forest, a platoon of fire fighting soldiers from Chico, approximately 120 men from Santa Rosa, and several airplanes and personnel.

Although the number was great, each fire was a potential forest hazard, most were controlled before extensive damage was done.

On the lower Trinity, at Carry Ridge on a fire near Mary Blaine mountain it required 24 miles of travel by trail from Denny to reach the conflagration. Bake Oven Ridge fire required 16 miles of travel from Denny, and Horse Linto Creek fire, which was the largest, was almost inaccessible. On the trail into Horse Linto one soldier re-injured a kneecap that had been broken previously, and was brought out on a bulldozer. On all these three fires, cargo planes supplied food to the fire crews.

So far as can be ascertained, all were lightning caused except one.

JIM JAM FIRE STATISTICS

Started Thursday, August 23, 1951, from lightning storm

Controlled Tuesday, September 25, 1951, at approx. 8,000 acres

- ◆ Fire not discovered until it was 300-400 acres, several lightning fires having burned together
- ◆ Located in heavy fuels and very steep terrain
- ◆ Hot and dry conditions
- ◆ Required 5-7 mile hike one way
- ◆ Hand tools only
- ◆ No air attack, only cargo drops of tools and food to fire camp
- ◆ About 511 firefighters
- ◆ Trailhead (one mile above Denny) was about 2 ½ hours from Forest office in Weaverville
- ◆ Fire was considered controlled within one week and a skeleton crew was left to mop up; however, it spotted over the line on September 19 and required firefighters to return for a few days. *The fire was still controlled totally within a month.*
- ◆ No fatalities or injuries (although minor injuries may not have been reported)

In the two years following the Jim Jam Fire, a road was constructed from Denny to the fire area in order to salvage some of the dead timber. A sawmill was operated on Jim Jam to utilize some of the timber that was not hauled out. Jeffrey pine was planted in areas that were accessible. The fire left hundreds of dead snags and much brush—heavy fuels that in years to come concerned Forest Service fire management staff with the possibility of additional serious fires within the same area.

References: Trinity Journal, Weaverville, California, editions of August 23 & 30 and September 20 & 27, 1951.

DENNY GUARD STATION
POOR DECISION-MAKING IN FIRE MODULE DOWNSIZING

As indicated earlier in this package of support information, the Denny Guard Station was a fire module the Shasta-Trinity chose to remove in spite of its known and tested strategic location as a firefighting station and as a presence in a large area of northwestern Trinity County. The Denny Guard Station had recently cost the public over \$1 million to replace engine crew quarters, engine bay, and office. The official Forest Service position was that according to computer analysis, this station was not needed, and moving it would “improve initial and extended attack capability across the forest [Shasta-Trinity]” The Denny crew was moved to Weaverville, which already had plenty of fire coverage from CalFire. The abandonment of the facility took place in 2005. The next year, 2006, three small lightning fires—which could have been handled by the Denny crew in a matter of hours—were allowed to burn until they combined and eventually became the 100,000-acre Bake Oven and Pigeon fires.

Following is a letter that was sent to the Forest Service explaining the history and background of this station removal.

P.O. Box 669
Big Bar, CA 96010
June 14, 2005

U.S. Forest Service
Trinity River Management Unit
Attn: Kevan Paluso
P.O. Box 1190
Weaverville, CA 96093

Dear Kevan:

This letter is in response to the public advertisement in the June 1 *Trinity Journal* requesting input regarding the proposal to close the Denny Guard Station in Denny, California.

We do not understand why the District Ranger, Joyce Andersen, has decided to ask for public input for the removal of the guard station and crew after the crew and engine were already moved out several weeks ago and the buildings have been put out for bid, (by sealed bid, deadline June 13) but we certainly hope she is sincere in this request and that she will consider our opinion. It seems as though the decision has already been made and this letter probably will not make any difference.

We believe the Forest Service is making a huge mistake if it removes the Denny Guard Station’s crew and buildings. Removed from the New River watershed, then, would be (1) support for fire prevention and suppression, (2) service to the public—wilderness permits, National Forest policy and recreation information, assistance and/or communications in time of emergency situations, and (3) a presence that deters, even if to a small degree, the re-creation of serious lawlessness in the National Forest. The New River watershed encompasses about 144,000 acres, a large chunk of northwestern Trinity County and a large chunk of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

There has been a guard station at the present site since at least 1929, when District Ranger Wes Hotelling set one up, beginning with just tent cabins and developing into wood frame buildings and a public campground. There were fire guards up New River before 1929, although not always at this specific location. The crews varied from one to two people, including “fire guards” and “smokechasers,” to the larger engine crew that has been stationed there the past several years.

1. Fire

The main road did not reach Denny until late 1932, and even now there are comparatively few roads in the watershed. A crew that is already in the area is quicker to access the trailheads, drive to lookout points during lightning activity, and respond to fire calls. With exception of a very few, such as the Jim Jam Fire of 1951 that burned 7,000 acres, fires were usually small. Fuels accumulating over the years, however, have painted a whole different picture, and in 1999 the Big Bar Complex ate up 150,000 acres to the west, to the east, and to the north of Denny. The fire burned to the west and threatened the towns of Willow Creek and Hoopa. We had never seen anything like it. There is still much, much unburned slash and standing dead trees up New River that could ignite very easily.

In September 1973 Gay’s father’s house burned down at Denny at about 10:00 p.m. Although Forest Service firefighters are trained in wildland fire suppression and not for structures, the Denny crew—just a few people at that time—responded to the fire. They were not able to save the house, but they were able to keep the fire from spreading to the surrounding forest and other houses. It is likely that if the crew were not there, it would have developed into a large and destructive forest fire. *The money saved from the prevention of just one fire like that might pay for the Denny crew for several years.*

We may not have many residences in the Denny area compared to other more populated areas, but we value our homes as much as anyone else, and we would like to see a fire crew stay, even if it were just a couple people with a small engine.

In letters the Washington Office sent to Senator Dianne Feinstein and the Redding Office sent to Congressman Wally Herger regarding Denny, the Forest Service explained the “National Fire Management Analysis System” concluded that moving the Denny engine and crew would improve “initial and extended attack capability” across the forest. However, this does not improve initial and extended attack capability in the 144,000-acre New River watershed—it takes it away!

Rudy Gillard, a Fortuna resident who has maintained a cabin and property at Denny for over 30 years, was present at his cabin during the Big Bar Complex. He has written to Joyce, in a letter also signed by many of the other property owners near him, asking that the guard station be kept at Denny. He has seen with his own eyes what happens when a fire sweeps through.

Charley Fitch, past Big Bar District Ranger, and David Rhodes, past Big Bar Fire Management Officer, both have been reported in a recent *Trinity Journal* article pertaining to the Denny Guard Station that they strongly believe the unit should be maintained. They are both familiar with fire management planning and strategy and know the New River country. Mr. Rhodes agreed that fire suppression is greatly helped by airplanes, helicopters, and smokejumpers, but they do not fly at night. Having a crew at Denny still gives us the option of starting them out hiking a trail in the dark to access a fire by early morning.

2. Service to the Public

Since the wilderness permit was first required for the then Salmon-Trinity Alps Primitive Area in 1971, the Denny crew has usually been available to issue these for hikers and horsemen. The crew has been a contact point for dispersing important recreational and fire prevention information, and has been there during times of

emergencies, either actually helping in the situation, or providing communication between the visitors and the Sheriff's Department or other agency or office. Denny is almost an hour's drive in from Highway 299 and it is a big help to the public to have the crew here.

The crew in years past has also issued firewood and campfire permits for the benefit of local residents and visitors.

3. Forest Service Presence

Although the Denny crew has never been a law enforcement entity, its presence has helped deter or reduce misuse of the National Forest. The New River watershed with its large isolated and difficult-to-access area still can attract some individuals as a haven to grow marijuana or conduct other sorts of criminal activity. The lack of any government presence can add to this attraction.

In the 1950s the public was becoming more aware that there were people living on mining claims on National Forest lands, and pressure was put on the Forest Service to start addressing the situation. Legislation such as the Church-Johnson Act provided a way for some of the oldtimers who weren't really mining any more to continue living where they had for a long time, but there were some others who were occupying the public land without having a legal reason to do so. By the late 1960s the message got out that newcomers could come and live on National Forest under the guise of the 1872 Mining Law.

The Big Bar District, especially in its New River watershed, saw an influx of younger people moving in and living on mining claims by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of them became hostile to Forest Service people. In April 1971 Big Bar Resource Officer Chuck McFadin was injured in his neck from a ricochet bullet while performing his job near Denny. Two other Forest Service employees at the same incident were jumped by Denny residents and beaten. For several years the Big Bar District had tried to get higher Forest Service offices to treat the mining claim situation as a real problem—there had been threats and incidents for several years before this—but it took the actual injury of a Forest Service employee for the Regional Office to agree to really deal with it, providing additional budget and law enforcement.

Between 1964 and 1979 the Big Bar District documented over 60 incidents involving threats or negative demonstrations by some of the occupants of the mining claims.

Some of the original mining claim occupancy problem evolved into the growing of marijuana on National Forest lands, many of these "farms" in the wilderness area. The residence at the Denny Guard Station and its adjacent garage, both built in 1933 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, were burned down by arson in 1979. In 1981 the older "Packer's Cabin" was burned by arson. Threats were made to the public as well as to Forest Service employees. The situation gained much national attention in the news and it was recommended that the public not drive the roads or hike the trails up New River.

Finally, in 1984 a special team consisting of Forest Service agents and Trinity County Sheriff's deputies moved in to the Denny Guard Station to eradicate marijuana growing and harvesting in the watershed. The criminal element of the marijuana growers left or was dealt with, and the situation was mostly alleviated. There are still "growers" in the area, but not to the extent of those earlier years.

By removing the Denny Guard Station and its unique "presence" in this complex and difficult area, the Forest Service is dropping the ball and allowing for a potential return of unfavorable uses of the National Forest. The New River area is still a very large, remote, and easy-to-hide-in area. It would be very unfortunate for another negative situation to evolve there. Much effort, time, public money—and even blood—have been expended to get the New River safe.

In the Forest Service response to Senator Feinstein and Congressman Herger, it stated, *“The relocation of Engine 3-3 will result only in the removal of the fire crew from Denny, not in a reduction of a USDA Forest Service presence in the area. Forest Service personnel such as fire prevention technicians and recreation, wilderness, and minerals resource specialists will continue to be present in the Denny area as administrative activities, project work, and inspections are required.”* This sounds good on paper, but as retired Forest Service people ourselves who know the work the Forest Service does in the area, we know this is not quite true. The presence IS lost; these various employees in recreation, fire prevention, wilderness, and minerals do not go up to the Denny area very often at all. The one who goes up there the most, Larry McLean, works in minerals—and is very well liked by all the community—but he is not able to get up there often because of other projects. *Having people go in and out occasionally does not equate with having a crew stationed there.*

If the Forest Service closes the Denny Guard Station, taking away the fire personnel and the “presence” and public service they afford, then we do not believe present management of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest really understands what has gone on in the area before, and does not understand what a fire hazard the area of the Big Bar Complex still is. [

Please leave a crew there, even a small one, and keep the Guard Station buildings as they are.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rich & Gay Berrien

Rich and Gay Berrien

LIABILITY FACTS REGARDING FIRE SUPPRESSION
Statement for Wally Herger by Stan Stetson

Mr. Herger I would like to thank you for taking the time today to listen to our concerns about the safety of firefighters and the well being of our National Forests and private holdings in Trinity County. You were able to view the Weaverville Community Forest recently and see what can be done on BLM land when environmentalists allow good forestry to be practiced without interference.

I would like to share with you some information about legislation and regulations that are interfering with firefighters doing the best things possible for the land while they are exposing themselves to great dangers from the lack of aggressive management of Forest Service lands across the range of the Northern Spotted Owl.

As a result of the fatalities on the South Canyon Fire in 1994, the Thirty Mile Fire in 2001 and the Kramer Fire in 2003, legislation has been passed under what I believe your outfit called the Cantel/Hastings bill. I would like to say that I get concerned when riders are attached to meet the needs of people back home and cause unexpected consequences for others. On the selfish side, I would like to thank you for voting for the bailout and including the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self Determination Act as a rider.

The effects of the legislation that places the threat of charges of Involuntary manslaughter over the head of every firefighter when they are placed in the position of Incident Commander is not conducive to retention and promotion of dedicated federal employees. People are quitting, retiring and choosing not to advance in the Forest Service because they are risking their careers and the security of themselves and their families if they assume responsibility for all of the people who show up on their fire. Will the Eagle Fire IC be charged with involuntary manslaughter and use his professional liability insurance because a member of the incoming IC's team was killed while scouting for the next planning cycle. Ms. Cantel felt the need to enact legislation so someone would be held accountable when someone died. She said, "People are losing their lives, but no one is losing their jobs."

Ms. Cantel may not be happy that Ellresse Danie, the IC on the Thirty Mile Fire in Washington, was removed from fire fighting and assigned to a warehouse job. He was charged and had charges dropped after the 2001 fire, then in 2006 he was indicted again and finally sentenced in August 2008 after plea bargaining to lesser charges of lying to investigators. One parent of a deceased firefighter thought Daniels should have gotten two years in jail. Another father said, "Ellresse is not in charge of the fire or the wind, and that's what killed them." Six of that father's children fought fire for the Forest Service, two sons went out this year, and his daughter just started as a firefighter this season.

The lives of the living are affected by the tragedy of fire fatalities in ways that cannot be envisioned by investigation teams as they try to make sense of the chaotic events that lead up to an extreme fire event. Ed Pulaski in 1910 was blamed for deaths by some and called a hero by others after he held his crew at gunpoint in a mine shaft. Wagner Dodge was blamed for the deaths of some of his crew on Mann Gulch in 1949 after he lit an escape fire and beckoned his fellow jumpers to join him and live. Those that heeded the foreman's call survived, most of those that did not, perished. People judged Dodge and he was dead seven years later, a broken man.

We try to make it safer, to make more rules, to develop better safeguards. In reality we have created a set of mandates that are conflicting and hard to understand. There is too much information to absorb and remember when a crisis is at hand. The Briefing Checklist that must be relayed to dispatch before a Forest Service crew can engage a fire may take ten minutes to complete. It took the Junction City engine less than five minutes to reach the ignition point of the Junction Fire. It was over ten minutes from the time they arrived on scene before they had the checklist completed and began attack on the fire. The fire escaped their control and threatened the town of Weaverville. In the old days, we memorized the Ten Standard Firefighting Orders, listened to the weather report and fire danger rating, checked our gear and equipment at the start of every shift, and listened to our foreman.

Today a firefighter may decide to disengage whenever trigger points are reached that in the mind of that individual makes further action unsafe. The theory was that once the critical situation was mitigated by new or altered tactics, crews would reengage. Supervisors are at the mercy of crews because of the message “safety at any cost. “ Any crew person can report a supervisor anonymously for engaging in a perceived unsafe situation without consulting the supervisor and determining what the goals and objectives of the plan actually are.

We have tried to make a system that can overcome and counter human nature and fear. We need simple systems with memorable phrases that can be applied and understood by all firefighters and applied by experienced crew leaders. Ten Standard Fire Fighting Orders, The 13 Watch Out Situations (they now total 18) , the LCES Checklist, Safety Zone Guidelines, Look Up, Down and Around and the Risk Management Process are too much to think about when you are in a classroom or a court room, let alone something you can remember when fighting a fire in an unmanaged forest.

It is time to return to the time proven basics. We need to fight fire aggressively, but provide for safety first. We must learn and apply the Ten Standard Firefighting Orders. We must continue to train and evaluate supervisors and ICs and require subordinates to follow their directions. We cannot legislate “ultimate safety” in a profession that is dangerous by its very nature. While an investigation of a death is certainly warranted, sometimes the blame lies with the fire and the forest – all firefighters know this.

CLIMATE, RAINFALL, FIRE SUPPRESSION, AND TIMBER HARVEST IN THE PAST CENTURY AS IT RELATES TO WILDFIRES

(This added after initial report to Congressman Herger)

By David P. Rhodes

A general history of Forest Service forest management, by decade, compared with nationwide fire and local fire data shows a definite failing of the agency's present fire policies as fires and burned acreages increase. There is a distinct and clear need to return to the strong forest and fire management that was in place earlier in this history. Below is a chart showing the fire and rainfall data by decade:

Number of Fires and Acres Burned by Decade Nationwide (Source NIFC) and Comparison with Local Average Rainfall

Average rainfall at Big Bar Ranger District. Source: http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow_rain.html

Dates	Average No. Fires	Average No. Acres Burned	Average Acres/Fire	Precip. Average at Big Bar Same Time Period
1919-1929**	97,599	26,004,567	266	32.72"*
1930-1939	167,277	39,143,195	234	31.09"*
1940-1949	162,050	22,919,898	141	36.04"*
1950-1959	125,948	9,415,796	75	44.45"
1960-1969	119,772	4,571,255	38	35.25"
1970-1979	155,112	3,194,421	21	39.72"
1980-1989	163,329	4,236,229	26	40.24"
1990-1999	106,306	3,647,597	34	38.36"
2000 only	122,827	8,422,237	69	35.49" (1999-2000)
2001 only	84,109	3,570,911	42	20.40" (2000-2001)
2002 to 9/15	67,561	6,444,305	95	35.47" (2001-2002) 44.44" (2002-2003)

* Precipitation record for Big Bar Ranger Station unavailable or incomplete for these years. Averages here are those for Weaverville, about 17 air miles east of Big Bar and which usually averages a small amount below Big Bar's precip.

**This entry is eleven years, not a decade.

Precipitation averages are based on the current annual precipitation year of July 1 through June 30.

Curiously, the wildfire literature seems to have little to say about weather and the effects of periodic climatic fluctuations either as related to periodicity of fire return or the rate of fuel accumulation. What the Forest Service currently relates to the public is that the last half of the 20th Century was a lot drier and hotter than the first 50 years. This would lead one to believe that the large destructive fires occurring from the late 1990s until present can be blamed on fire suppression successes in the past—Smokey the Bear preventing fires, and a build-up of forest fuels because of this suppression of fires along with logging.

This scenario gives present day wildland fire managers the excuse needed to allow wildfires to burn under conditions that they now call managed or the “appropriate management response”—which seems to have no sideboards or accountability.

1919 to 1929 – During these eleven years the average annual rainfall in the Big Bar area was 32.72 inches. The number of fires nationwide during this same period was 97,599, with acreage burned, 26,004,567. The average acres burned per fire were 266.

In this same time period, World War I initiated increased demands for lumber from both public and private lands, more than the demand had been in the past decade of 1909 to 1919. Very little clean-up or slash disposal took place during 1919 to 1929. Logging debris was pretty much left on the site and decayed as time passed. The Forest Service had no organized fire suppression forces during this period, relying on employees from other Forest Service disciplines, private citizens, logging crews, and whoever else might be available for recruitment as firefighters.

Some fires during this decade and the previous decade were the result of land clearing fires set by private citizens to clear agricultural lands for farming. Annual growth in the forest was a lot more than was being harvested, which added to the build-up of forest fuels.

1930 to 1939 – From 1930 to 1939 the annual rainfall averaged 31.09 inches. The number of fire starts nationwide was 167,277, the number of acres burned was 39,143,195, and the average acres per fire 234. This decade, which included the Depression Era, had the most fire starts and acres burned for the century. Much of this may have been due to severe drought from which much of the country suffered. The Civilian Conservation Corps which was established in 1933 had a large effect in helping the Forest Service in constructing roads and building ranger stations and fire lookouts. The enrollees worked additionally as firefighters. The Forest Service still also depended on private citizens and logging crews to help in the suppression of fires.

Logging on National Forests continued to increase and concerns about depleting the nation’s forests started to surface. Logging slash and cull logs were still being left in the woods without much clean-up being done.

Some fires during this period may have been set by individuals so they could be hired to help suppress the fires they started.

1940 to 1949 – The average annual rainfall taken in the Big Bar area was 36.04 inches. The number of fires nationwide was 162,050, acres burned were 22,919,898, and the average acres per fire were 141. This decade had a large number of fire starts but a sharp decrease in the amount of acres burned. This decade included World War II which taxed many of the nation’s natural resources, including timber.

In 1944 the Sustained Yield Act was initiated in the National Forest system. This act put restrictions on the amount of timber that could be cut annually from the National Forests. Simply put, it meant that no more timber could be cut from a forest than what was grown on an annual basis. This slowed down logging in some areas but it remained in high demand even after World War II ended. (In the Big Bar area, timber harvest was never the same level as in other areas of the United States during these years, due to inaccessibility.) Much of the timber demand was due to the nation’s rebuilding after the war and an increase in home building.

Fire suppression on the National Forest was accomplished with some aid from the military, logging crews, and Forest Service employees who had grown in numbers as the organization was enlarged.

Also important during this time period was the establishment of the smokejumper program and Smokey the Bear, the bear cub rescued from a fire on the Lincoln National Forest in 1946. Smokey became the national symbol for preventing fires.

1950 to 1959 – The average rainfall at Big Bar was 44.45 inches, number of nationwide fires 125,948 and acres burned 9,415,796. Average acres for each fire was 75. Demand for timber was continuing to increase. The Korean War also had an effect on this. The Forest Service had begun disease control on the National Forests. Timber contractors were being required to clean up or pay for the clean-up of logging slash. The Forest Service was using prescribed fire to prepare logged-over areas for replanting. Aggressive reforestation was begun and logging of diseased timber was taking place.

Fire suppression forces grew in the form of hot shot crews and a build-up of engine crews. Numbers of employees on the ranger districts increased because of additional emphasis on recreation, timber harvest, slash clean-up, engineering, and road design.

Use of air tankers and helicopters also was a great aid to suppression efforts, as well as fire prevention programs. This had a significant effect on the amount of acres burned, a reduction of over 13,000,000 acres over the past decade.

1960 to 1969 – During this decade the average annual rainfall at Big Bar was 35.25 inches. The nationwide number of fires was 119,772, acres burned were 4,571,255, and average acres per fire were 38. Demand for timber continued to increase as the nation grew and the war in Viet Nam began. The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act was passed.

Recreational demands on the National Forest were increasing with millions of new visitors using the forests.

Suppression of fires was handled aggressively. Better firefighting equipment as well as agency training programs had a lot to do with reducing acres burned and size of fires.

Better utilization of left-over logging residue and removal of cull logs to landings also helped reduce the tons per acre of fuels in logged-over sites. Timber sales were paying for clean-up, burning, and reforestation of cut-over areas.

Pre-attack planning of forests in California and construction of fuel breaks before fires occurred were a great help in reducing the acres burned by wildfire.

During this period the Wilderness Act of 1964 was passed. This Act restricted use of mechanized equipment for fire suppression purposes except by special authorization, such as helicopters, retardant planes, and chain saws.

1970 to 1979 – The average annual rainfall at Big Bar was 39.72 inches. The average number of nationwide fires was 155,112 with acres burned at 3,194,421. The average acres per fire were 21. It should be noted that this is the smallest amount of acreage burned in one decade in the 20th Century. Reduction in acreage burned can be attributed to several factors:

1. The 1972 Fire Plan strengthened Forest Service initial attack forces nationwide. It provided additional fire crews, new stations, and a build-up of aircraft and support services. Increased fire training programs and facilities were a great asset in developing a higher quality of fire management.

2. *Timber production was high and the industry was using more of the left-over materials. Cull logs were being processed into wood chips or being sold to other countries. Japan was a big buyer of these products. Reducing these fuels in the forest had a positive effect on reducing fire.*

3. *A small fee for every board foot of lumber sold was put into a special fund called Extra Protection. These Extra Protection funds were used to provide fire crews in areas that had been logged in previous decades where no treatment of slash had been completed. The crews provided protection in these areas as the slash was breaking down and decaying. They also carried out fuels reduction work in the areas and helped strengthen ranger district initial attack forces.*

The 1970s brought controversy over using chemicals to treat insects on National Forest lands especially when helicopters or fixed wing aircraft are used for application. Loss of this tool to treat insect outbreaks had a significant impact in later decades, increasing dead standing fuels in the forest. Insect material was continued to be removed, but only on roads and areas where mechanical means could be used.

1980 to 1989 – From 1980 to 1989 the average annual rainfall at Big Bar was 40.24 inches. The number of fires nationwide was 163,329. Acres burned were 4,236,229 and the average acres per fire were 26. Fire suppression strength for this decade stayed pretty much stable. The exception was that during the mid-80s the Extra Protection program and funding was cut and this eliminated those crews. The larger retardant planes and helicopters capable of hauling bigger pay loads were a great help.

Timber production remained high and better utilization of residue and slash continued as new markets opened up. Insect infestation continued to be a growing problem as many areas could not be treated because of no mechanical access.

The Northern Spotted Owl issue surfaced during the last part of this decade and would have a devastating effect on many aspects of forest management in future decades.

1990 to 1999 – The average rainfall at Big Bar was 38.36 inches. The number of fires nationwide was 106,306 and acres burned 3,647,597. Number of acres per fire was 34.

Due to the spotted owl restrictions and environmental groups pushing for reduction of timber harvesting in old growth stands—or, for many environmental groups, pushing for no timber harvest at all—the timber cut on National Forest land was reduced dramatically, especially during the last half of this decade.

As logging slowed down and timber-based revenues declined sharply, forest and district work forces began to shrink greatly in size. This included fire suppression forces as well as brush disposal, timber preparation, and silviculture crews.

Because of the shrinking work forces, districts were consolidated. Many of the specialists in fire and fuels management were reaching retirement age and as they left, so did their experience and knowledge. Many positions either were not filled or were combined with other positions, further cutting down the workforce.

The slow-down in timber also caused many employees in that area to either retire or switch to other functions within the Forest Service.

Now that timber production was cut severely, new annual growth was out-distancing the timber harvested. On the Shasta-Trinity National Forest it amounted to the following:

Annual growth in board feet: Approx. 4000,000,000 per year
Timber harvested before Spotted Owl: 210,000,000 to 298,000 per year
Timber harvested after Spotted Owl: 30,000,000 or less per year
Much of the timber harvest has been contested and stopped by environmental groups.

Several fire-related fatalities occurred nationwide during this decade. These fatalities ignited a change in traditional fire suppression tactics. Instead of direct aggressive attack on fires, crew bosses and fire managers started using a back-off approach. This approach, coupled with lack of experience and knowledge of fire, started the down-hill spiral in the agency's ability to fight fire.

Thinking in the Forest Service changed as fire managers tried to justify natural wildland fire starts, such as in allowing lightning fires to burn, especially in wilderness areas under the right conditions. Public sentiment had also begun to change as environmental groups pushed the Forest Service to take this approach.

In this analysis of the fire conditions within these past decades, in this decade of 1990 to 1999 one can see the pendulum swinging back toward larger fires and more acreage burned.

The years of 2000, 2001, and 2002 are treated individually as they are separate from the 10-year averages in the NIFC data cited at the beginning of this report.

2000 – Annual rainfall at Big Bar was 35.49 inches. There were 122,827 fires nationwide and 8,422,237 acres burned. Average acreage per fire was 69.

2001 – Rainfall recorded at Big Bar was 20.40 inches. The number of fires nationwide was 84,109 and acres burned 3,570,911. Average acreage per fire was 42.

2002 – Rainfall recorded at Big Bar was 35.47 inches. The number of fires nationwide was 67,561 with 6,444,305 acres burned. The average acreage per fire was 95.

These increases have started to accelerate and have continued to climb from 2002 to 2008. Forest fuels (tons per acres) are growing at a steady rate because of reduced forest management and timber harvesting. The Forest Service now uses large numbers of private contractors in an attempt to replace the loss of the suppression forces it once had.

The contractors for the most part do not have the training or experience that agency forces had. They also lack the incentive to put out the fires in a timely manner. When a fire is extinguished they are out of a job until the next event occurs.

The safety factor and steep and inaccessible terrain are excuses used for not attacking fires directly. Few if any night shifts are now utilized on fires. Fire managers say that night time fire suppression is too dangerous.

Among the excuses is that the last half of the 20th Century was a lot drier than the first fifty years. This just is not true.

Another excuse is that it is "Smokey Bear's fault," because of that program's emphasis on preventing and suppressing fires. This is another untruth.

The decades of the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s as shown in the chart are proof that when the forests were being managed and fire suppression was aggressive, there was a large drop in fire size and acres burned.

Fire managers of today tell the public to expect more of the same large destructive fires in the future. At this rate we will be back to where we were at the start of the 20th Century.