



National Park Service
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Fort Laramie NHS

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National Historic Site Assists Fort Laramie 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 \$4,500 to increase firefighter safety and to enhance fire protection capabilities.



Historically, the National Park Service has had no capability to help with funding for small, rural fire departments that routinely help fight fire on or near Department of Interior (DOI) lands. The Rural Fire Assistance Program is designed to assist rural fire departments that often rely heavily on volunteer firefighting resources, especially those that have a substantial cooperative role in the protection of federal lands and support interagency fire efforts. The program helps fund equipment, training and prevention needs on a cost-share basis. The Fort Laramie Volunteer Fire Department worked with the staff of Fort Laramie NHS to develop a list of equipment to effectively respond to wildland fires. It was determined that the department had two major needs.

The first was to acquire a FLOTO-Pump, a highly specialized piece of firefighting equipment useful in areas where water sources are a problem. The FLOTO-Pump is a lightweight (less than 50 pounds), portable water pump that can be placed directly in a water source such as a stream, irrigation ditch, stock tank, etc. The pump is self-priming and floats on the surface of whatever water source is being used. It can operate in as little as six inches of water, yet deliver as much as 140 gallons of water per minute with up to 170 pounds of pressure for firefighting operations. The portable pump can also be used to fill water tanks on fire trucks. The FLOTO-Pump should dramatically increase the efficiency of the Fort Laramie Fire Department by allowing it to utilize water sources closer to remote fire events.

The second need was to begin replacing the department's aging and obsolete fire shelters with the new generation shelters that meet current safety standards. The fire shelter is essentially an emergency heat shield that looks similar to an aluminum foil tent. If a firefighter becomes trapped by flames, he/she can deploy the fire shelter and take cover in it until the flame front passes over. The fire shelter has saved the lives of many firefighters across the nation over the past decade. Despite its high cost of approximately \$288.00 each, it is an integral piece of safety equipment that every wildland firefighter is required to carry. This year the department was able to replace eleven shelters, and hopefully will be able to complete the conversion in 2005.

Park Superintendent George Helfrich noted that assistance from the Fort Laramie Volunteer Fire Department is vital to fire management operations. "We rely heavily on them to provide nearly all wildland and structural fire protection at the National Historic Site," he said. "We simply do not have enough qualified staff available to provide the protection ourselves." Helfrich praised the level of professionalism of the local fire department and emphasized the importance of maintaining a good working relationship between the Park and the local fire department. This marks the third year the Fort Laramie Volunteer Fire Department has received funding through the Rural Fire Assistance Program.