

Where's the fire? We're tired of piling slash

Early detection, quick suppression, is the purpose of the new fire crew stationed at Opal Meadows in the Heppner District of the Umatilla National Forest.

Under the supervision of John Breidenbach, fire management technician, the 21 member crew serves several purposes. Equipped with a 5-passenger helicopter for

mobility, the crew members can be moved to a fire in minutes, either in this district or wherever needed. When not fighting fires, the six-man squad are kept busy piling

slash, building helpads or making fuel breaks.

At the start of the season the fire crew numbered 25 but due to personality conflicts, dislike for the work and various reasons, the crew now stands at 21. Of this number, five are young ladies. Most of the crew are college students or recent graduates. Regardless of sex, the workload is the same. Four of the women are as capable in the use of a chain saw as are the men.

Prior to being stationed at Opal Meadows, the crew was trained in Pendleton in fire fighting methods and working together. They also were familiarized with operations from the helicopter.

Each person is furnished shirt, pants, boots, hard hat and pack of other necessary equipment. The packs are kept in the command tent and in the event of fire would be dropped to the squad as soon as all personnel were at the scene of the fire. The pack contains such items as jacket, first aid kit, and "C" rations to mention a few.

The clothing issued is fire resistant and appears to be one or two sizes too large. The reason for the baggy appearance is if the clothing should catch fire, loose clothing is easier to remove and there is less chance of serious burns. At all times two canteens are carried by the members of the fire crew.

All buildings, vehicles and cook equipment are on lease at the Opal Meadows camp. Mobile homes are used to house the crew, portable toilets are available and the food is furnished by a catering firm from Seattle. Rented panels are used to transport the squads to areas for slash piling. The helicopter is also on lease.

The crew is on duty at all times but may have one day a week off. Their work day begins at 9 a.m. and continues until 6 p.m. Breakfast is at 7:45 and most will have a sack lunch at noon followed by a healthy meal at night. Each day they have a half hour of physical training, calisthenics, running, volleyball or some other activity.

Each day the work for the squads is rotated to break the monotony of some jobs. One squad will go with the helicopter to various areas to build helpads. One squad remains in camp where they pile slash nearby and the others will go to logged over areas to pile slash.

Helpads are required to have a cleared area of 300 feet by 500 feet with the actual pad being 25 square feet. The pad is merely a level spot where the helicopter may safely set down. The pads are marked by rocks painted white. They try to locate pads so no more than three miles separate them. Normally an area that is open is preferred.

The helicopter crews are in addition to the three lookouts and 3 guard stations in the district. All facilities are in radio contact at all times and daily flights by detection planes aid in early sighting of fires. Those stationed at guard stations are primarily in the prevention end of the service although road patrols are made by the rangers. They spend considerable time talking to the public and warning them of the fire dangers.

Pay for the fire fighters is \$3.25 per hour with time and a

half for over time. In the timber sale contracts the cost of slash piling is included in the price. Piling of slash along the roads is of prime concern as this reduces the hazard of fires from cigarettes or matches.

The only fires so far this season have been small snag fires caused by lightning. Many of the crew expressed disappointment that no large fire has required putting their training to use. Since this portion of the district has a

lighter tourist load, fire dangers are primarily from lightning.

The crew of mixed men and women works well according to forest officials. The women probably adapt to that way of life faster than most of the men. This year has been one of learning according to Breidenbach and next year we can benefit from this year's mistakes.

Depending upon the fire code for the day, the rules are observed by the fire crew the same as by all timber operations. Should the code be C for the day, the saws must be shut off early enough to allow for a three-hour watch of the area after the shutdown. Other codes mean different regulations and time of the watch. The code is determined by weather conditions.

Smokey Says:



Tossing away burning smokes is a dangerous habit! Crush your smokes dead out... Prevent forest fires!



JOHN BREIDENBACH, fire management technician, discusses the next location for a helpad with pilot Shroch. The copter is setting on the pad at Opal Meadows, headquarters for the fire crew.



Two of the fire fighters are shown piling slash at Opal Meadows. On the left is Ennon Hayden and on the right is Isaiah Burton.



Two squad members are shown piling slash along a logging road. Note the sticks are piled so they lay up and down the hill. This prevents them from rolling down hill when burning.



JANICE GILBERT is shown using the chain saw while piling slash. She is only one of the four women who are skilled in the use of a saw. At all times while using the saw safety equipment such as goggles are used. On her belt is also a fire extinguisher.

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