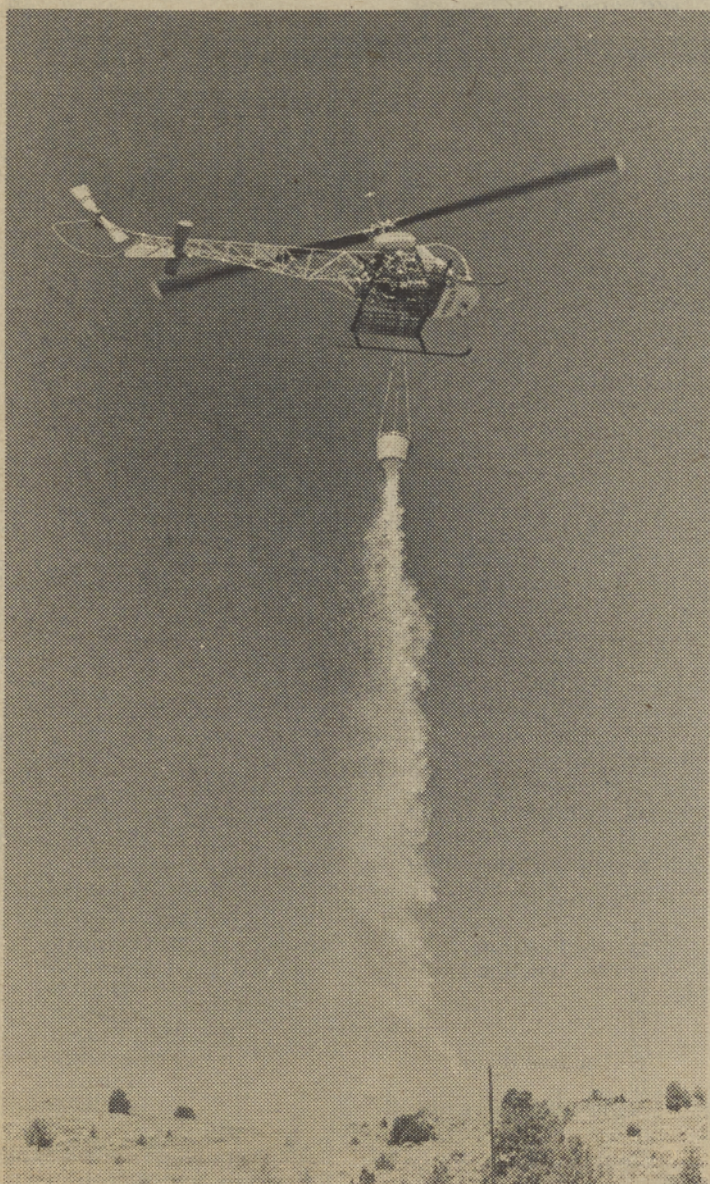


FIRE CONTROL - IT'S CHANGED THROUGH THE YEARS

(FROM HORSES TO HELICOPTERS)



THE EYE IN THE SKY

Pilot Jim Henderschot arrived with the helicopter for this year's fire season - July 1 to September 15. The second year it's been in operation at Fire Control, the helicopter cuts down on the time it takes to get moisture on a fire. The 50-gallon water bucket may not look like much, but in three drops it equals the capacity of a small tanker.

Rangila Photo

by Sandy Rangila

In the summer of 1927 when a dry, frustrated storm lashed the reservation with whips of lightning, scores of fires were ignited in the range and forestland.

All the way into Warm Springs the night sky glowed feverishly as winds fanned the flames into an orange monster which threatened to consume a good portion of tribal timberland.

But no helicopters or retardant planes moved in to slow the progress of the inferno. No hotshots with red helmets parachuted in near the fire lines.

When heading out to a forest fire in those days, men loaded up strings of packhorses with supplies from the commissary near what is now the old administration building.

The firefighters rode out as far as they could in truck beds over dusty and often muddy roads, then either hiked in on foot or led in the pack trains by horseback. But most of the men walked in to where a base camp was set up for the duration.

And once they got to the fire line there were no chain saws or 1000-gallon pumpers to aid them in their battle against one of nature's most awesome and terrifying forces.

Today there exists a swift network of communication so that in the event of a forest fire, it can be doused in a hurry. Telex and electronic equipment

spew out data on a daily basis so lightning fires can often be predicted well in advance through knowledge of approaching storms.

Sophisticated methods of fire detection enable fire control personnel to detect and pinpoint the location of a fire in short order, once it has started.

Immediately after a lightning storm, the fire control helicopter (now in its second season here) goes out on reconnaissance to hunt down any spot fires that may have been touched off.

But according to Fire Control Manager Larry Whalawitsa, it is usually the lookouts at Sidwalter, Eagle Butte, and Shitike Butte who spot and report the fires first. Whalawitsa or Assistant Manager Harrison Davis take a reading from two of the lookouts, and with that information they can plot the exact location of the fire on the map-board.

Vital data such as temperature, humidity, wind direction, and weather forecasts all play a role in fire suppression once it is detected.

Mobilization of men and machinery is swift once a fire has been reported and located.

In the initial stage of a fire, the helicopter, piloted by Jim Henderschot, can dump 50 gallons of water at a time to immediately raise the humidity at the fire site. "In the later stages he works the hot spots,"

said Whalawitsa.

The helicopter can also be used to ferry men and equipment into an area where the terrain is difficult or inaccessible by vehicle.

Located on Kah-Nee-Ta Road by the two blue warehouses, the Fire Control Office has mobile tankers available, a 14-man crew, and can call upon the Redmond Air Base for assistance if necessary.

But despite all the modern equipment and manpower at their disposal, fire prevention is the by-word at the Fire Control Office.

Of the 14 wild-fires so far this year, eleven have been man-caused and only two were started by lightning strikes. And the thing that angers Whalawitsa the most is man-caused fires.

What worries Whalawitsa the most this year is the great number of blowdowns. "It's bad," he states. "It's all down and as it cures the fire danger will increase." The blowdowns concern him because it adds to the fire load above and beyond the thinning and logging slash that is lying around. So Fire Control is keeping an eye on that area of the reservation.



PINPOINTING THE FIRE

When two lookouts radio in their reading to the Fire Control Office, Larry Whalawitsa can plot the exact location of a fire which is pinpointed where the two lines converge. Having determined the location and nature of a fire, he can have men and equipment mobilized within a matter of minutes. Response time to the four-acre grass fire earlier this month near the Moody residence was six minutes.

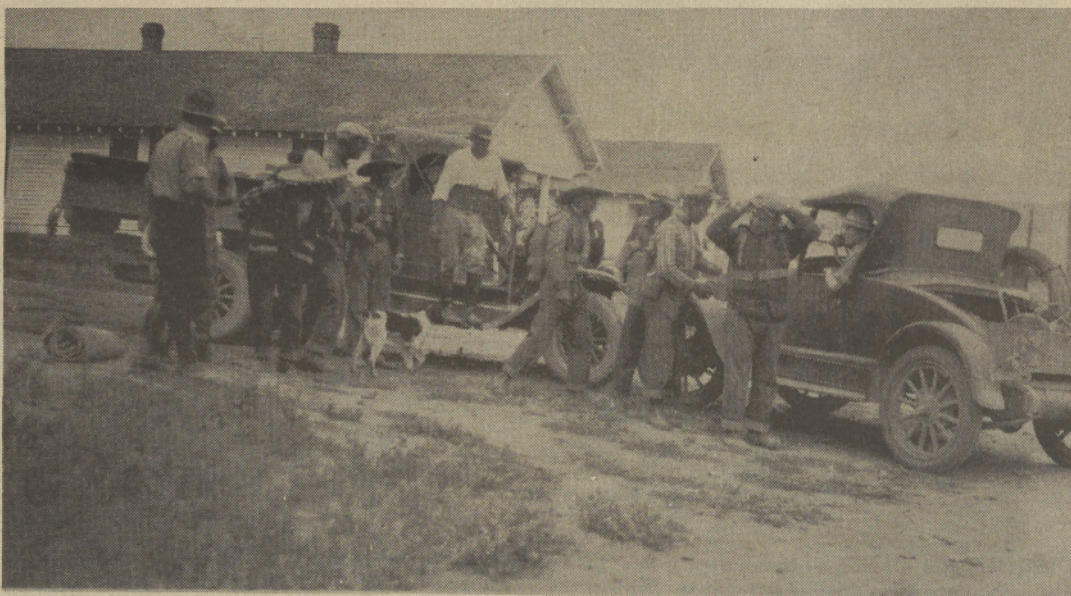
Rangila Photo

Although methods and equipment have advanced to the point where forest fires are more easily controlled now, Harry Davis remembers the stubborn Lion's Head Fire in 1955 where the crews had to set up camp for 21 days, a bit like in the 1920's.

"Pack horses were sent in with supplies of rations and beef, and it was kind of fun," he

recalled. "Most of us were Indians, and one day a guy shot a deer and we all forgot about that beef," he quipped.

Just maybe those men gained a bit of insight as to how it was during the time of a forest fire in years gone by. "It's easy to romanticize about the old days," someone said as he put down his coke to answer the phone.



CREW HEADING OUT TO A FOREST FIRE

Smoke filled the sky during the summer of 1927 when this photo was taken in Warm Springs near what is now the old administration building. There used to be a commissary in that area where the men were recruited and loaded up with supplies. They rode as far as possible on the rough roads, then hiked in to the base camp where they stayed for the duration of the fire.

(Photo courtesy BIA Forestry)



PACK TRAIN AT BALD PETER LOOKOUT

The year is uncertain, but it is probably in the 1920's or 1930's, and the man standing on the horse is thought to be Wesley Smith. Supplies for fire fighters, rangers and lookout crews were hauled in by such pack trains in those days. Even in 1955 during the Lion's Head Fire, rations were brought in by horse. The lookout tower in the background no longer exists.

(Photo courtesy BIA Forestry)