

Illinois Wildland Fire Crew assists with western fire fight in Idaho, Montana

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Wildland Fire Crew, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), assisted with wildland firefighting efforts during a recent two-week deployment, assisting with fire fights in Idaho and Montana.

On July 17, 20 members of the Illinois crew joined fire crews from Pennsylvania, Vermont and West Virginia that were deployed to the Northern Rockies Dispatch

Center and were immediately assigned to work the Powerline Complex fire in west-central Idaho. This lightning-caused fire involved approximately 23,000 acres of grass and open timber burning actively in very steep terrain along the Snake River, including the deepest canyon in North America, with steep slopes, loose rocks, and summer temperatures ranging from 30 degrees at night to 105 degrees during the day. Given the hazardous terrain and conditions, firefighter safety, as always, was the crew's top priority.



The Illinois crew and counterparts from one of two Pennsylvania crews worked to build and secure 1.5 miles of critical hand-hewn fire line on steep, rugged terrain. The line tied into a previous fire line and the Snake River. The fire teams then backfired from that line to hold the advancing fire front. Using this backfiring method, along with two days of aerial ignitions, the total burn area was held to about 45,000 acres.

The Illinois crew was released from the Powerline Complex on July 25 and reassigned to the Meyers Fire near Phillipsburg, Montana. This 3,300-acre lightning-caused fire was in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest south of Missoula. Illinois crew members were engaged in widening and improving a dozer trail firebreak near several Forest Service cabins and private summer homes. The work involved removing ladder

fuels (small 3-ft. to 10-ft. trees), felling 50-ft. to 90-ft. lodgepole pine and subalpine fir, as well as clearing dead and downed trees off the line. As the summer wears on, fuel drying continues to hamper fire containment. This critical line will serve again as a backfiring line to burn out around the residential area and nearby campground.



Wildland fire crew deployments are planned for approximately 18 days in duration. The Illinois crew returned home safely on August 2. The Illinois crew consists of IDNR personnel, as well as Illinois-based firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and local fire department firefighters. All expenses of the deployments are covered by the U.S. Forest Service through an interagency agreement with the IDNR Division of Forest Resources.

“The knowledge and leadership gained for our Illinois wildland firefighters on these types of deployments is extremely valuable, and helps to better prepare us should we need to respond elsewhere, or right here in Illinois,” said Tom Wilson, IDNR State Forester. “We hear all the time from our federal partners and local officials at the scene of these wildland fires how much they appreciate the hard work and dedication of our Illinois crew.”



Illinois Interagency Wildland Fire Crew members deployed this summer include:

- Tom Wilson – IDNR Forestry
- Tom Gargrave – IDNR Forestry
- Dave Griffith – IDNR Forestry
- Ben Snyder – IDNR Forestry
- Chris Bickers – IDNR Fisheries
- Rich Lewis – IDNR Planning
- Ray Geroff – IDNR Natural Heritage
- Jacob Shurpit – IDNR Land Management
- Brad Semel – IDNR Natural Heritage
- Bryan Eubanks – IDNR Wildlife
- Phil Cox – IDNR Private Lands
- Curt Timmer – Firefighter, Freeport
- Curt Martin – Firefighter, Fox Lake
- Alan O'Brien – Firefighter, Lake Villa
- Jesse Riechman – U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- Dan Reuscher – U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- Jonny Walker – U.S. Forest Service

- Hugo Goulet Papazian – Contract Administrator
- Cody Langen – Contract Administrator
- Toby Warren – Contract Administrator