



**Bureau of Land Management: Arizona, New Mexico
Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2
Bureau of Indian Affairs: Southwest, Navajo, Western Regions
National Park Service: Intermountain Region
U. S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region
Arizona State Forestry Division
New Mexico State Forestry**

Date: June 21, 2011

To: National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group

From: Southwest Coordinating Group

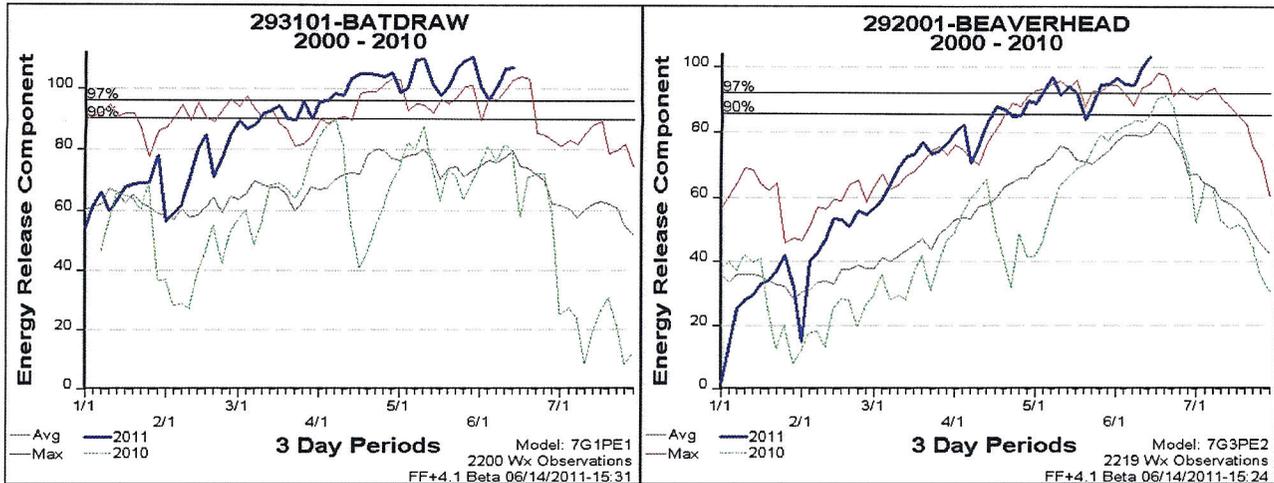
Topic/Issue: SOUTHWEST GEOGRAPHIC AREA FIRE SEASON SITUATION AND PROJECTION

The Southwest Geographic Area has already experienced an above average year for fire occurrence and acreage burned. In the Southwest, fire season began in February, with fire activity starting in Southeast New Mexico and migrating west and north as the season progressed. As of June 12, 2011, the Southwest has encountered 1,381 fires for approximately **1,309,731** acres burned. The acreage burned to date surpasses the previous record set for the Southwest in 2002 by 255,000 acres. With this record setting year, the Southwest is currently experiencing resource shortages at the local levels and mobilization of out of GACC resources is heavy in order to support the substantial large fire activity as well as initial attack. Many of our Geographic Area Hotshot crews and engines have been on multiple two week assignments since early May. Fatigue of our crews is an issue that the SWCG is monitoring closely.

Observed Weather and Fire Behavior in the Southwest

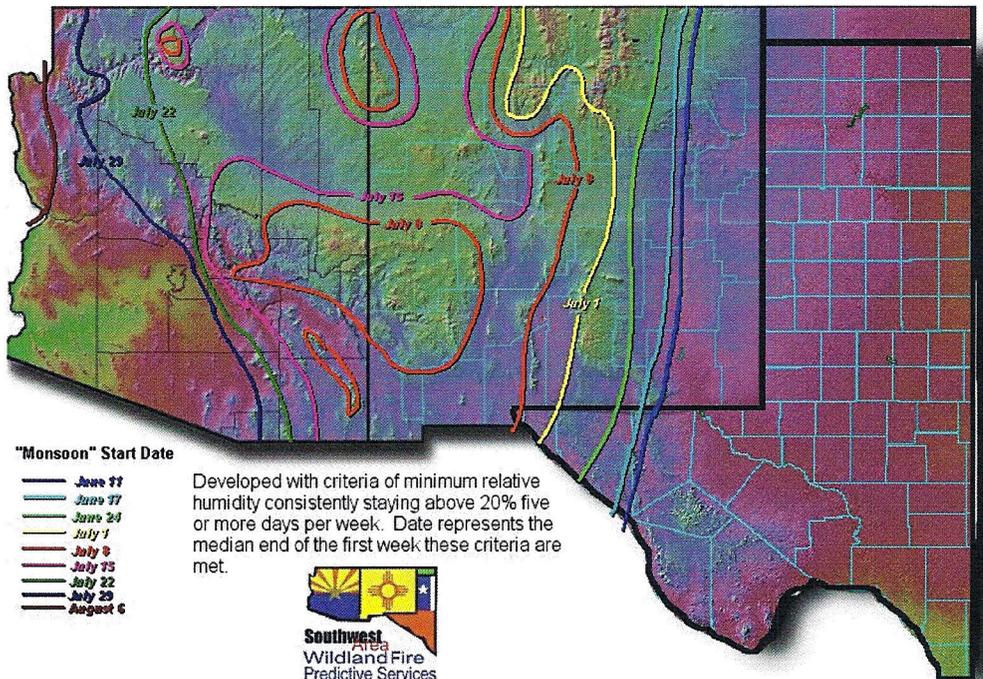
Drought conditions persist over much of the Southwest area and numerous incidents have been heavily influenced by these conditions resulting in unprecedented fire behavior that has hampered our firefighting efforts. In many locations in the Southwest, 10-hour fuel moisture observations have been documented for as low as 1%, 100-hour fuel moistures at 3% and nearly half the geographic area observing 1000 hour fuel moistures at less than 5%. ERCs for several areas of the Southwest have also experienced record highs, with readings over the 100th percentile (Figure 1). Coupled with the low fuel moistures, the Southwest has also experienced an historic weather pattern with numerous days of severe winds and single digit humidity. The Southwest area has also experienced an all time record number of days of red flag conditions since the month of April, with average sustained 20 foot winds ranging between 15 to 25 mph with frequent gusty conditions between 35 to 45 mph. These severe fuel and weather conditions have resulted in a wide range of extreme fire behavior throughout the Southwest, with single and group tree torching along with frequent long-range spotting. This common theme is being observed on numerous initial attack fires in both New Mexico and Arizona along with persistent spotting and receptivity of the dry fuels to any ignition source. On the Wallow fire in Arizona, long range spotting was confirmed up to 3 miles ahead of the main fire, with unconfirmed reports of up to 5 miles. The Wallow fire also experienced a 30,000 to 40,000 acre run in one burning period.

Figure 1.



Long range weather predictions are for these conditions to persist through the month of June including several wind events followed by hot and dry conditions. The summer monsoon season is expected to be robust when it finally sets up, beginning during roughly the normal time frame and bringing above average rainfall to much of the Southwest Area (see Figure 2). This is in line with similar strong La Niña years where the La Niña trended towards neutral during the summer and produced pre-fire season weather conditions similar to those seen in 2010/2011. Before the onset of the monsoon the Southwest area will observe the usual period of dry lightning, which will increase initial attack activity lasting until wetting rains are established to reducing fire conditions in most areas.

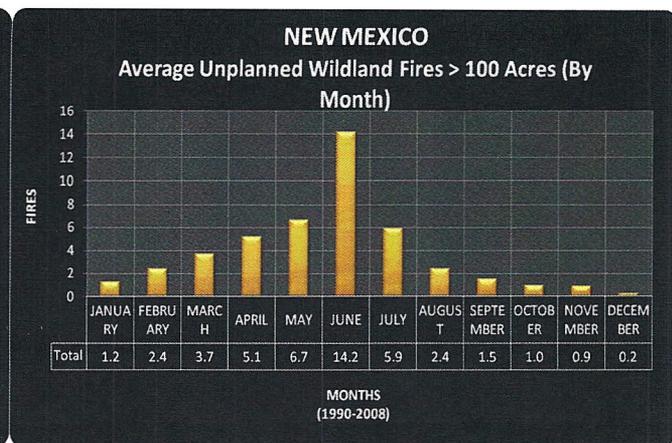
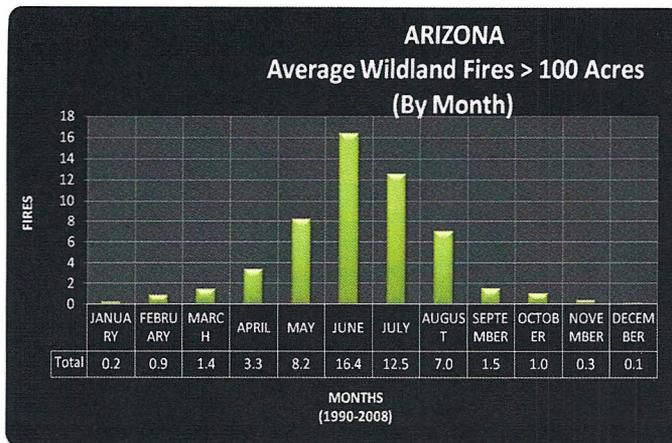
Figure 2.



Incident Management Team Commitments

Incident Management Team call-out assignments within the geographic area have also been well above average. As of June 19, 2011 there have been 36 Type 3, 10 Type 2 and six Type 1 mobilizations. It is projected that several of the current large fires within the geographic area will require additional IMT support from out of area due to the projected long duration of these incidents (Wallow, Horseshoe 2, Monument, etc.). The average number of large

fires (>100 acres) within the Southwest for the month of June is 30 with the area experiencing 21 as of June 15. For the month of July the Southwest average for large fires is 18. With the combination of predicted weather, fuel conditions and the area's historic indices, the Southwest could expect approximately four to five IMT assignments for new, emerging fires for the rest of June into the latter part of July.



Aviation

Aviation assets have been heavily utilized within the Geographic Area since mid-May. Numerous exclusive use aircraft as well as variable term aircraft have been utilized in supporting the Southwest area. The Southwest is experiencing shortages of trained aviation personnel to help support incidents, as well as supporting the home units that are requesting aviation assistance due to the severity of the season (i.e. helibase managers, unit aviation managers). Contributing to these shortages is the Southwest's fire season timeframe does not coincide with the northern geographic areas. The Southwest's fire season starts a couple months earlier than the northern GACCs. This dynamic creates shortages of qualified aviation personnel to support the Southwest while the northern areas conduct critical pre-season trainings and certifications during the Southwest's fire season. With the current and expected increase in Southwest Area fire activity the next few weeks it will be imperative to keep as close to the level of aviation support that is currently within the Southwest to provide support for ongoing and future incidents.

Current Southwest Aviation Resources Committed as of 6/19

Large Airtankers =	8
MAFFS	4
Leadplanes/ASM =	3
Fixed-Wing Air Tactical=	29
SEATS=	22
Helicopters =	47
16 Type I	
11 Type II	
20 Type III	
Total Aircraft =	112

Since June 15, 2011, the Southwest is well above its' seasonal average of retardant used on wildfires within the GACC. The gallons of retardant utilized by fixed wing aircraft are:

Winslow ATB=	244,234 gallons
Albuquerque ATB=	120,078 gallons
Silver City ATB=	142,989 gallons
Alamogordo ATB=	595,024 gallons
Fort Huachuca ATB=	695,560 gallons
Prescott ATB ATB=	22,171 gallons
Williams Gateway ATB=	83,044 gallons
Roswell Reload Base=	275,349 gallons

Safford SEAT Base= 135,000 gallons
Total= **2,313,449 gallons**

Equipment/Crews/Personnel

Local crews, equipment and support personnel have also been challenged this season. The majority of our handcrews and equipment assets have had multiple two week assignments and fatigue is being closely monitored. Dispatch centers across the GACC have continually worked extensive shifts to meet the demands of this season. Numerous crews, equipment and overhead from other GACC's are providing large fire support as well as prepositioning for initial attack. Some of these fire resources have had multiple tours to the Southwest. As of June 15, the Southwest has placed and received orders totaling 18,926 for personnel and equipment to support the firefighting efforts, well exceeding the average for this time of year.

Type 1 Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHC) crews are at a premium for ongoing fires in all GACCs and currently the Southwest has 52 crews. Due to increased fire activity in other GACC's it is unlikely that additional Type 1 IHC's will be authorized by NICC. Type 2 IA crews have been utilized heavily as well within the area, with 100 currently assigned to on-going incidents as well as initial attack. 10 Type 2 crews are currently being mobilized from other GACC's to enhance the Southwest's capability to support large fires. With the projected severity of conditions for the rest of the fire season it will be imperative that the Southwest maintain the levels of 50 Type 1 Crews and 100 Type 2 IA crews in order to meet the needs and objectives of all agencies.

Wildland fire engines of all types are being utilized in large fire and initial attack support. A large number of these engines are from other GACC's and multiple agencies and contractors. Due to numerous fire incursions and urban interface threats these resources are also in high demand. Numerous local Volunteer Fire Departments (VFD) resources from both Arizona and New Mexico have reached both, human and resource exhaustion from longer than normal fire commitments, as well as the amount of local resource activations in support of large fires. To assist with dealing with the void caused by resource shortages effecting local cooperators, the interagency community has strategically prepositioned task force units in each state to assist in meeting fire management objectives for all agencies.

Summary of Resource Needs

The Southwest Area is experiencing an historic fire season that has exceeded all predictions and expectations. The severity of conditions (fuel and weather), as well as the observed fire behavior have made this one of the most challenging years for fire managers throughout the area. These challenges will continue for several more weeks until monsoonal moisture establishes in the Southwest reducing the fire conditions for the majority of the area. Until this occurs the Southwest will need consistent resource commitments to meet management objectives. These needs include:

- A level close to 50 IHC crews, 70-100 Type 2 IA crews
- Aviation resources consistent to 6/19 levels (112 assets)
- 6-10 engine task force units in each state.



Leon W. Ben, Jr.
Chair, Southwest Coordinating Group