

For Immediate Release: August 15, 2003

Youth Fire Crews Temporarily Removed from Active Fireline Work

As a result of national direction, the cooperative wildland fire agencies and the state Youth Training Centers in Nevada have discontinued the use of youth crews for direct hotline wildland fire suppression activities. Increased safety and liability concerns have heightened awareness and sensitivity of having youth less than 18 years of age work on suppressing active wildfire.

“These crews are a valuable resource and we will continue to use youth crews nationwide in less hazardous positions in support of fire suppression,” said Alice Forbes, Assistant Director for Fire Operations for the USDA Forest Service.

Three 20-person fire crews operated by Youth Centers in Nevada in cooperation with the Nevada Division of Forestry are affected.

“The Nevada Youth fire crews have made an enormous contribution to firefighting in Nevada and the nation in the past 43 years. This action in no way reflects upon the safety record or capabilities of these youth,” said BLM Nevada State Director Bob Abbey.

Abbey continued, “However, the National Wildfire Coordination Group is examining the program and risks involved with using underage people to fight fire in hazardous conditions. The Nevada Division of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service are long-time firefighting partners in Nevada. We stand shoulder to shoulder and will continue to work together.”

According to Nevada State Forester Steve Robinson, “We have agreed to temporarily suspend the use of these crews while the National Wildfire Coordinating Group continues to evaluate this issue. We are saddened that federal regulations imposed on us have caused this situation. At this point the federal government is unsure of its own legal posture. These crews have performed admirably and even courageously for more than 40 years, and have truly been part of the team.” Robinson went on to say, “My first objective now is to ensure these young people have alternative work off the fire lines. There is so much to be done in Nevada where our rangelands and forests are concerned, and I am confident we can find worthwhile jobs for them.”

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NORTH DOUGLAS COUNTY LAND SALE

The Federal District Court in Washington, D.C., has denied Carson City's motion for preliminary injunction or a temporary restraining order to stop the sale of 144 acres of public land in northern Douglas County. The Court will issue an order on Monday that allows the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to go forward with the sale. The buyer, however, will not be able to receive title to the land until the Court rules on the merits of the case. A final ruling is expected in late October. The sale will occur on August 6 at 10 a.m. at the Douglas County Administration Building in Minden.

"We are pleased that the court has denied the request for a temporary restraining order," said BLM State Director Bob Abbey. "We believe that the public interest is best served by holding a competitive sale to dispose of the property into private ownership."

The BLM carried out extensive planning, analysis and coordination with local governments and the public over the past three years to prepare for the sale of the Douglas County land. Land use planning is an open public process with numerous public notices and news media stories to inform everyone concerned. Carson City took advantage of many opportunities to participate in the BLM and Douglas County joint planning process, which began in the spring 2000.

Sale of land is the priority disposal method for public lands in Nevada. The BLM conducts auctions twice a year for land in the Las Vegas Valley. Sales of public land are in the planning stages for Elko and Lyon Counties, and a sale recently was completed in Mesquite.

The BLM's ability to offer lands for sale in less populated rural areas of the state has been hindered by a lack of funds to cover sale preparation costs. The proceeds from the North Douglas land sale will provide seed money for other public land sale offerings and acquisitions throughout the State.

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