



Fort Laramie NHS: *National Park Service Provides Grant to Volunteer Fire Department*

The National Park Service, in conjunction with Fort Laramie National Historic Site, recently provided funding through the Rural Fire Assistance Program to the Fort Laramie Volunteer Fire Department. The Fire Department received \$14,000 to increase firefighter safety and to enhance the fire protection capabilities of the departments.

The 2003 Congressional Appropriations Act allocated Department of the Interior agencies \$10 million to enhance the fire protection capabilities of Rural Fire Protection Districts. Of this amount, the National Park Service received \$1.55 million for rural fire assistance. Historically, the National Park Service has had no capability to help with funding for these small rural fire departments. The Rural Fire Assistance Program is primarily designed to increase firefighter safety and efficiency of rural departments. Emphasis is placed on departments that protect rural communities and play a substantial cooperative role in the protection of federal lands. Of the 378 units of the National Park Service, 245 experience wildland fires either originating within the unit, or igniting outside and threatening the park. Particularly in smaller park units such as Fort Laramie, significant assistance from small adjacent communities' volunteer fire departments is required to respond to wildland fires. In many cases, those fire departments are the only firefighting resources available to assist the parks.

"To qualify for assistance, a Rural Fire Protection District has to meet certain requirements," explained Park Superintendent George Helfrich. "A Rural Fire District must have a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service, must serve a community with a population of less than ten thousand people, and must meet a cost share minimum of 10% of the total grant amount." Funding can only be used for training, equipment and prevention activities. The Fort Laramie Fire Department was able to meet all of these requirements, according to Helfrich.



The Fort Laramie Fire Department worked with the staff of Fort Laramie NHS to develop a list of equipment that the department needed to be able to effectively respond to wildland fires. The most pressing need was to replace their aging Type 6 engines. The department had a number of Type 6 engines; however, they were all at least twenty years old. Most of these were used vehicles when the department acquired them, and all of them except one had pump apparatuses that were "home built." The vehicles had serious design flaws and mechanical and age-related problems that severely limited their ability to safely and efficiently respond to wildland fire incidents. The \$14,000 that the National Park Service provided the Volunteer Fire Department was used to purchase a new Danko® slip-on firefighting unit. The new slip-on unit boasts a 300-gallon

poly tank, with an integrated Class “A” foam proportioner. The Fort Laramie Rural Fire District agreed to secure a loan to purchase a new chassis. The new slip-on unit will be mounted on this vehicle. According to the Fort Laramie Fire Department, the acquisition of the new slip-on unit made the difference in being able to field a new Type 6 engine. The Fire Department had barely enough money to purchase the chassis let alone a new tank, pump and foam unit. Without the aid of the National Park Service, it is unlikely that this project could have gone forward. With the grants received from the Rural Fire Assistance Program in 2002 and 2003, the Fort Laramie Fire Department is making great progress in improving its ability to meet accepted standards of wildland fire qualifications, training and performance.

Superintendent Helfrich emphasized the importance of maintaining a good working relationship between the Park and the Fort Laramie Volunteer Fire Department. He noted, “We rely heavily on them to provide nearly all fire protection, both wildland and structural, at the National Historic Site. We simply do not have the enough staff available with firefighter certification to provide the protection ourselves.” Helfrich praised the local fire department and their level of professionalism. Fort Laramie NHS was happy to be able to provide them with this equipment and looks forward to continuing to assist the local department in any way they can.