



New Zealand, Australia Contingent to USA 2015 “WE WORK AS ONE”

Update # 4 2 September 2015

Due to the fact that fires are contained as well as a slowdown in work and greater use of the Kiwi Team’s skills elsewhere, there have been a number of changes in the last couple of days about where our personnel are based.

Cooler temperatures and even the odd spot or rain has certainly helped over the last few days. Further rain is forecast in coming days; unfortunately not season-ending but still helpful none the less.

Here’s an update on the fires and where our people are:

Boise National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC)

- Tim Mitchell - NZ Liaison

Washington North West Area

Canyon Creek

Forest Service Fire Authority fire located 2 miles south of John Day 105,684 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber and logging slash fuels, numerous structures threatened, fire cost to date \$21.2m.

- Philip MacDonald - Helicopter Manager

Kettle Complex (3 fires)

Forest State Fire Authority fire located 15 miles northeast of Republic, 76,216 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber and light logging slash plus bush fuels, numerous structures threatened, fire cost to date \$16.1m.

- Scott Marchant - Helicopter Manager
- Malcolm Smith - Helicopter Manager

Okanogan Complex (4 separate fires) (This was the largest fire but has now been split into two separate fires)

State Fire Authority fire located 11 miles northwest of Omak 147,979 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber fuels, moderate fire behaviour, cost to date \$16.4m.

- Ashton Oliver - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader
- Kerry O’Neil - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader
- Kevin Ihaka - Division Group Supervisor

Tunk Fire (Not a new fire but split off from Okanogan Fire)

Bureau of Indian Affairs (Fire Authority) fire located 10 miles northeast of Omak 161,440 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber fuels, moderate fire behaviour, cost to date \$11.5m.

- John Rasmussen - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader

Wolverine Fire

Forest Service Fire Authority fire located 3 miles northwest of Lucerne 64,940 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber fuels and short grass, moderate fire behaviour, cost to date \$17.2m.

- Johnathan Lane - Strike Team Leader

Chelan Complex (5 separate fires)

Bureau of Land Management (Fire Authority) fire located one mile south of Chelan 93,694 acres burnt fire is burning in timber and grass fuels, moderate fire behaviour, fire cost to date \$12.9m.

- Steven Ochsner - Division Group Supervisor

North Star (Now the largest fire in USA based on total acres burnt)

Bureau of Indian Affairs (Fire Authority) fire located 24 miles east of Omak 205,331 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber and logging slash fuels, moderate fire behaviour, numerous structures still threatened and evacuations in effect, fire cost to date \$10.9m.

- Ian Reade - Division Group Supervisor
- Rick Sloman - Division Group Supervisor

Oregon Area

Eagle Fire

State Fire Authority fire located 20 miles northwest of Richland 12,504 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber and logging slash, moderate fire behaviour structures still threatened and evacuations in effect, fire cost to date \$6.5m.

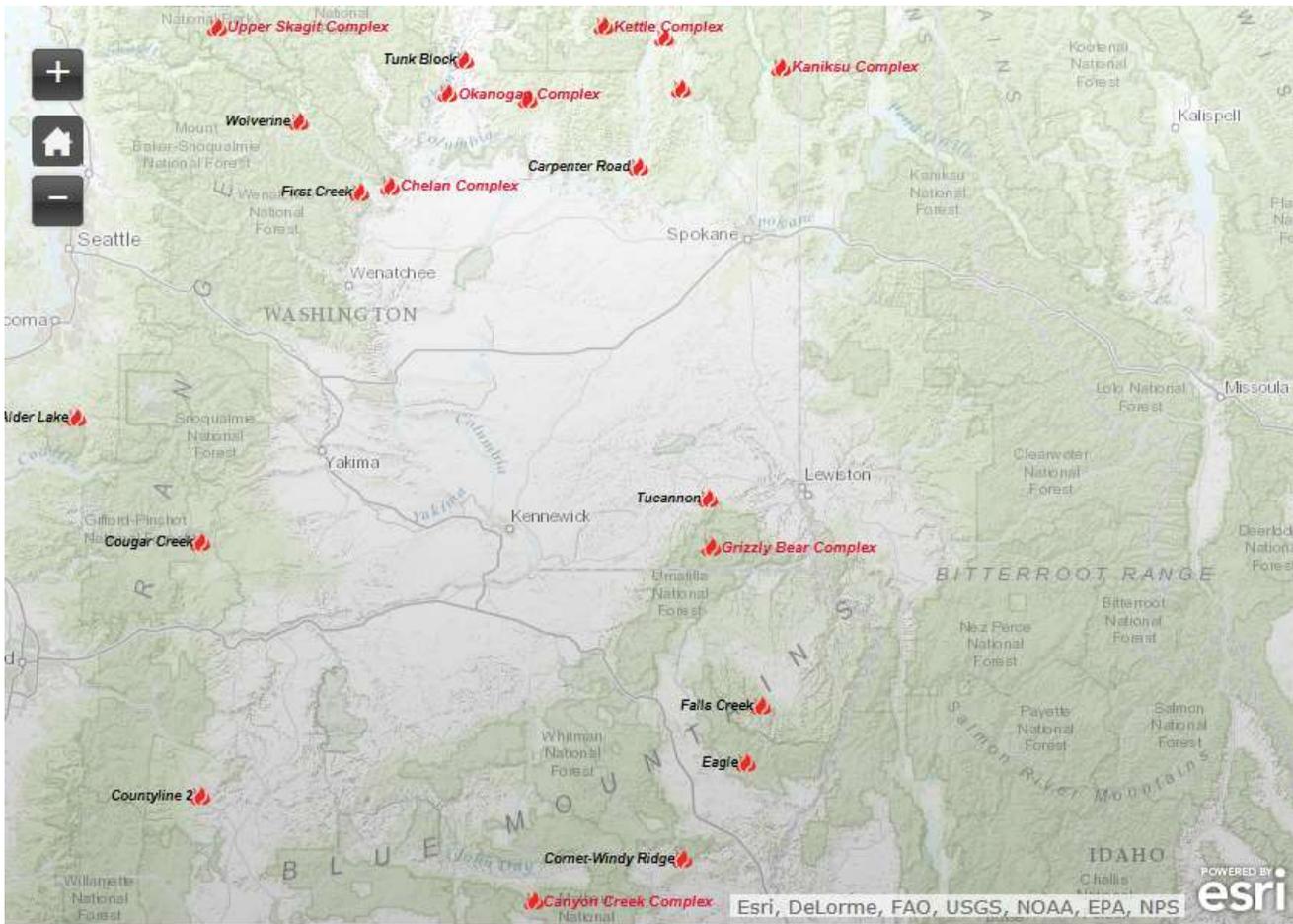
- Paul Devlin - Helicopter Manager

Grizzly Bear Complex (8 separate fires)

State Fire Authority fire located 20 miles southeast of Dayton 74,496 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber and grass fuels, numerous structures threatened, fire cost to date \$10m

- Bruce Janes - Helicopter Manager
- Warren Heslip - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader

Note while there might be only one Kiwi on some of the fires they are not alone as there are a number of Australians with them as well.



Map: Showing location of fires NZ crews are working on (Okanoga, Canyon Creek, Tunk, Kettle, Chelan, North Star (to the right of Okanoga), Eagle, and Grizzly Bear).

Day-to-day life

One of the pilots and Helicopter Manager on the Chelan fire got a bit of a fright yesterday. While flying the pilot noticed a snake had slithered around his legs and pedals, once he landed it was confirmed as non-poisonous; however, it's still somewhere in the chopper as it darted down a gap under the floor.

The boys are now working on a film sequel to “snakes on a plane” called “snakes on a helicopter”.



Photo: Chelan complex heli base, not sure which helicopter has the snake.

I have had to do a phone-around to some of the team (especially the hunters) as today is the start of the Elk hunting season in the USA. September is for bow and arrow hunters while October and December are for the shooters. Yes, everyone is still focused on the fire and not thinking about hunting – or at least that’s what they’re telling me.

Travelling home from the NIFC centre last night we saw three deer run across the road in front of us into the local cemetery, so they are around.

A few of the camps are quite basic, with not a lot of facilities for doing laundry etc. Some of the team are saying they will need to have a bit of a clean up before coming back to civilianisation, something the field liaisons are working on at the moment.



Photo: Chelan complex camp 1,200 personnel, 58 fire appliances and 13 helicopters.

Photo: New Zealand flag flying at the Chelan complex camp, note the attempt by the USA fire fighters to outdo the kiwis by adding their flag.



Feedback from the Incident Management Teams where the Kiwis are based is they are very impressed with the work ethic and flexibility of the Kiwi crews.

Interesting Facts

The incident ground radios used take non-rechargeable AA batteries. Every day the logistic section issues 167,000 AA batteries, and so far this fire season they have issued 9 million batteries. That's enough power to run 763 homes in the US for a day.

As of 1 September, 8,202,557 acres of land has been burnt by wildfires. The US Federal Government has spent over 1 billion dollars fighting those wildfires.

Useful links

Please note the guys are now working in locations where there is not a lot mobile phone reception so calls home may be limited. The liaisons in the field have a communications strategy for ensuring all personnel are contacted regularly to confirm all is well.

If you have any messages you want to get to someone on the deployment you can post them on the Facebook site or send them to me and I will endeavour to pass them on.

Don't forget to use the Facebook and website to help keep up to date on what is happening.

We've set up a Facebook site for friends and family to access photos plus regular updates on what is happening, the site is called "USA Wildfires 2015 – Australia/NZ Deployment". It's a closed site, so you'll need to register to join.

Another useful site giving up-to-date USA Situation reports is:

<https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/index.htm> (click on the situation report tab left side menu).

For more detailed information about the fires in the Northwest where the Kiwi crews are deployed: <http://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/>

You may also find the Friends and Family webpage useful. We have set up this page for those who don't have access to facebook <http://files.portal.em.vic.gov.au/refdocs/SCC-IILU.htm?v=3>

I'll send more news soon to keep you all up-to-date.

Cheers,

Tim

(On behalf of the Kiwi team)