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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Federal, State and Local Employees from Montana Help with Hurricane Recovery**

Though the Gulf Coast Region is far from Montana, help for hurricane recovery involves many Montanans working for federal and state agencies, fire departments, and local governments. According to statistics from the Northern Rockies Coordination Center, 455 personnel are mobilized for Southern Area Hurricane Support, including four incident management teams, two buying teams, nine fire crews, and other support personnel. More than half (188) are from the USDA Forest Service and 42 are from agencies within Department of Interior. A total of 34 personnel from the Montana DNRC are assigned to hurricane recovery efforts, most of them on incident management teams. They will join volunteers from the American Red Cross, soldiers from the Montana National Guard, and others already in the region providing support for hurricane recovery efforts. Most will be gone for thirty days, working two 14-day stints with two days off in the middle.

The people who take these assignments aren't the only ones impacted in Montana. "It's important to recognize the sacrifices of the families – some of whom haven't seen their spouse or family member much since before the fire season." said State Forester Bob Harrington, "These same people are now working extended assignments in hurricane recovery zones." Harrington also praised the employees who have taken on extra responsibilities at their home units to cover for coworkers absent on hurricane assignments.

And while the 2005 fire season may be over in Montana, it's just now heating up in places like southern California, where firefighters battled a 20,000 acre fire outside of L.A. last week.

In their traditional roles, incident management teams are associated with wildfires, but their role has expanded to include a variety of other incidents. For example, when the Space Shuttle Columbia broke apart on re-entry on February 1, 2003, incident management teams assisted with the recovery of shuttle debris to assist NASA in determining the cause of the tragedy. Crews from Montana's Indian Reservations were integral to the shuttle recovery effort. Last year, teams assisted with recovery from a number of hurricanes that battered Florida and much of the southeastern US. Teams went to New York after 9/11 to assist with rescue and recovery, and later with the massive cleanup at ground zero. One of the most bizarre assignments for incident management teams was in California in 2002 and 2003 when an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease threatened the commercial poultry industry in several western states. The outbreak cost more than \$160 million to fight and resulted in destruction of more than three million birds.

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Incident Management Teams operate using the Incident Command System (ICS), and effective system for management of emergencies. The teams are able to mobilize quickly and manage highly complex incidents using ICS with a command structure including sections for operations, planning, logistics, information, and finance. And the system is adaptable for incidents of varying size or complexity. Team members are typically from a variety of organizations, including federal and state agencies, counties, local government and fire departments.

More Montanans are headed to hurricane recovery areas, including last week's deployment of 200 soldiers with the Montana National Guard, and orders for additional resources expected at the Northern Rockies Coordination Center in Missoula.

For additional information on wildland agency hurricane response, visit the Forest Service website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/fire/mreport.shtml> or the daily updated briefing paper on hurricane response at <http://gacc.nifc.gov/sacc/predictive/intelligence/KatrinaBriefingPaper.pdf>

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