



250 ranchers ready to fight fire in Idaho

June 17, 2014

(BOISE) - Since the 2013 fire season, **another 100 ranchers have been trained to fight wildfire** in southern Idaho, and **one additional rangeland fire protection association (RFPA) has been formed** - the Black Canyon RFPA out of Emmett.

That brings the total number of ranchers trained and available to legally fight fire in Idaho this fire season to **more than 250, with a total of five RFPAs formed to date.**

The State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) this morning heard the update in a pre-fire season report from the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL).

Together the ranchers will provide **fire protection on 675,000 acres of private rangeland and 2.9 million acres of federal and state rangeland** in Owyhee, Twin Falls, Elmore, and Gem Counties.

And there are six additional areas in southern Idaho where landowners are in various stages of forming new RFPAs.

Working together to keep fires small

Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) are non-profit organizations made up of ranchers and other landowners that can legally assist in fighting rangeland fires in Idaho. The associations are governed and directed by their members and funded by membership fees and grant dollars.

Before 2012 there were no RFPAs in Idaho.

The associations grew out of the ranchers' desire to be active participants in protecting the forage needed for their livelihood, but fire managers wanted to be sure they were properly trained and equipped to assist in putting the fires out.

So all parties focused on a **common goal** - to take advantage of the knowledge and quick initial attack ranchers can provide while satisfying safety concerns and protecting sage grouse habitat to the benefit of all parties.

In 2013 Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter and the Idaho Legislature supported changes in Idaho law and funding for start up costs that enabled the creation of the RFPA groups. Funds pay for training, personal protective clothing, equipment, and ongoing support by an IDL employee dedicated to working with the RFPAs.

As a result of the legislative changes, during the 2013 fire season ranchers assisted the BLM on at least 30 separate fires in southern Idaho.

Ranchers know the land. They know access routes, where water sources are located, and where fires have burned before.

The ranchers' support **helped save potentially millions of these taxpayer dollars by keeping fires smaller**, and minimizing the need to bring in incident

How do ranchers assist firefighters?

>> They **call in the fires early**, prompting quick dispatch of firefighting resources.

>> They **offer their intelligence about the land** to aid in good decision making about fire suppression tactics.

>> They **assist in initial attack** by digging hand line with shovels and dozing fuels in the fire's path.

>> They use their own ranch equipment along with water tenders issued by the State to **put fires out fast**, keeping them small in size and enabling firefighters to focus their efforts and resources on other more threatening fires.

National Recognition

In May the Bureau of Land Management and two RFPAs received the prestigious **Pulaski Award.**

The Pulaski Award is a national award. It is a collective recognition by seven federal agencies and the National Association of State Foresters representing 50 state fire programs, and it is given for outstanding contributions to wildland firefighting.

In the wildland fire community the Pulaski Award is a big deal, and for the BLM and two RFPAs to be given the award after one fire season is remarkable.

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management teams that can cost up to one million dollars per day on larger fires.

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