



*NMFS Opens National Fire Plan Offices in
Tri-State Area to Help with Forest Work*

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In response to the extensive wildfires that ravaged the West last summer, the National Marine Fisheries Service has hired a team of biologists to work with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management as those agencies implement a national fire plan. The biologists have been installed in four new fisheries service locations in Salmon, and Grangeville, Idaho; Ellensburg, Wash.; and La Grande, Ore.

The addition of these four new installations doubles the number of field offices the National Marine Fisheries Service operates out of its Northwest headquarters in Seattle. The other offices are in Portland and Roseburg, Ore.; Boise, Idaho; and Olympia, Wash.

The four new offices are part of an expansion funded by a special Congressional national fire plan appropriation to offset the effects of last summer's wildfires. The fire plan is designed to restore burned areas and reduce the risk of wildfires on communities.

Because much of the forest restoration work has the potential to affect salmon habitat, the fisheries service has hired 30 federal national fire plan workers to assist Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management efforts in the tri-state area in producing salmon-friendly restoration plans.

Donna Darm, acting regional administrator for the fisheries service's Northwest region, said the latest office opening in Salmon is the capstone of that plan. "We're very excited about developing partnerships not just with our fellow federal agencies – the Bureau of Land Management and U. S. Forest Service – but with local communities as well, so we can integrate forest fire activities with salmon protection and the Endangered Species Act."

The La Grande field office is headed by Randy Tweten, who has worked on eastern Oregon issues for the past six years. Tweten said he expected his office to have 11 fire-plan biologists by summer's end, assisted by a smaller core of permanent staff to be hired later to work on non-fire-plan habitat issues in eastern Oregon.

The office is co-located with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's La Grande ranger station.

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The new Salmon field station is expected to have eight staff members by summer's end. It's headed by Jan Pisano, a former Salmon resident, who said she expects the office to be fully operational by the end of June.

“Our presence in Salmon is long overdue.” Pisano said. “The people in the Upper Salmon area have long shown a concern for salmon and steelhead, and a real willingness to take up beneficial, on-the-ground actions. We've been trying for years to find a way to work closer on local issues. The national fire plan is exactly what we needed.”

The Ellensburg office will have a staff of four and is headed by Dale Bambrick. The team leader of the Grangeville office is Dale Brege.

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