



U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management



Message from the Director January 10, 2008

Happy New Year! I wish all of us health, happiness and the ability to go home safely.

There is a lot going on, as usual. Our FY08 budget was decided through the Omnibus Bill passed by Congress and signed by the President in December. Hearings on the '09 Budget will begin soon after the President announces it in mid-January. We are still working through the FY08 allocation to determine the dollar figures for hazardous fuels, preparedness and suppression. There were several interesting items in Congressional direction included in the Omnibus Bill. Between House, Senate, and Conference language, there are about forty noted items of intent or direction. For example, Congress has a special interest in how we allocate hazardous fuels funds and took note of the difficulty of retaining firefighters in southern California with a request that the USFS to give them some solutions. Also included in the budget language was permanent authority to expand the reimbursement program for firefighter liability insurance. The budget shop will have all the details soon and we'll keep you posted.

Obviously, we will obey the language in the 08 Omnibus Bill directing that no money be spent in 2008 for A-76 studies – what many of you may hear called competitive sourcing activities. The Feasibility Studies for Dispatch and Wildland Fire Training we finished as a prelude to any further competitions or reorganizations will be presented to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) this month for consideration. Some organizational changes may still be coming based on the Chief's acceptance of any of the recommendations in the Feasibility Studies. We still have an overwhelming need to be the leanest, most efficient organization we can be in the atmosphere of today's static and declining budgets. In addition, we are continuing the work we started last year in aviation. More on that to come...

One January event I'm really looking forward to is starting my Blog. "Tom's Blog" is on the Forest Service intranet site and I'm very excited about using this technology to reach across the physical distance between me, the Deputy and Assistant Directors here in the WO and all the folks in the field who want a forum to share some concerns or ideas about the Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Program. To get to my Blog, employees can go the FSweb site, click on Beta: FS Blog, enter your EAuth information, and then stop in Tom's Blog. Before we get started, I wanted to review the Policy for the FS Blog sites so we are all clear on what will happen:

Blogger and Commenting Policy

- We will tell the truth. We will acknowledge and correct any mistakes promptly.
- We will not delete comments unless they are off-topic, spam, or defamatory.

- Bloggers will reply to comments when appropriate and as promptly as possible. However, there will not be a response for each comment. Many comments may not receive a response.
- We will link to online references and original source materials directly
- We will disagree with other opinions respectfully.

I won't be able answer every thought or opinion and that's not really what a Blog is for, but I will do my best to read and understand your points of view. If there are questions or misinformation my staff can answer, they will log in and address some of the postings. I may send my moderator some thoughts from the road on occasion if I can't get on to post them myself. Rest assured she will post them word-for-word and her moderator duties and ethics are solidly behind the policy statements above.

Remember you need your EAuth information to get in to Tom's Blog – the same you use for your AgLearn User ID and Password - which also means there is no anonymity.

I hope you access Tom's Blog and join in the dialogue. I want to hear about what going on from the White Mountain NF fire program to the very different experiences on the Cleveland NF, in Florida and all across the nation.

Once again, let's make this another great year.

Tom Harbour