

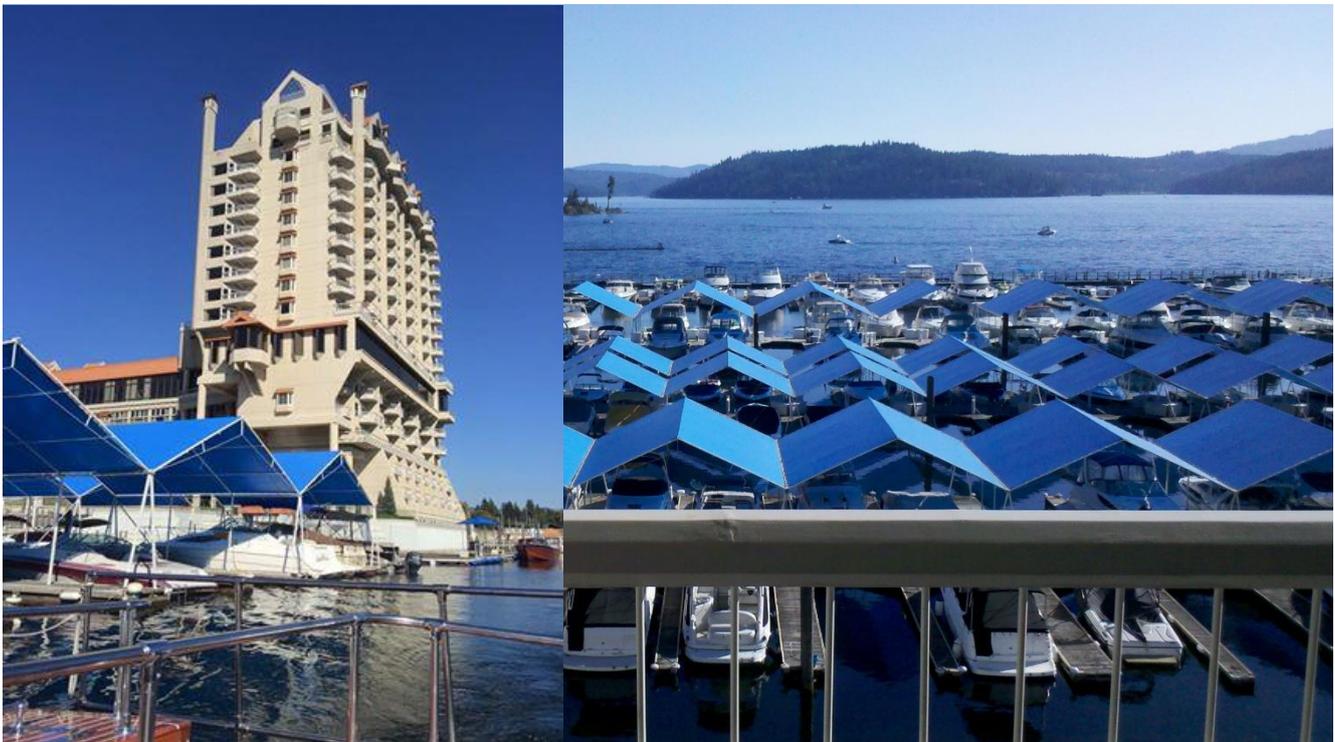
## **New Zealand, Australia Contingent to USA 2015**

### **“WE WORK AS ONE”**

**Update # 6**  
**15 September 2015**

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Greetings from Coeur d’Alene resort near Spokane, the location for everyone on the deployment to have a couple of days of rest and relaxation (R+R) before returning to the fire line.



Coeur d’Alene is small resort town (population of 46,402) 25 miles east of Spokane. Perched in a beautiful lakefront mountain setting, it is a favourite destination for retirees and many others fleeing the urban hustle. There is plenty to do with numerous recreation activities and entertainment options. The summer climate is particularly pleasant, temperatures at this time of year are on average 27 degrees celsius.

Downtown is made up of bars, restaurants and a large Cabela's (hunting and fishing) store which I lost most of the kiwis in.

For those contemplating a move the housing is reasonably affordable with prices averaging around \$197,400 us, although you may have to pay a bit more to purchase the house owned by Arnold Schwarzenegger.



Photo: Kerry O'Neil, Steve Oschner

Photo: Johnathan Lane



Photo: Bruce Janes and Paul Devlin  
(note the Cabela's sign)

Most arrived at R+R without incident except for one Australian, who stopped to take a photo of the Canadian border (the Stickpin fire where he was working is near the border), unfortunately a Canadian guard took exception to this, taking him aside to see what he was photographing.

On his camera in addition to the photo of the border, were photos of him with a ute load of fire lighter fluid, and using fire lighting equipment to do vegetation burnout work.

The guard must have thought he was trying to start some sort of war, but after some fast talking and a warning he was finally allowed on his way.

On the return from R+R one of the kiwis also stopped and took a photo of the same border, although he didn't face the same scrutiny, maybe because we don't look as suspicious as the Australians.



*not recommended you take photos.*

After R+R our team have now been assigned to the following fires:

Portland - North West Coordination Centre (NWCC)

- Tim Mitchell - NZ Liaison

Washington North West Area

**Kettle Complex (3 fires)**

Forest State Fire Authority fire located 15 miles northeast of Republic, 76,521 acres burnt, timber and light logging slash plus bush fuels, 952 personnel working on the fire, cost to date \$28.3m.

- Paul Devlin - Division Group Supervisor

**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 133,142 acres burnt, timber fuels, 575 personnel working on the fire, cost to date \$43.4m.

- Steven Ochsner - Shadow role reparation activities
- Ashton Oliver - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader
- Kerry O'Neil - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader
- Kevin Ihaka - Division Group Supervisor
- Scott Marchant - Helicopter Base Manager

**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 167,840 acres burnt, fire is burning in timber fuels, 535 personnel working on the fire, cost to date \$7.4m.

- John Rasmussen - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader

**Wolverine Fire**

Forest Service Fire Authority fire located 3 miles northwest of Lucerne 65,512 acres burnt, timber fuels and short grass, 495 personnel working on the fire, cost to date \$29.2m.

- Johnathan Lane - Strike Team Leader
- Malcolm Smith - 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 217,558 acres burnt, timber and logging slash fuels, 1,483 personnel working on the fire, cost to date \$31.1m.

- Warren Heslip - Taskforce/Strike Team Leader
- Bruce Janes - Division Group Supervisor
- Philip MacDonald - Helicopter Manager
- Ian Reade - Division Group Supervisor
- Rick Sloman - Division Group Supervisor

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.

While on R+R there was a period of warmer and windy weather which result in some fire escapes and four additional large fires, cooler temperatures and rain are forecast for most areas over the coming days, which will again help further containment of the fires, but also limited some containment strategies given the vegetation will once again be too moist for burnout operations.

A general downscaling in fire activity is likely to occur as containment of fires is achieved and we get closer toward the end of the fire season. A number of our personnel are getting the opportunity to move around different fires and roles.

There is still a shortage of US fire management personnel who are on mandatory rest breaks due to the incredibly long hours and number of consecutive days they have worked, many of which would not be acceptable in terms of our health and safety practices.

The main focus on all fire is completion of containment and restoration work.

The long range forecast for the next seven days is a return to warmer conditions over the weekend and into next week with a cool change early to mid next week.

Finally the team have asked that I pass on their sincere thanks and appreciation to all those back home, for looking after the kids etc and picking up the extra work which has enabled them to come over to help the US. Thank you, your contribution has not gone unnoticed and is greatly appreciated.

### **Useful links**

Please note that the guys are back in areas of possibly poor phone coverage, so may not be able to phone as regularly as they have over the last few days while on R+R.

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 Facebook and the 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 and 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 setup 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)