



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

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DELAWARE SENDS FIREFIGHTERS TO BATTLE WESTERN WILDFIRES

The Delaware Forest Service dispatched a crew of wildland firefighters to California today to assist with efforts to contain western wildfires. Delaware's crew, which consists of 20 firefighters, is going to California to battle the Deer Fire on the Mendocino National Forest, about 20 miles northeast of Redwood Valley. The fire is currently 2400 acres with 15% containment and is burning in brush and pine. Moderate fire behavior has been reported with some spotting observed. A Type II management team has been ordered and is on its way to the fire. If the team remains out west for the entire 14 day assignment, the crew will be back in Delaware on Saturday, 8/27/05.

Michael Scuse, Agriculture Secretary, said, "I am very proud of our wildland firefighters. They are well trained and ready for the job ahead. Their willingness to help their fellow firefighters across the country is to be commended. Their personal sacrifice in leaving their everyday lives and their families is an example of their dedication."

Wildland firefighters typically camp in primitive conditions while assigned to a fire. Each work shift lasts an average of 13-15 hours. The firefighters will have little to no contact with their families during their assignment.

The Delaware Forest Service began mobilizing fire crews for out-of-state fire duty in 1998. Since the inception of the wildland firefighter program, Delaware has sent crews west nearly every fire season. In addition, individual firefighters, known as "single resources," also travel west each summer to serve in a variety of capacities, including bull dozer operators, EMTs, helicopter crew members, and dispatchers.

"When western states exhaust their resources due to the long duration of an intense fire season, they typically turn to the resources available in the eastern states," says Austin Short, State Forest Administrator. "Delaware has made quite a name for itself in the national fire scene thanks to the hard work and dedication of our wildland firefighters."

Only specially trained firefighters are eligible to serve on a western fire crew. Every winter, the Delaware Forest Service holds wildfire-training sessions at the Delaware Fire School to recruit and educate volunteers. Potential candidates must successfully complete a series of courses on fire behavior, wildfire suppression techniques, and the Incident Command System (the chain of command used to coordinate fire fighting activities on a fire incident). Candidates must also pass a physical fitness test in which they must carry 45 pounds of equipment three miles within a 45-minute time limit.

In addition to the wildland fire courses held at the Delaware Fire School, the Delaware Forest Service also sponsors a two-day training camp every spring. Fire Camp attendees receive hands-on experience in the suppression of an active wildland fire, and learn about wildfire suppression techniques, fire behavior, fire weather, mobilization, pump use, and power saw use.

According to Short, the rewards of combating wildfires are many. "Serving on a fire crew is physically challenging, but there's nothing more satisfying than pushing your limits to help out your neighbors and the

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environment. There's also a lot of comradery on the fire line, and an immense feeling of satisfaction when the fire is finally out."

The Wildland Fire Crew will consist of:

*Michael Valenti, Dover
*Glenn Gladders, Dover
*Todd Gsell, Townsend
*Henry Poole, Carney's Point, NJ
*Erich Burkentine, Lewes
*Samual Topper, Dewey Beach
Michael Brown, Hartly
Matt Dotterer, Milton
Andrew Mathe, Wilmington
Monica Waller, Mill Creek

Logan Fountain, Townsend
Michael Nelson, Oxford, PA
Kevin Hauer, Dover
Jenny McDermott, Newark
Jonathan Richardville, Wilmington
Timothy Mutter, Dover
Christopher Hammond, Smyrna
Stephen Gilbert, Millsboro
Anthony Pilittier, Frederica
Zachary Knox, Bear

***DDA Forest Service Employees**

For further information, contact: Austin Short, State Forest Administrator:
Tel.: (302) 698-4548, (800) 282-8685 (DE only), or (302) 245-3462 (Cell)

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Left to right:

First Row: Jonathan Richardville, Timothy Mutter, Christopher Hammond, Stephen Gilbert, Anthony Pilittier, Zachary Knox

Second Row: Matt Dotterer, Andrew Mathe, Monica Waller, Logan Fountain, Michael Nelson, Kevin Hauer, Jenny McDermott,

Third Row: Michael Valenti, Glenn Gladders, Todd Gsell, Henry Poole, Erich Burkentine, Samual Topper, Michael Brown

Electronic copy of the picture available – anne.fitzgerald@state.de.us