

**United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service**

**United States
Department of Interior
Bureau of
Land Management**

**State of Oregon
Department of
Forestry**

**State of Washington
Department of
Natural Resources**

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FS Memorandum

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To: All Employees

Subject: Letter of Gratitude to Pacific Northwest Fire Fighters

In the wake of one of the most devastating wildfire seasons in our region's history, it is time to recognize the sacrifice and contribution of thousands of firefighters, support personnel, cooperater agencies and contractors.

The summer and fall of 2002 saw the safe and successful mobilization and management of the largest concentration of firefighting resources in a single-season campaign the Pacific Northwest has ever seen.

The enormity of this truly interagency effort is difficult to comprehend. Largely due to widespread lightning strikes, wildfires in Oregon and Washington burned more than a million acres. Of the more than 2,600 fires counted in the two states, 375 resulted from a three-day series of lightning strikes in early July; and 66 of them are on the books as project fires. The impact of these fires placed human lives and homes at risk in both states. The Biscuit Fire in southwest Oregon, which threatened more than 17,000 people for several weeks before it was contained after burning nearly a half-million acres, is believed to be the largest fire in Oregon in more than a century.

Over the course of the summer 22 Type I Incident Management Teams, 54 Type II Incident Management Teams and six Area Commands took charge of the major fires. More than 30,000 firefighters and support personnel, several hundred aircraft and over 2,100 engines, bulldozers and tenders were committed to the fire suppression efforts. Indeed, the overall suppression costs were high and, regrettably, some homes and other structures were lost.

However, in the face of this huge mobilization and coordination task, the most remarkable statistics reflect the safety accomplishments. There were no fatalities, no aircraft accidents and no serious ground vehicle accidents – outstanding achievements for a wildfire season, which ran so long and required such a large mix of people and equipment. This safety performance did not happen by chance but because it was our highest priority.

We are particularly proud of the professionalism of all the firefighting organizations, which safely completed this suppression task in spite of many challenges. The 375 fire starts from over 15,000 lightning strikes between July 12-15 presented extraordinary competing resource needs

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and demands for some suppression skills that were limited or unavailable. Our fire managers applied the skills and resources to the greatest needs first – human life and property – regardless of land ownerships.

Praise and gratitude are also deserving of the many employees who remained at home to complete the all-important field season work, while lending their support to the critical fire borrowing needs, which this wildfire season required.

As we now move ahead to assessment and implementation of fire rehabilitation and recovery, we can all be proud that the skill and resilience of our Pacific Northwest workforces have again risen to and surpassed the needs of the critical task at hand. Thank you one and all for your dedicated efforts.

/s/ LINDA GOODMAN
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/s/ JAMES E. BROWN

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