WORKING FOR A FIRE SAFE FUTURE

California Fire Alliance Accomplishments 2002

During the year 2002, the member agencies of the California Fire Alliance continued to make California a safer place for human and wildlife inhabitants by clearing away the fuel that can turn a spark into a raging wildland fire. The Alliance is a consortium of local, state, federal, and tribal agencies that work together to reduce the risk of wildfire. Thousands of acres of private and public land have been treated to meet that goal. Following are some of the accomplishments of the California Fire Alliance in 2002.

Fire Safe Councils – Citizens working together to make their communities safer and healthier places to live, that is what California's Fire Safe Councils are all about. Through their local Fire Safe Councils, people have learned how to apply for and obtain grants which bring millions of dollars into their communities for fire safe projects. In 2002 more than $7.1 million in federal funding was distributed among 241community projects. That money was used to remove dry brush and grass, create green belts, and develop fire prevention and public education programs. Several other states have used the California model to develop their own Fire Safe Councils. For more information about this dynamic, grassroots program, see www.firesafecouncil.org

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - The BLM contributes to the goals of the California Alliance in two ways; first, by treating their own land and second by acting as the conduit to bring federal funds into our state for hundreds of fire safety projects each year. In 2002 they treated 3,176 acres of BLM land which makes adjacent private property more fire safe as well. BLM also provided millions of federal dollars to other agencies to create fire safe landscapes around California. Through their own projects and through projects they funded, BLM treated a total of 6,364 acres in remote areas to support wildlife, forestry range and watershed projects and in the wildland urban interface, to protect communities where people live.

National Park Service (NPS) – The Pacific West Region of NPS was very busy in 2002 with 64 projects in California. Of those projects, 34 were on parks which are near the Wildland Urban Interface. By making the park more fire safe, they also created a fuel break which protects nearby communities where people live. More than 6,500 acres in California's national parks were treated last year either with prescribed burns or mechanical removal of the materials that fuel wildfires. Fuel breaks were created by removing dry grass, brush and weeds and thinning out overstocked stands of trees. These fuel breaks slow the progress of wildfire and provide access to firefighters. These projects also help maintain current species diversity and safely re-establish the natural presence of fire in the wildlands.

Bureau of Indian Affairs – (BIA) The BIA reduced fire hazards in the wildland urban interface with 22 projects for 21Tribes in California. The BIA also supported 17 Rural Fire Districts with grants that provided personal protective equipment, wildland fire training and wildland fire prevention activities.

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection - (CDF) The CDF protects private and public property on State Responsibility Area (SRA) within California. Every year CDF contracts with land owners and other cooperators to reduce fire hazards and improve the environment on their land. Through its Vegetation Management Program (VMP) CDF treated more than 24,000 acres in 2002. (The program averages 36,000 acres per year). Using controlled burns, hand clearing, and mechanized clearing, this program reduces the size and intensity of wildfires by denying those fires the fuels they need to spread. When a wildfire moves through treated land, it slows and cools so that firefighters have a chance to put it out. Every year CDF firefighters report success stories when they are working in or near VMP- treated land.

Governor's Office of Emergency Services - (OES) and Federal Emergency Management Agency – (FEMA) As a result of the cooperation by these two agencies, there were 12 wildland fires declared in California under FEMA's new Fire Management Assistance Grant Program. As a result of these declarations, Federal funding will be provided through OES to State agencies and local fire and sheriff's departments to assist with their response costs to those fires. FEMA manages and OES administers Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grants that are distributed on an annual basis and range from $250,000 and up. Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) grants become available following a disaster and range from 7.5% to 20% of the total disaster costs. In order to obtain these grants communities must develop and have approved pre-disaster mitigation plans through a working consortium of agencies and private citizens who collaborate to make their communities a safer place. California's fire departments received more than $19 million from FEMA in 2002 for essential training and equipment through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

USDA Forest Service – (FS) In 2002 the Forest Service treated more than 81,000 acres of national forest land in California with mechanical, hand, or prescribed fire treatments. Almost half of the areas treated were in the wildland urban interface. The FS added 15 crews, one helicopter, 19 engines, and seven bulldozers to its firefighting resources, improving its wildfire suppression capability. The FS also continued restoring wildfire-damaged areas through 16 rehabilitation projects. As part of the national fire plan, the Pacific Southwest Experiment Station is undertaking fourteen research projects. These will add valuable information to our knowledge base about wildfire and its effects. Through the Region, the Agency also provided approximately $4.9 million in funding to local and state fire departments, and $3.6 million in grant funding that supported a range of projects in local communities.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has provided more than $1.5 million toward Alliance projects, workshops, and education. They have provided funding to hazardous fuels projects near major urban centers including San Diego, San Francisco, Ventura and Sacramento. In 2002 the Service completed more than 5,400 acres of Wildland Urban Interface and 22,700 acres of Hazard Fuel Projects in California. Projects have focused on removal of critically flammable trees such as eucalyptus, acacia, and tamarisk adjoining urban sub-divisions in the wildland interface.

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