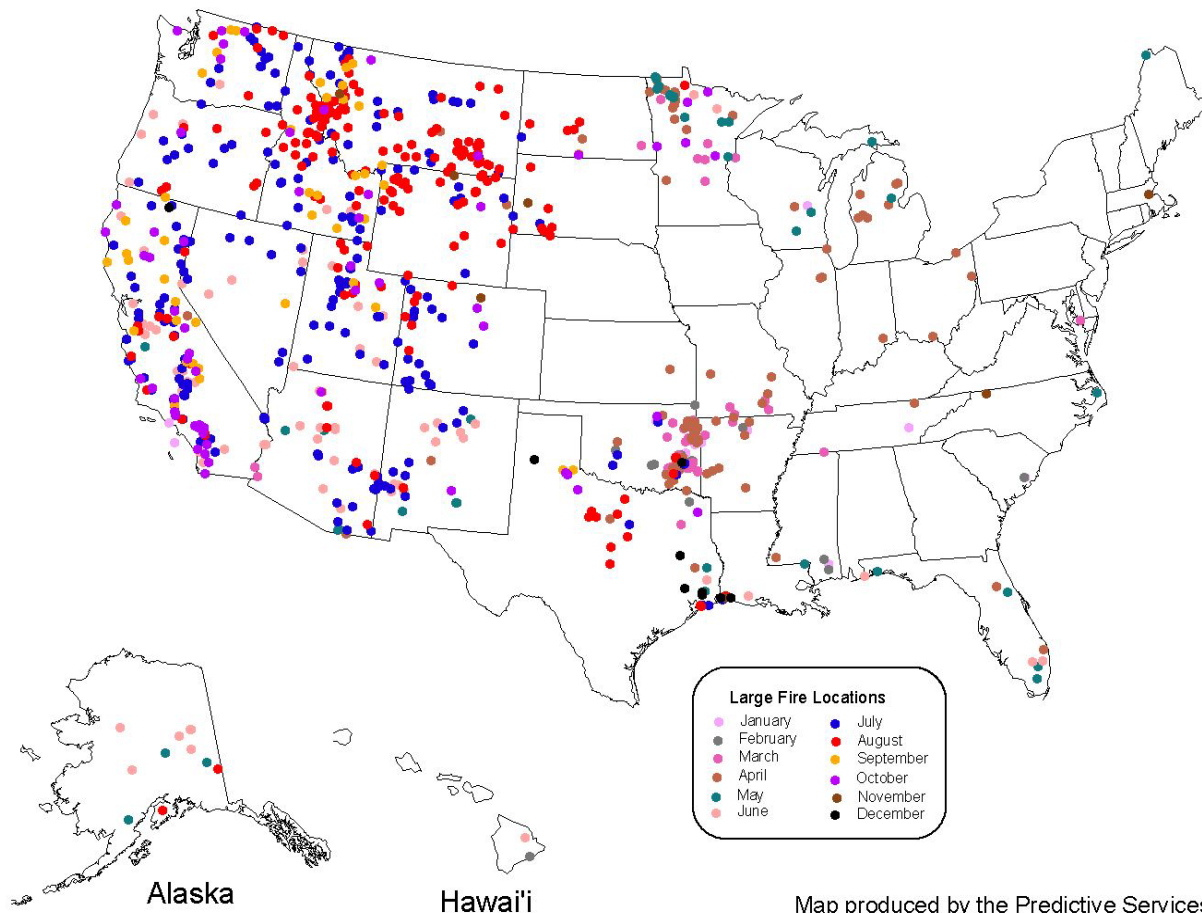


National Interagency Coordination Center

2003 Statistics and Summary

U.S. Large Fires, January 1 - December 31, 2003



Map produced by the Predictive Services
Section at the National Interagency
Coordination Center, Boise, Idaho





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Identifier Legend

Interagency Coordination Centers

AK - Alaska
EA - Eastern Area
EB - Eastern Great Basin
NICC - National
NO - Northern California
NR - Northern Rockies
NW - Northwest
RM - Rocky Mountain
SA - Southern Area
SO - Southern California
SW - Southwest
WB - Western Great Basin

CIFFC - Canadian Interagency Forest
Fire Centre

NIK - National Interagency Radio
Support Cache

Other:

PRI - Private

Government Agencies

Department of the Interior:

BIA - Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM - Bureau of Land Management
FWS - Fish & Wildlife Service
NPS - National Park Service
OAS - Office of Air Services

Department of Agriculture:

FS - Forest Service

DDQ - Department of Defense

Department of Homeland Security:

FEMA - Federal Emergency
Management Agency

Department of Commerce:

WXW - National Weather Service

ST - State

CN - Canada

Preface

All wildland fire and acreage statistics were gathered from the National Situation Report program, individual geographic areas detailed situation reports, submitted incident status summaries (ICS-209), and previous NICC annual reports. The statistics presented in this report provide for a national perspective. The statistics are delineated by agency and geographic areas.

For specific or more detailed information contact individual agencies for official statistics.

Resource mobilization statistics were gathered from the National Interagency Coordination Center's (NICC) database. The statistics presented are the resource requests that were processed through NICC and ordered by one of the eleven interagency coordination centers. The resource ordering process and procedures may be found in chapter 20 of the National Mobilization Guide. The National Mobilization Guide can be found on the NICC web site, (www.nifc.gov/news/nicc.html) under reference materials. The term "Other" may be used in different context throughout this report; "other" may refer to an agency or the type of a resource.



Annual Fire Summary 2003

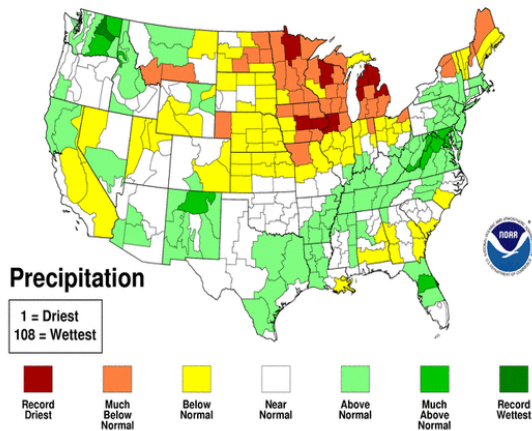
National Interagency Coordination Center 2003 Fire Season Summary

Winter (December 2002 – February 2003)

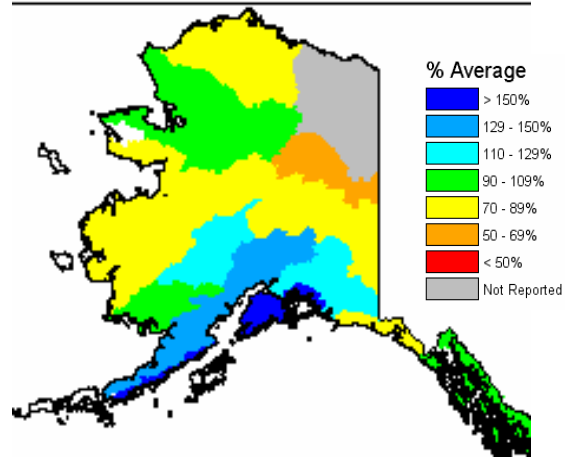
Much of the interior West had been suffering from long-term drought conditions as we entered the 2002-2003 winter season. While El Niño conditions persisted, winter precipitation and temperatures did not exactly follow typical El Niño patterns. Early winter precipitation was above average over the West Coast and Southeast, while the Great Lakes States remained dry. However, January was quite dry across much of the country except for the Northwest. The West saw one of its warmest winters on record while the East and Southeast were colder than usual. Alaska was generally drier and much warmer than normal from October 2002 through February 2003. Snowpack was light with some locations recording record low snow water contents at the end of winter.

Dec 2002 - Feb 2003 Divisional Ranks

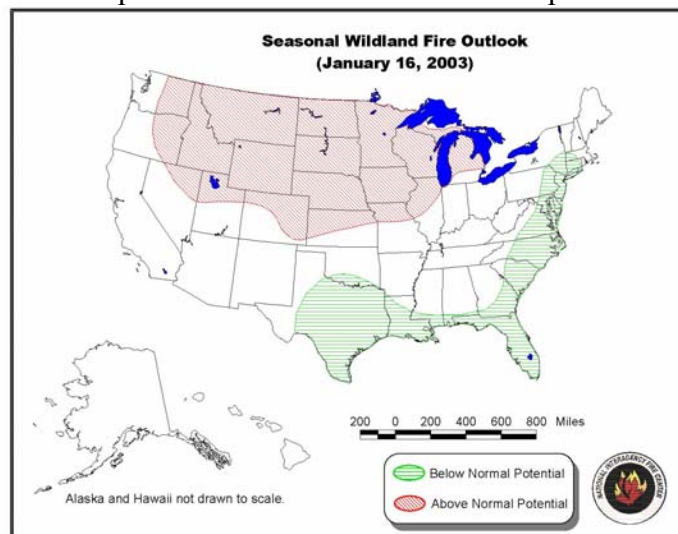
National Climatic Data Center/NESDIS/NOAA



Seasonal Precipitation, October 2002 - February 2003



The outlook in mid-January was calling for above normal potential for large fires in the Northern Rockies, Great Lakes region, and portions of the Rocky Mountain, Northwest and Great Basin Areas. Much of the Southern Area was expected to have below normal fire potential during 2003.



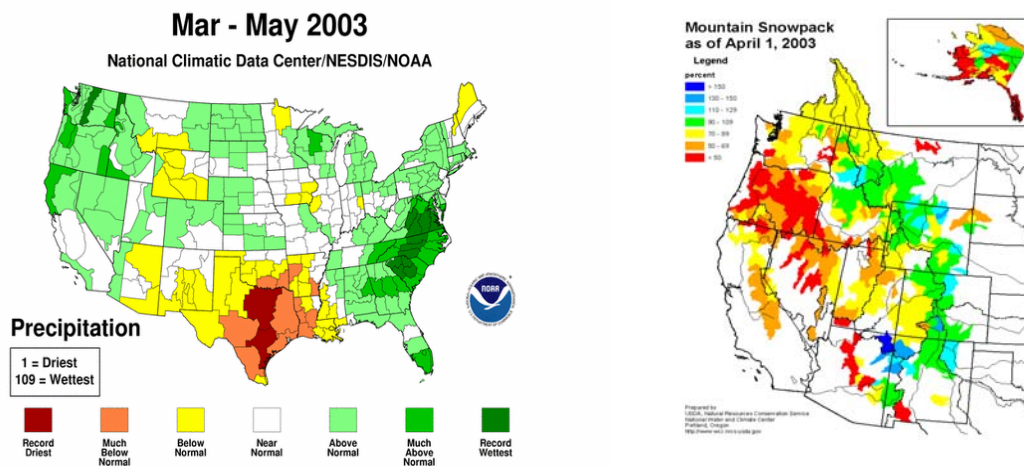
In January, 22 overhead resources and an infrared aircraft were requested and mobilized to Australia to provide suppression assistance with extreme wildfire activity in Australia. However, the most

significant commitment of resources from the Wildland Fire Agencies during the first quarter of 2003 was support provided for two major all-risk incidents, which began in early February and continued into the second quarter of the year. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) **Columbia Space Shuttle** recovery mission occurred in Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Utah and Nevada. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) **Exotic Newcastle Disease** response took place in California, Nevada, Arizona and Texas. These incidents tasked the Wildland Fire Agencies with providing 2,329 overhead personnel including 25 Incident Management Teams, 5 National Buying Teams and 2 Area Command Teams. In addition, 466 crews were mobilized to support and assist these all-risk incidents.

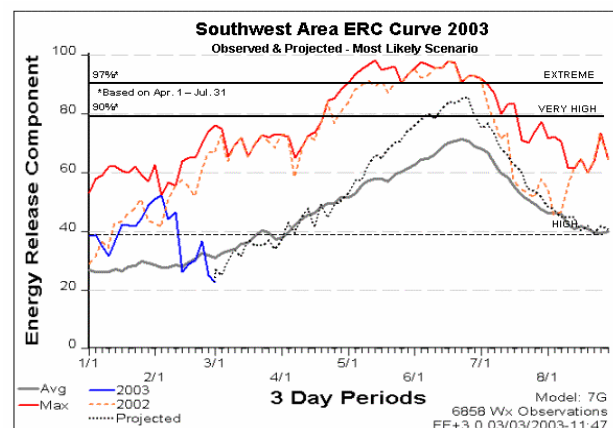
Wildland fire activity during this period occurred primarily in the Southern Area, with the majority of the incidents being short duration human-caused fires. The Eastern Area and California also began experiencing wildfire activity during the winter months.

Spring (March – May)

El Niño weakened considerably during the spring and ended during the summer. March through mid May was much wetter than normal over the West at the lower elevations (excluding the Southwest) but a heat wave and very dry weather prevailed the latter half of May. Western snow packs as of April 1st (the usual date of maximum snow depths) were below normal except along and east of the Continental Divide. In the East, March was generally dry in most areas but April and especially May were much wetter than normal. This was one of the wettest springs on record for the East and Southeast with North and South Carolina, as well as Virginia, reporting their wettest spring ever.



The first *National Seasonal Assessment Workshop* (NSAW) was organized in late February to bring together Geographic Area Predictive Service units, climatologists and fire managers from across the country to produce seasonal fire outlook reports. The Southwest produced a graph that predicted Energy Release Component values for their area from early March through mid-August. They predicted their season would start later and be shorter and less severe than 2002, but fire danger would increase sharply during dry periods, especially during late May and June. This outlook proved to be quite accurate.



By the end of March the Southwest, Rocky Mountain and Alaska Areas were seeing increased initial attack and limited large fire activity. By mid-April, there was moderate large fire activity in both the

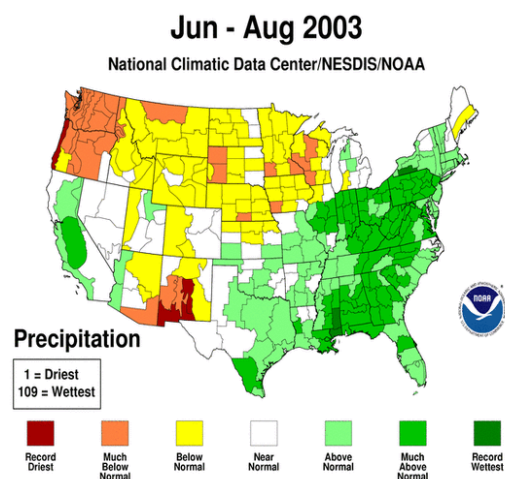
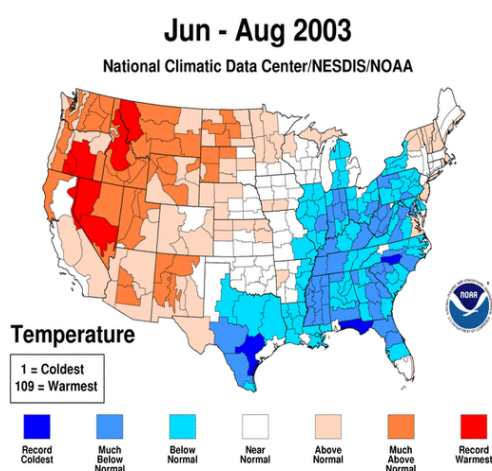
Southern and Eastern Areas. The Caribou Fire in Minnesota consumed 12,600 acres. The Southwest Area was also beginning to see an increase in large fire occurrence. On April 22nd, the lightning caused Boiler fire, a **Wildland Fire Use (WFOU)** incident for resource benefit, began on the Gila National Forest, eventually burning more than 58,000 acres. Mid-May brought very high to extreme fire indices in parts of the Southern, Eastern, and Southwest Areas. Alaska's fire season was also soon to be underway, with 12, 800 acres consumed by May 25th.

By early April more than 500,000 acres had been searched by thousands of personnel as part of the Columbia Space Shuttle Recovery incident. The search of the final 1000+ acres in Utah for space shuttle materials was completed by May 13th, just as the fire suppression workload began to increase.

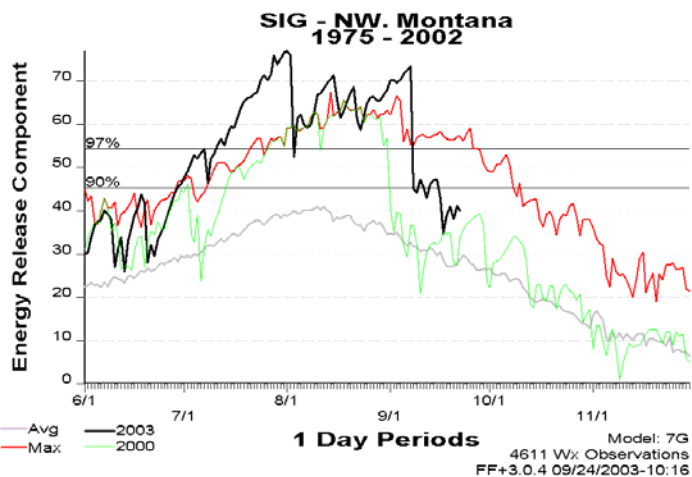
Summer and Fall (June – December)

A strong and persistent ridge of high pressure dominated the summer weather pattern over the West that was centered over the Great Basin instead of its usual position over the Four Corners. This, in turn, led to a deeper than normal low pressure trough downstream over the East. This pattern resulted in one of the hottest and driest summers in the West and one of the coolest, wettest summers in the East (*see images below*).

This was the warmest summer ever in Nevada, second hottest in Oregon and third warmest for Idaho. Several cities set all-time record highs. Boise, Idaho, broke its previous record with 20 days over 100 degrees. Washington saw their driest summer on record with New Mexico reporting their driest July. Meanwhile, areas east of the Mississippi River experienced one of their top ten wettest summers. While no records were set, several states reported their second or third wettest summers ever. As of August 31st, the Southern Area had burned only 34% of their 10-year average acres.



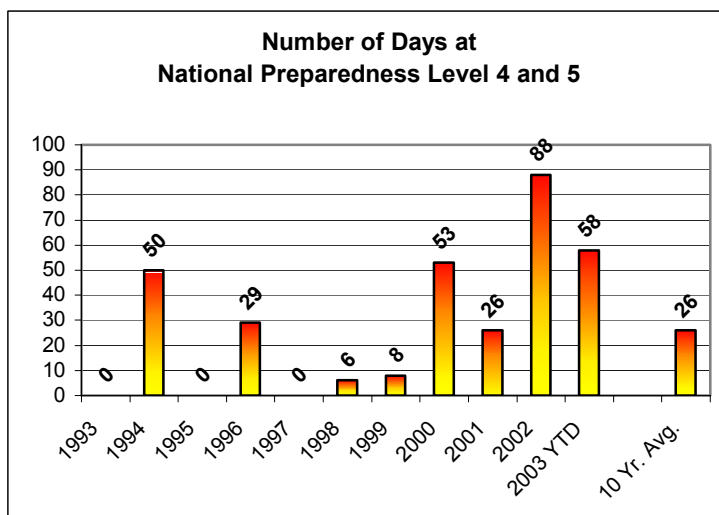
Fuels and fire danger indices were climbing rapidly by early July across many areas in the interior West. The following image depicts the **Energy Release Component** (ERC) trend line for northwest Montana during the 2003 season and is representative of many areas across Idaho, northern Washington, central Oregon and portions of the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain Areas. By mid-July ERC values and other fire danger indices were exceeding previous historic maximum levels and remained above critical threshold values until early September.



Throughout the period, the Pacific Northwest Area experienced moderate to heavy initial attack activity with long duration large fires reported in north and central Washington and central Oregon. The Southwest Area experienced unseasonable heavy initial attack activity well into late July, and large fire activity through the end of August.

Sustained lightning activity beginning in late July and extending through mid-August produced heavy initial attack and large fire activity in the Northwest, Eastern Great Basin and Northern Rockies Areas. These lightning storms that swept across much of the interior west resulted in a very significant number of large fires, especially in the Northern Rockies Area. Fortunately, other summer thunderstorms were usually accompanied with enough moisture to limit large numbers of ignitions.

This lightning activity resulted in a dramatic increase of large fires and a move to National Preparedness Level 4 on July 20th. On July 23rd, the National Preparedness Level (PL) was increased to Preparedness Level 5 and, except for 6 days of PL 4 in August, remained there through September 14. National Preparedness Level 4 remained in effect for only one day, dropping to Preparedness Level 3 on September 16th. As of September 26th, there had been 58 days in 2003 when the National Preparedness Level was either 4 or 5, compared to a 10-year average of 26 days for the period from 1993-2002 (see graph at right).



The sustained lightning events from late July through mid-August produced the highest demand for resource mobilization in 2003 and required a significant commitment of National Resources. In mid-August, the Northern Rockies reported over 50 large fires on the IMSR and up to 24 Incident Management Teams were assigned in the Area concurrently. In addition, between July 28th and mid-September, five Area Command Teams were assigned to the Northern Rockies Area.

Due to the extent of national large fire activity in August, **Task Force Steel Dragon** (US Army 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment) from Fort Hood, TX were deployed to the Northern Rockies Area assisting fire suppression efforts in western Montana from August 24th through September 13th. Through established International Arrangement, 44 Australians and 10 New Zealanders were mobilized to the United States on August 27th and departed on September 15th. These overhead resources were also deployed to western Montana, filling critical command and operations management positions.

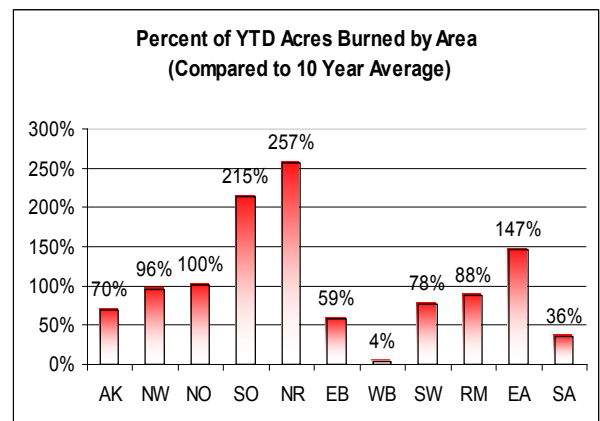
The Rocky Mountain Area reported steady initial attack activity from July to the beginning of September. However, large fires were mainly limited to the western slope of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, the mountains of north-central Wyoming and western South Dakota burning approximately 55% of normal acres through mid-September. Whenever Alaska was on the verge of increasing activity, a well-timed storm mitigated their conditions to keep fire activity below average.

Fire activity in the Western Great Basin and Southern Areas was well below average for this period. *Oddly, Nevada had burned **only 4%** of their normal acres by the end of August with less than twenty large fires reported.* This was due to less than expected fine fuel loads and interspersed wet thunderstorms across the state. The Southern Area reported modest large fire activity in Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana during July, August and into the beginning of September, and had only burned 33% of their average acres as of mid-September. In addition, recovery efforts for Hurricane Isabel required a modest commitment of resources during September in Virginia and North Carolina. The Southern California Area reported moderate to heavy initial attack activity and steady large fire occurrence in July and August. Aggressive initial attack limited large fire occurrence on both state and federal lands to mostly short duration incidents. Numerous fires on federal lands were placed in Wildland Fire Use status in August, including those on National Park lands as well as the Sequoia, Inyo and Stanislaus National Forests. Southern California had burned only 22% of their 10-year average acres at the end of September; however a Santa Ana wind event exacerbated several late October human-caused fires to eventually consume in excess of 700,000 acres bringing the Area to 215% of their 10-year average acres by the end of October. Resource mobilization to southern California in support of this late season conflagration included six Type 1 Incident Management Teams, one National Area Command Team, some 800 overhead resources, 200 engines, 60 aircraft and 40 crews.

For September, the West was generally warmer and drier than normal. The exception was cooler than usual weather from Colorado and Wyoming eastward to the Mississippi River. Wetter than normal conditions persisted over most of the Eastern States. The Alaskan interior was cooler than normal with near normal precipitation.

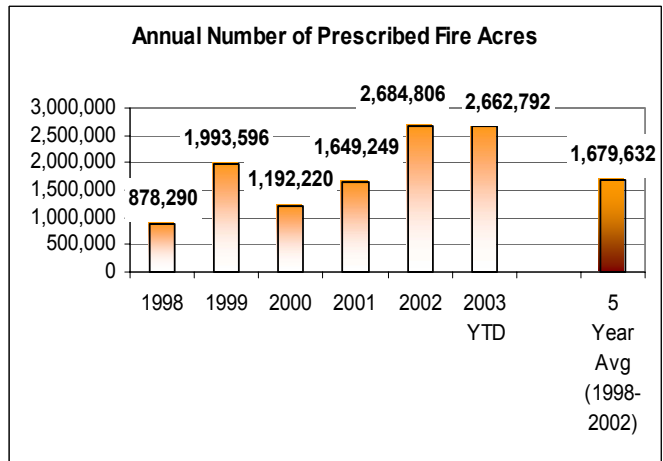
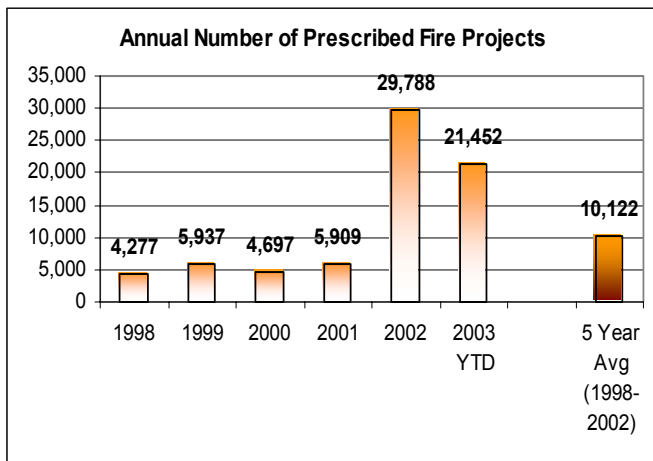
Lightning events in early September significantly increased fire activity in northern California and the Northwest producing numerous large fires pre-dominantly on the Mendocino National Forest, the Coastal Range, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and in central Washington.

Fire activity peaked during mid-August to early September. Nationally, as of the end of October we had only incurred 76% of our average number of fires burning 88% of normal acres (*based on 10-Year data reported to NICC for all agencies*). Only the Northern Rockies, Southern California and Eastern Areas have exceeded their 10-year average acres burned (*257%, 215% and 147% respectively*). The majority of the acres burned (38%) were primarily on U.S. Forest Service lands. This chart shows the percent of acres burned by October 31st by geographic area.



Following the late October fire siege in southern California, activity moderated nationally, reducing demands for suppression resources to their lowest point during the year.

In the midst of a busy season agencies successfully managed a record number of Wildland Fire Use acres and were well on their way to accomplishing a record number of prescribed fire acres by the end of the calendar year. The graphs below show these noteworthy accomplishments as of the first of November 2003.



Throughout the season periodic assessments were made, which consistently pointed out the potential for significant large fire activity in the Northern Rockies, Eastern Area and portions of the Rocky Mountains, Northwest, Great Basin, Southwest and California. The following image shows the large fires, as reported on the National Incident Management Situation Report (IMSR), through October 31st.

