

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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SC Forestry Commission deploys 14 personnel to western wildfires

Large wildfires prompt calls for out-of-state assistance from firefighters around the country

COLUMBIA—Responding to multiple requests from the U.S. Forest Service, the South Carolina Forestry Commission has sent 14 of its wildland firefighters to join crews battling wildfires in five western states.

The 14 SCFC personnel have either arrived or are en route to wildfires in California, Colorado, Oregon, Texas and Washington. Their work assignments fall under a wide range of Incident Command System (ICS) roles, spanning everything from firefighters, heavy equipment bosses and tractor plow operators to public information officers and resource unit leaders, among others.

All certified wildland firefighters and ICS-trained personnel, regardless of home state or agency, train to the same standards and under the same framework so that they can fall in seamlessly on any incident.

The Forestry Commission does not release the names of any of its deployed personnel for security reasons, namely protection of their identities and those of their families.

While South Carolina's fire season, which typically peaks between November and April, was relatively mild, the western United States is experiencing another widespread and deadly series of conflagrations. Because the western and southern fire seasons do not generally overlap, it is customary for Southern state forestry agencies to send its wildland fire personnel on western assignments when requested. It is common for all states to share resources on such incidents; for example, the Forestry Commission received assistance from firefighters and other ICS personnel from five different states during the November 2016 Pinnacle Mountain Fire at Table Rock State Park.

The Forestry Commission sends its highly trained personnel out west every year in response to calls for out-of-state assistance, which have continued to grow in recent years. These deployments are great training opportunities for those who go on what are typically two-week assignments, said SCFC Protection Chief Darryl Jones. "All of our IMT personnel and all of our firefighters undergo regular training for exactly these kinds of special assignments," he said. "Not only do they provide much-needed help, but they also bring that valuable ICS experience with them back to South Carolina."

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The Forestry Commission runs the state's only Type 2 Incident Management Team, which works regularly with a wide variety of organizations on training events and real-world disasters, helping them to apply the principles of the ICS framework. ICS is now widely adopted as the most effective organizational structure for both emergency situations and planned events.

Did you know...?

Fire season in the U.S. Southeast is typically a winter phenomenon, running from November to April, when lower humidity and higher wind speeds combine with dry fuels on the ground to create the potential for outdoor fires escaping easily and spreading rapidly. In the western U.S., however, fire season coincides with the predictably less rainfall and low humidity characteristic of the summer months in that region. Climate change and the depletion of water resources in western states is contributing to expanded firefighting efforts that has in recent years stretched from early spring to late fall.

