

USDA FOREST SERVICE

2001 NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER

REPORT



National Smokejumper Program

Smokejumping had another busy, productive and safe year in 2001. The ability to safely get highly motivated, self sufficient and experienced firefighters on the ground to an incident in a minimal amount of time is still the key to success in being able to stop an incident from becoming large, costly and environmentally devastating. The ability of the smokejumper program to move large numbers of initial attack firefighters to an incident with minimal time and cost is an asset to land managers that helps the program to continue to be the success that it has been for the past 60 years.

The 2001 fire season arrived with much anticipation. The National Fire Plan came to life, bringing both hope and headache. The number of new WAE fire positions available throughout the country, due to the NFP, was enough to lure many experienced firefighters to new positions. This affected every smokejumper base in the country. Several smokejumper bases were able to increase their numbers to meet MEL, as per National Fire Plan. However, due to the lateness of the timeframes when some of the NFP hiring rounds occurred, a number of smokejumper positions were unable to be filled. This left the number of Forest Service smokejumpers available for during the 2001 season at approximately the same level as last season (288 individuals).

Some of the factors that make the smokejumper resource such a valuable asset to managers were highlighted during this season. The speed, range and payload of smokejumpers was utilized on numerous occasions this season when smokejumper aircraft from multiple bases, regions and even agencies converged over a single incident, putting 25-35 fresh firefighters on the line in minimal time. Spike bases were opened at several locations throughout the summer in locations where initial attack fire activity was either expected or observed to be higher than local resources were able to manage. These bases saw considerable activity and were a valuable resource to local land managers. On numerous occasions, jumpers from one base were sent to "boost" another base. This seamless process has been practiced for decades to get the resources to the location where the fire activity or resource shortages are occurring or anticipated. Paracargo resupply of remote incidents again proved its value, both in timely delivery and in cost effectiveness.

Detail opportunities were taken advantage of by the smokejumper program again in 2001. Individuals from within the smokejumper organization are detailed out to other units as well as individuals from outside the smokejumper organizations detailing in. Both types of details allow for the exchange of information, expertise, skills, and provide new ideas and perspectives for both the individuals and hosting units. These opportunities have long been recognized as a benefit for everyone involved and will continue to be used in the future. In 2001, a number of smokejumpers detailed into positions on IHC crews, ranging from superintendent to foreman to squad leader positions. Other details include a regional fire safety specialist, an assistant forest FMO, a pilot, an air tanker base manager and an assistant ATBM, an equipment development specialist and an initial attack dispatcher.

2001 was a safe and successful year for the Forest Service smokejumper program. The smokejumper emphasis on rapid, aggressive initial attack falls in line as a cornerstone of the National Fire Plan. The successful use of multiple loads of smokejumpers on emerging fires this year is a tremendous asset to managers, and is highlighted in several of the significant actions on the following pages. These assets, the ability to rapidly move large numbers of aggressive, highly trained and skilled initial attack firefighters where they are needed, will keep the program thriving in the decades to come as an integral part of the National Fire Plan.

2001 Summary

Fires Jumped (page 9) – Forest Service smokejumpers jumped 591 fires from Forest Service bases during the 2001 season. This is down approximately 100 fires from last year, probably due to the fact that there are more initial attack firefighters available in the system due to national fire plan hiring. Examples of significant actions (pages 4-8) clearly display the value of this initial attack resource. This year's examples emphasize not only the value of rapid initial attack, but also the value of getting sufficient numbers of I.A. firefighters on scene in a timely manner. These examples saved taxpayers millions of dollars while limiting exposure to thousands of wildland firefighters.

Person Days on Jump Fires (page 9) – Forest Service smokejumpers contributed 9,582 person days to fires that were jumped during the 2001 fire season, which is back to a more average level. The level of activity was evenly distributed between the Northern Rockies, Eastern Basin, Northwest and Northern California, the four geographical areas that host the F.S. smokejumper bases, with minimal activity in the other areas.

Suppression Ground Crews (page 10) – Forest Service smokejumpers contributed 2,683 person days in various ground crew configurations. The Northern Rockies and Northern California areas accumulated the highest numbers in this category. This is an increase in approximately 25% over last year. Normally a decrease in jump activity at the bases results in an increase in ground crew suppression activity, as the number of firefighters available at the bases to attack fires by means other than jumping is higher.

Suppression Overhead (page 10) – Forest Service smokejumpers contributed 1,846 person days in support of large fires filling single resource overhead assignments. The majority of these assignments were in the Northern Rockies and Southern areas.

Prescribed Fire Support (page 11) – Forest Service smokejumpers contributed 1,246 person days in a variety of prescribed fire crew configurations. The majority of this action again occurred in the Southern area. Some of this contribution was in the form of prescribed fire planning and overhead assignments, the remainder in field operations.

Other Person Days – During periods of low fire activity, Forest Service smokejumpers contributed over 4,500 person days in support of the Chief's Natural Resource Agenda. Activities included; mechanical fuels treatment, timber marking, silviculture, range and recreation program support. The Asian Longhorn beetle eradication project, through APHIS, again kept jumpers busy climbing the hardwood trees in Chicago and New York City. Annually, in the early spring and late fall, jumpers participating in this program work an additional 5,000+ person days.

Demographics – Forest Service Base Managers are committed to providing the safest, most efficient and diverse workforce possible. Of the 288 Forest Service smokejumpers, nearly 30% represent either ethnic or gender diverse individuals. The smokejumper community is committed to recruiting and hiring a quality and diverse workforce.

Public Education and Recruitment – Aerial delivery of firefighters has always, and probably will always, fascinate the public, whether it be smokejumpers or heli-rappellers. With this fascination comes attention, both from the media and private citizens. This season it was the Green Knoll fire in the Jackson, WY area that received massive media coverage. Every year smokejumper bases are visited by tens of thousands of private citizens, as well as newspaper reporters, television reporters and movie makers. The positive reinforcement from these contacts is a benefit for the entire Forest Service.

Safety – Safety is and has always been a core value of the smokejumper program. Constant evolution in training, procedures and equipment continue to reduce parachute landing injuries. The improved FS-14R reserve parachute, hoped for in 2001, will be in service in 2002. A new, lighter, stronger helmet and facemask and an improved timber let-down system will also be evaluated in 2002. Again in 2001, injuries continued to decline.

In Summary – Smokejumper use, nationally, was at average levels for the 2001 season. Some of the highlights for the season included an increase in putting multiple loads of jumpers on emerging fires, with very successful results. Several of these incidents are highlighted in the significant actions portion of this report. Opening "spike bases" in areas of high activity was also very effective during the 2001 season. Overall, **Forest Service smokejumpers contributed 24,857 person days in the field** engaged in fire suppression, prescribed fire application and other activities in resource management. This figure does not include pre-suppression, support or program management time. The smokejumper community is striving to help fulfill the Forest Service mission.



Cache Creek Fire, Deschutes National Forest, August 2, 1999

Significant Actions

The following narratives are provided as examples of significant actions or "saves" during the 2001 fire season. It is likely smokejumper actions on these fires were instrumental in saving taxpayers millions of dollars in suppression costs.

REGION ONE

Grangeville Smokejumpers

⇒ **Spruce Fire, Kootenai National Forest, August 16, 2001**

On August 16, 2001 the Grangeville smokejumpers were dispatched to the Kootenai National forest in Northwest Montana. The forest had received widespread lightning that morning and the evening before, resulting in numerous new starts which quickly drew down local initial attack resources. At 7 minutes out from the original incident, Jumper 14, the GAC Twin Otter, was contacted by Kootenai Dispatch and ordered to a new fire, which had just been detected by aircraft, burning on Spruce Mountain.

Upon arrival at the fire, 8 jumpers were dropped, after a short delay for a single engine air tanker operations. The fire was approximately 2 acres in size and burning actively on the upper 1/3 of the slope. Located in a remote, road less area, the fire was burning in sub-alpine fir, spruce, dense brush and deep, dry duff. The Spruce fire was controlled in a single shift by the 8 jumpers originally assigned. Several additional shifts and some minimal helicopter support were required to fully extinguish the fire.

While unlikely that this fire could have gotten too large due to its position on the slope, due to spotting potential, extremely dry fuels and lack of availability of IA resources, a delay in suppression action could have made it much more difficult and time consuming to suppress, requiring many valuable resources during a time of high resource demand.

Missoula Smokejumpers

⇒ **West Alder Fire, Rock Creek, Lolo National Forest, August 18, 2001**

On Aug. 18th four Missoula smokejumpers jumped this fire at .10 acre. Within one hour the winds reached 25 MPH and the fire grew to around 10 acres. With the help of air resources, the four jumpers were able to hold the fire to 40 acres, until the Lolo IHC arrived and helped finish lining the fire two days later. The fire was then turned over to the Lolo crew. This fire had real potential to be a project size fire, but effective dispatching, initial attack firefighting and air to ground communication allowed catching it at this size.

⇒ **Hoppe fire, Gallatin National Forest, August 1, 2001**

This was one of several fires initially staffed by smokejumpers this season that was NOT contained by IA forces. This fire was reported on 8/1 at 0900. The West Yellowstone smokejumper base had no smokejumpers available, but Missoula had 20 available and Grangeville had 8 available. Missoula received a request at 1820 for 16 smokejumpers to staff the fire, which at the time was estimated at 20-25 acres and growing. The jumper aircraft arrived over the fire at 1940. This jump resulted in an injury and nighttime emergency helicopter evacuation. The fire was severely understaffed and the IA resources had no chance to catch the fire. The final cost of the Hoppe fire was over 1.6 million dollars.



Buck Creek fire

West Yellowstone Smokejumpers

⇒ **Buck Creek Fire, Gallatin National Forest, July 26, 2001**

This fire was staffed from two smokejumper bases – West Yellowstone and Missoula, and was successfully controlled at 7 acres. Within two and one half hours of the initial call West Yellowstone had 16 jumpers on the line with 10 jumpers from Missoula arriving that evening. This initial group, support by retardant and help from the local Forest the next day, was able to contain this fire that was located just 7 miles southwest (downwind) of the Yellowstone Club/Big Sky Resort areas, an interface area of significant real-estate value. Swift action on the Forest's part, using aerial resources most likely prevented this emerging fire (fuel model G at 7500 ft.) from becoming a significant logistical and political problem. Less than \$50,000 was spent on the total cost of suppressing this fire and seemed to be a significant save when considering the resources up wind of the fire.

REGION 4

McCall Smokejumpers

⇒ **Mosquito fire - Targhee National Forest - August 1, 2001**

On August 1, at 1300, a fire was reported on the Targhee National Forest. The fire was located on the Idaho-Wyoming border, within 10 miles of the Green Knoll fire on the Bridger Teton N.F.

The McCall jumpers received a request for 2 loads of jumpers from the Eastern Idaho Dispatch center at 1600. At the same time, Eastern Idaho was also requesting jumpers from the West Yellowstone smokejumper base and the BLM Great Basin smokejumpers. The fire at that time was estimated at 50 acres. Within 3 hours, 34 smokejumpers from 3 bases and 2 agencies were on the fire, with an estimated size of 125 acres.

The fire was in NFDRS fuel model G, on a 70% slope, Southwest aspect, elevation of approximately 8,500 feet, with fairly continuous, heavy fuels. The fire was staffed for the next day and a half by the jumper crews, one type 2 crew, and several overhead.

Due to aggressive initial attack, availability and aggressive use of available aerial resources, i.e. air tankers and helitankers, and a well coordinated air tactical group, the spread of this fire was stopped within 24 hours of initial attack. The final acreage burned was 197 acres and the final cost was estimated at \$750,000.

While that cost is not an insignificant amount, it is still millions of dollars less than the potential cost for a project type fire in that area at that time of year. The Green Knoll fire, only 7 miles east of this fire and burning under similar conditions and fuels, only one week earlier, burned almost 4,500 acres at an estimated cost of over 11 million dollars.



REGION 5

Redding Smokejumpers

⇒ **Indian and Shields fires, Plumas and Modoc N.F's, July 25, 2001 and August 8, 2001**

On July 25, 2001, Smokejumpers were requested for the Indian Fire on the Plumas National Forest. J-52 (a DC-3T) was loaded with 18 jumpers and enroute to the incident, 81 nautical miles south of the Redding smokejumper base, at 1924. All 18 jumpers were dropped on this incident, including enough food and supplies to sustain the crew for 2.5 days. The deployment operation was completed at 2052. Some retardant had been dropped across the head and down the left flank of the fire. Three helitack crewmembers were on scene, but left once the jumpers arrived to remain available for initial attack. The fire was burning actively with a 2230 temperature of 80 degrees and a relative humidity of 17%. The smokejumpers contained the fire at 2 acres by 2400. The Indian fire had great potential due to burning conditions and topography, but a successful initial attack defused this fire's potential. The Indian fire "save" is significant. A similar fire was ignited by the same storm just four miles away. This fire, although not discovered until 1000 the next morning, burned 3650 acres. It was to be called the Stream fire, and at its peak staffing level had 1421 persons assigned to it and cost an estimated \$7 million to suppress.

On August 8th a lightning storm ignited the Shields Fire in the South Warner Wilderness of the Modoc National Forest. Initially the fire was jumped with eighteen on the morning of August 9th. That afternoon 11 smokejumpers were dropped in to reinforce the incident. The 29 jumpers contained the incident by 0600 the next morning at 160 acres. They received no air, crew or



logistical support until the third day of the incident. Containing this fire was a difficult task. Relative humidity's were in the single digits and thunderstorm induced winds caused erratic fire behavior. Several fires that were ignited by the same storm escaped initial attack, including the Blue, which burned 34,401 acres. On the Shields incident, smokejumper trademarks of experience and self-sufficiency were demonstrated quite well.

REGION SIX

Redmond Smokejumpers

⇒ **Campbell Butte fire, Oregon BIA, August 12, 2001**

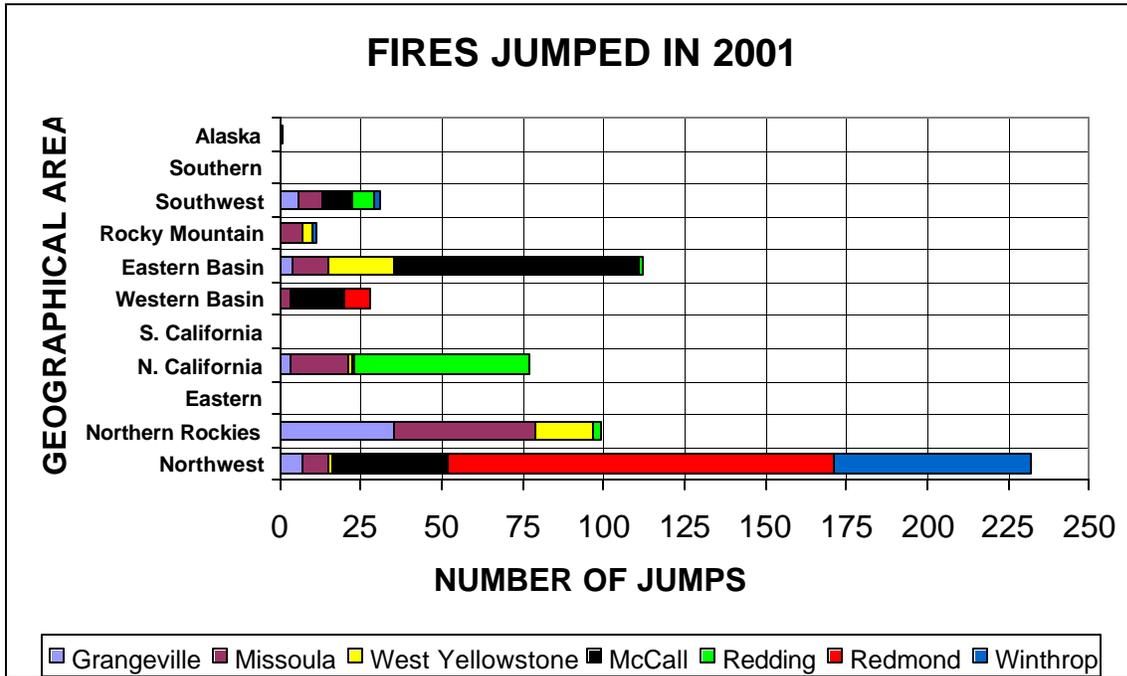
On August 8th, 2001, a dry lightning storm swept across the east slope of the Cascade Mountains starting numerous small fires. Two of these fires, the Olallie fire #99 and the Campbell Butte fire #104, were on or near the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. These two starts were within two miles of each other, at 5,000 feet elevation in short needle fuel type, and exposed to the same weather conditions. Their similarities were many, except the degree of remoteness, the IA resources used to suppress them, and the final cost. The Olallie fire, two miles north of Campbell Butte near Olallie lake, was reported on 8-12 at 1700, and was initial attacked that evening by engines. It was declared controlled on 8-29 at 2,719 acres. Total suppression costs were over 5.5 million dollars.

The Campbell Butte fire, one quarter mile south of Campbell Butte, was also reported on 8-12, at 1629. It was initial attacked on 8-13 at 0700 by four smokejumpers, all that were available at the time. This fire was considered the highest priority with the greatest potential. The initial size up was 7 acres with spots visible one quarter mile across a drainage. Equipment utilized included a Mark III pump and several thousand feet of hose that was delivered by Para cargo in quick deployment backpacks. This fire was controlled on 8-18 at 12 acres. The total cost of this fire was \$13,920.

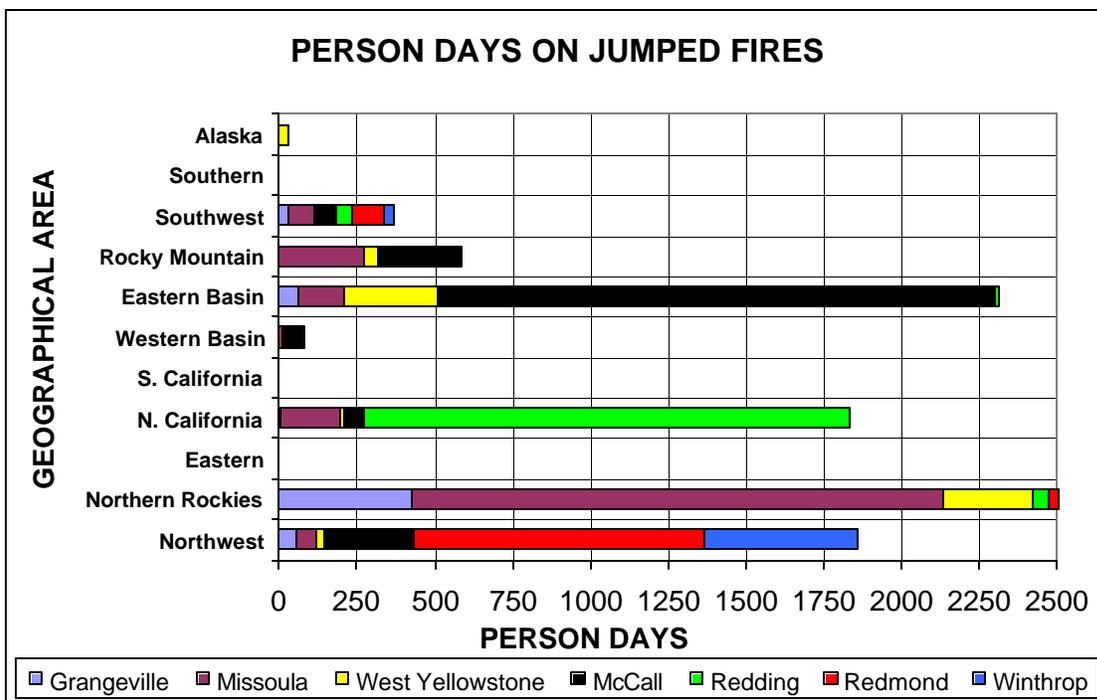


Campbell Butte fire 8-13-01

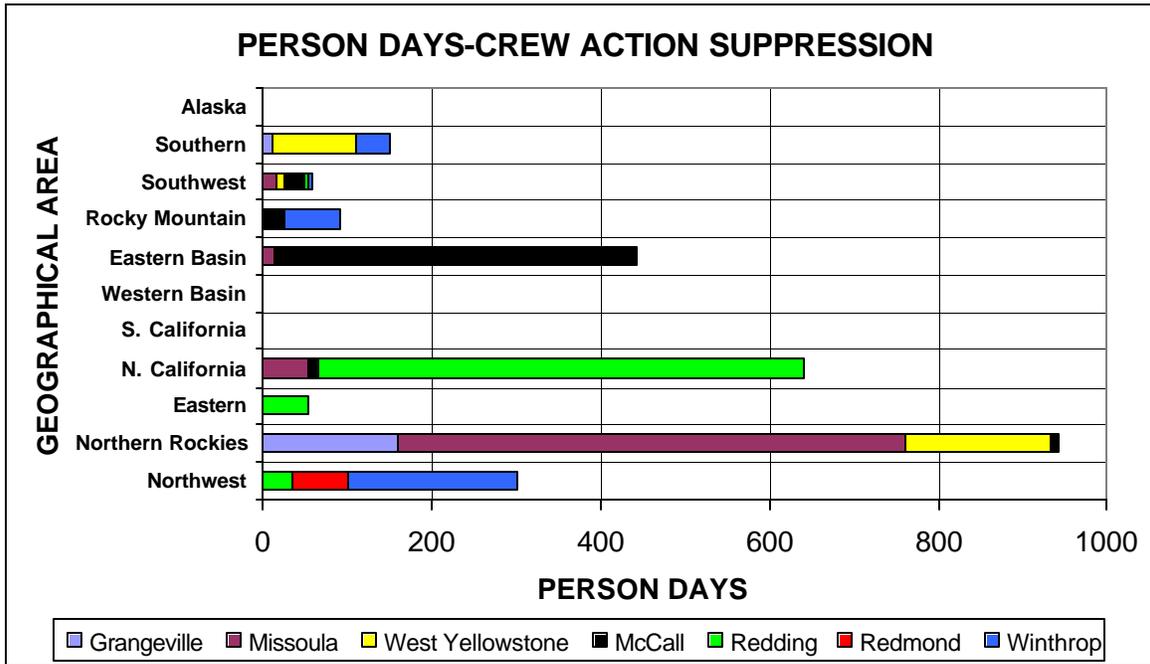
Fires Jumped- Forest Service smokejumpers staffed 591 fires in 2001, as jumpers.



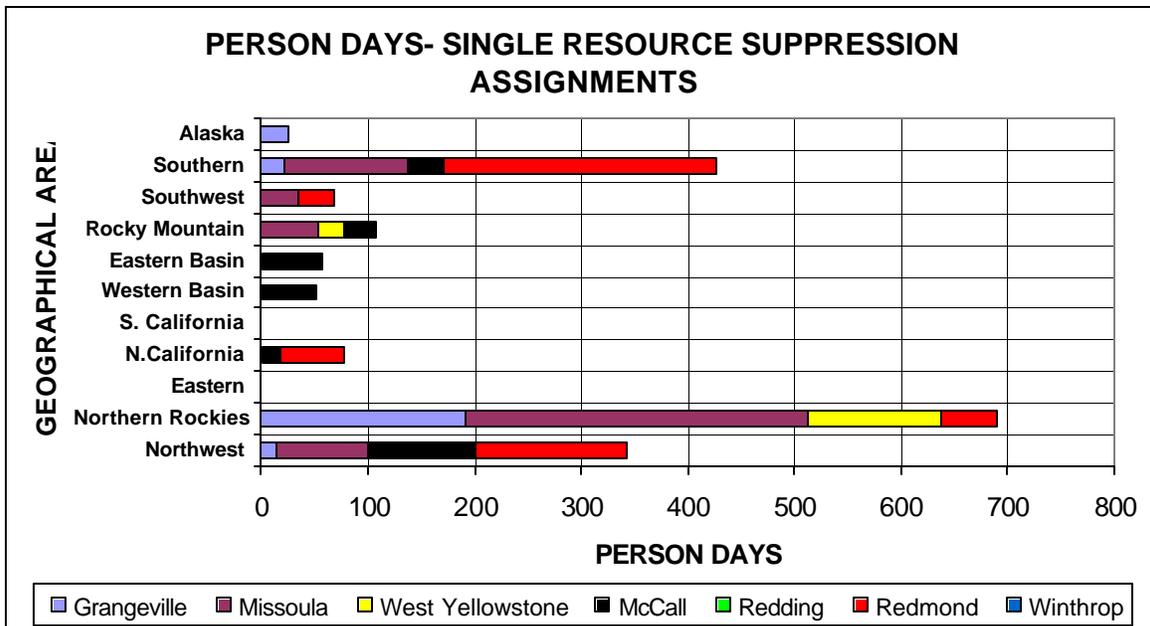
Person Days on Fires Jumped- Smokejumpers worked 9,582 person days on fires jumped.



Suppression Ground Crews- Smokejumpers contributed 2,683 person days on ground action fires.



Suppression Overhead- Smokejumpers contributed 1,846 person days to single resource assignments.



Prescribed Fire Support- Smokejumpers contributed 1,246 person days to the Prescribed fire program. This included crew, overhead and planning time.

