



July 2004

Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Grand Teton National Park

Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Forest Service  
Bridger-Teton National Forest

## Teton Interagency Fire Management Federal Officials Dedicate New Interagency Helibase



The Bridger- Teton National Forest and Grand Teton National Park celebrated completion of a new interagency helibase in a ceremony held on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Park Superintendent Mary Gibson Scott and Forest Supervisor Kniffy Hamilton jointly cut the ribbon on the new 3,200 square- foot building, located at the Jackson Hole Airport.

Establishment of a permanent base for interagency helicopter operations has been a long- term goal for both Park and Forest administrators after a 1995 helibase review noted safety concerns for approaches and departures. At that time, helicopter operations were based from a helipad located behind Bridger- Teton offices in downtown Jackson, Wyoming. An interdisciplinary team comprised of federal and county officials and conservation groups identified potential locations for a new base. A subsequent environmental analysis determined the Jackson Airport was the best site for operations, serving firefighters and emergency response teams.

Beginning in 1999, space for a temporary helicopter base was leased from the airport, allowing interagency crews to continue operations while a permanent base facility was under construction. Construction on the new base began in September, 2003 and was finished last month. The project cost approximately \$950,000.



The new base provides two 30-foot-by-30-foot helicopter landing pads and one 40-foot-by-40-foot pad. Additionally, there is spill containment parking for fuel trucks and a mobile communications trailer. The building houses offices, a crew ready room, a storage area stocked with gear and equipment for response crews, a training/meeting room, and a helitack operations center. The new facility also includes a physical fitness room for firefighters to maintain their required fitness standards.

Through an established interagency partnership, the two federal agencies were able to build an efficient and safe base and eliminate duplication of facilities. "This would not have been possible without this partnership between Grand Teton and the Forest Service," said Forest Supervisor Kniffy Hamilton. "Interagency partnerships like this are really unique, and that uniqueness provides an avenue for pooled resources, efficiency, and better service to the public."

In 2003, the helitack crew responded to 81 wildland fires and kept all but four to less than one acre. The two contract helicopters also provide a shared resource that allows park rangers to use the helicopter for short-haul rescue operations within the Park and Forest. The base will directly serve 2.5 million acres of federal land and is available to assist in rescue and fire operations on 18 million acres across the greater Yellowstone area.