

NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

Briefing Paper

Date: May 24, 2008

Topic: International Wildland/Bushfire Exchange Program: Australia—United States

Issue: Update NWCG Members regarding exchange program between Australia (State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and the Environment) and the United States (National Wildfire Coordinating Group).

Background: As previously reported to NFAEB, in May 2007 in Canberra, Australia, Secretary Kempthorne (DOI) made the announcement of the AUS/US Exchange Program along side the US Ambassador to Australia, Robert McCallum. On May 9, 2007, Secretary Kempthorne was joined by Secretary Johanns (Agriculture) and four international Ambassadors (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Mexico) and made the same announcement in Washington DC.

Following suit, on August 2nd, Bodie Shaw and Mr. Rick Sneeuwjagt, Chair of the Australia-New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG) orchestrated a final conference call with representatives from the six states and two territories of Australia and New Zealand (this was the third call over a four-week period). Joining the call from US-NIFC was NFAEB Chair, Tim Murphy, BIA Director, Lyle Carlile, and FWS Deputy Chief, John Segar. NOTE: Mr. Carlile was sent over as a MAC representative for the AUS deployment and Mr. Segar was Chief of Party for the 2nd AUS deployment earlier this year and has been instrumental in the design of the Exchange.

The intent of the FFMG calls were two-fold: 1) finalize the exchange program concept and, 2) get verbal commitment and buy-in from all parties involved. There was unanimous agreement from all to participate in the program with the US. It was agreed by all that the next logical step was to send two ambassadors to initiate the suppression and 30-day exchange arrangements (Mr. Shaw US and Mr. Goodwin from AUS). The agreement was finally signed on April, 11, 2008 (attached).

KEY ITEMS: The AUS-US Exchange Program will be centered on the fundamental concept of an investment for the future of international wildland/bushfire management. The Exchange concept is founded in the long standing practice of periodic fire management study tour exchanges for United States and Canadian fire managers to Australia and New Zealand and the reciprocal visits of Australian and New Zealand fire managers to the United States and Canada. These study tours, which began over 50 years ago (1951) demonstrated that similar wildland firefighting skills, abilities and knowledge are present in all four countries.

Primarily, Mr. Shaw will, through the assistance of the Office of General Counsel (USDOA) and Solicitor's Office (USDOJ), will look for opportunities to develop and legally codify wildland fire/bushfire suppression Arrangements/Operational Plans as well as pursue 30-day technical exchanges for the 6 states (Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia), 1 territory (Northern) and New Zealand prior to his return (March, 2009). Note: the US currently has an existing Arrangement and Operations Plan with the State of Victoria, Australia which will be used as a template. Mr. Shaw will be based in Melbourne, Victoria at DSE as well as an outpost in Bendigo.

Primarily, Mr. Goodwin will look at delivering on key issues from AUS-DSE leadership: Formal exchange program in place for land management / fire program (exchanging knowledge on suppression, FRB, community engagement etc.) for years to come. Develop a position on national coordination as per the NIFC model (this would be linked with Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC)). In addition, develop a position on future research on health and well-being (through University of Montana, sponsored by CRC). Alan will also be exploring/researching initial attack processes and procedures (including capability to maintain the same). Mr. Goodwin would like to engage in

30-day rotations between the four DOI bureaus and the US Forest Service, with his final 30 days located in the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination. Mr. Goodwin will be based in Boise, Idaho at NIFC.

Once again, the AUS-US Exchange Program will be centered on the fundamental concept of an investment for the future of international wildland/bushfire management by:

- ✓ Providing an opportunity for Departmental staff to expand their professional experience and expertise, and thus achieve personal development through working in US and AUS/NZ wildland fire/bushfire management agencies (30-day technical exchanges for employees: training, fuels, rehabilitation, education and equipment);
- ✓ Bringing/exchanging new ideas, approaches and work methods to workplaces in the Departments with respect to land management concepts and management; and
- ✓ Fostering an exchange of culture, knowledge, experience and professional contacts relevant to both AUS/NZ and the US with focus on wildland/bushfire under the umbrella of natural resource management.
- ✓ Defining and establishing firm legal parameters and expectations for overseas operations concerning wildland fire/bushfire activities: suppression; prescribed fire; ICS and AIIMS equivalencies; RFA/Community Assistance/Education, training, equipment development/tech-transfer as examples.

Cost Analysis: The Secretaries and FFMG were briefed regarding budget costs being a relative non-factor; selected individuals will exchange domiciles and/or state/government housing; I.E. food and lodging would be absorbed by current payroll with the respective individuals. Exchange rates would have to be assessed at the time to get a true picture of other nominal costs associated with an exchange.

Action Item/Follow-Up Needed:

None. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Goodwin will report back monthly on developments of the suppression arrangements and technical exchanges with the applicable parties.

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