



Minnesota Incident Command System

Annual Report 2020



Minnesota Incident Command System

MNICS Mission:

To provide coordination, education and implementation of the Incident Command System in Minnesota and support fire and all-risk incidents in the nation.

MNICS Goals:

- Provide timely, safe, and cost-effective mobilization and demobilization of resources under the closest forces concept.
- Collect and disseminate intelligence data within specified local and national time frames.
- Assess the capabilities within Minnesota to respond to critical emergency situations.

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Message from the Chair



As unpredictable as 2020 turned out to be, MNICS agencies proved that we continue to be fully adaptable to the challenges we face. We started the year out by sending two federal employees from the US Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs to support Australia's incredible bush fire needs. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in late winter continues to challenge all MNICS agencies' efforts to keep staff healthy and safe while working to keep operations running. During this challenging time, the resiliency of all staff, along with virtual camaraderie and ingenuity from all of the MNICS partnerships, allows us to carry through.

Compared to 2019, the year was anything but slow. Learning to do our jobs from home or adapting our traditional office procedures for social distancing, we remained committed to emergency response and wildland fire. The effort you put forth in quickly adjusting processes, modifying a facility, and empowering employees to continue accomplishing great work is remarkable.

The decision to cancel the Minnesota Wildfire Academy and move many important meetings and training sessions to alternate, often virtual, formats were necessary and not made lightly. These important decisions helped ensure that our employees' and partners' health and safety remained a top priority. While this alternate safety path continues to be the best option for the foreseeable future, we are all looking forward to the day we can return to our offices, meetings, trainings, and assignments working together in person again.

Despite the modifications to our normal routine, MNICS filled out three Type 3 Incident Management Teams supported by all MNICS partnering agency employees. The Task Force recognizes the commitment of all who supported these teams, standing ready throughout the summer and fall as abnormally dry conditions hung on in pockets around the state.

The Task Force also recognizes the flexibility and willingness of all who stepped up and supported the significant needs out west at the National Preparedness Level 5. Many task books within MNICS agencies were initiated, and many others were completed this year due to your efforts.

On behalf of the MNICS Task Force, thank you for all that you do. We look forward to another rewarding (and hopefully less unpredictable) year ahead.

Chase Marshall (U.S. Forest Service)
MNICS 2020 Task Force Chair

MNCC Intelligence



Fire Weather

The 2019 fire season concluded with wet fall conditions that transitioned into snow late in November. A heavy snowpack formed in December and January, which preceded a snow drought covering most of Minnesota by the end of January persisting through February. The cold start to spring mixed with the heavy remaining snowpack in the north limited Minnesota's early spring wildfire activity. Late spring conditions – dry conditions with minimal precipitation – provided favorable fire weather conditions over the northern half of the state. The dry pattern lingered into summer, eventually leading to abnormally dry to drought conditions in the northeast, central, and west-central Minnesota.

Precipitation returned in mid-July. Most of the state received well above average rainfall in August, though some limited drought remained in the northeast and far west-central regions of the state.

Minnesota Wildfires

On November 5, 2020 MNICS agencies reported 1,308 wildfires in calendar year 2020 totaling 7,689 acres; of those:

- BIA = 371 fires / 453 acres
- USFS = 107 fires / 120 acres
- FWS = 21 fires / 2,913 acres
- NPS = 6 fires / 0.5 acre
- DNR = 837 fires / 4,209 acres

Prescribed Burning

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns, most of the MNICS agencies made the decision to postpone spring prescribed burning, this includes Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) decision to postpone all prescribed burning on agency administered land through 2020.

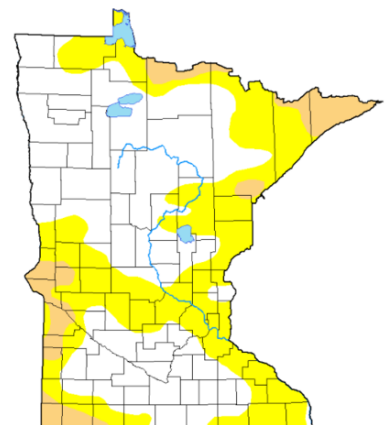
Drought Classification

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)

- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

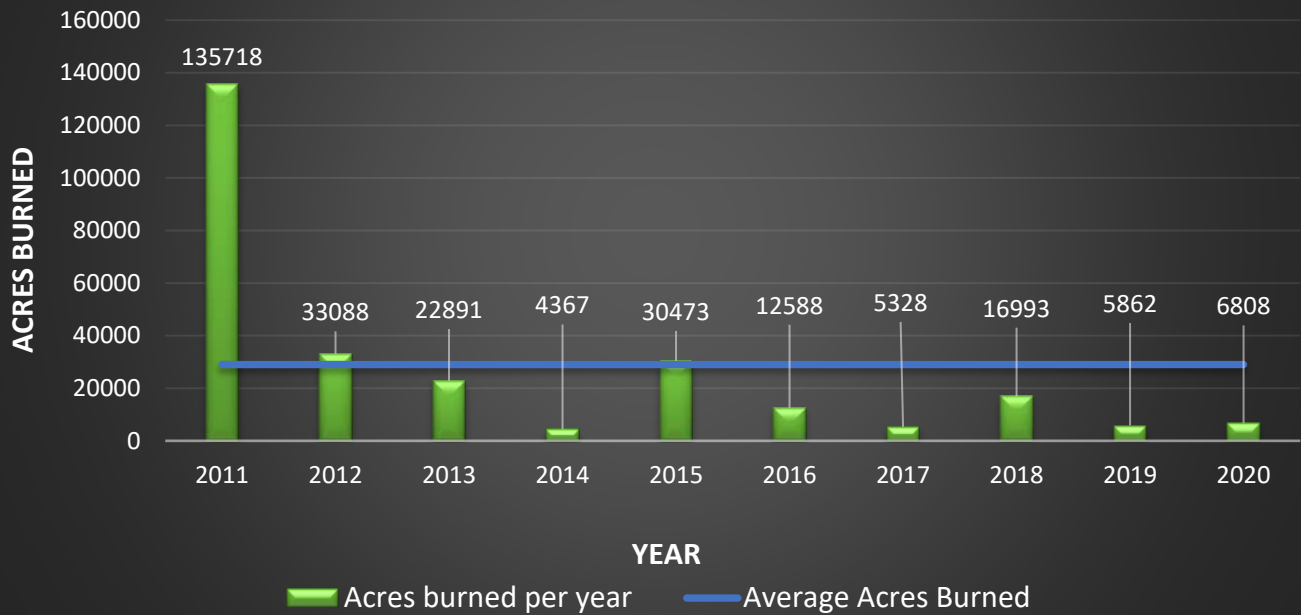


September 24, 2019

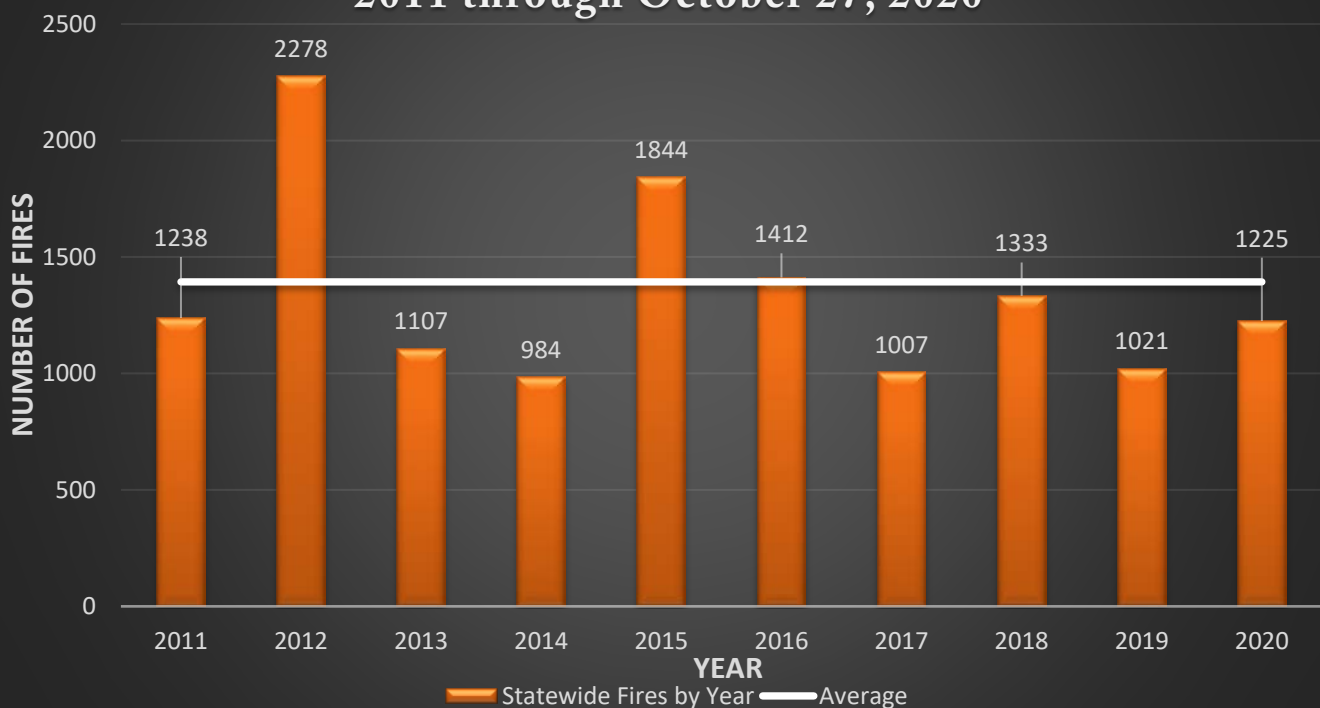


September 29, 2020

MNICS Acres burned by Calendar Year 2011 through October 27, 2020



MNICS Wildfires by Year from 2011 through October 27, 2020



National Weather Service



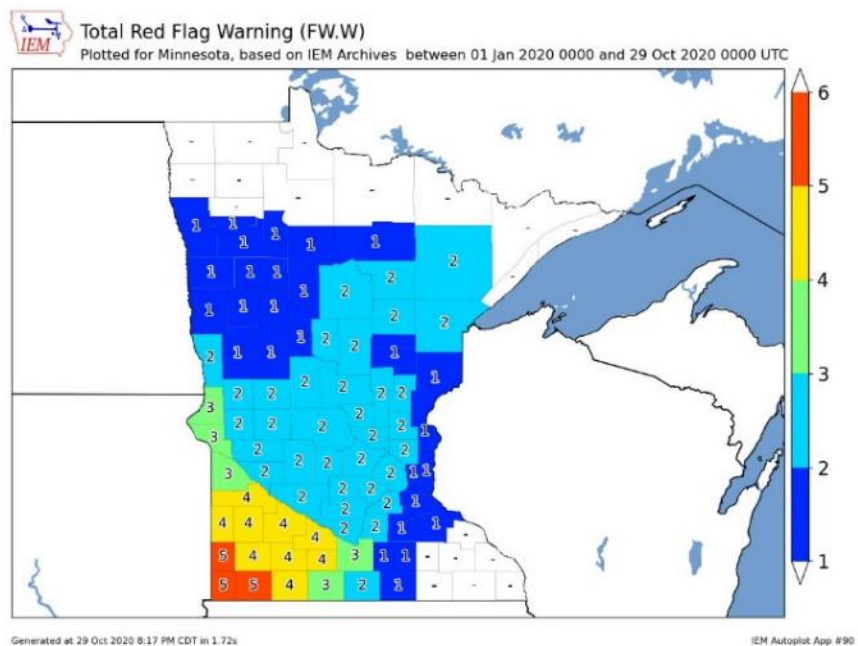
Overall, the year 2020 has been drier than normal across much of Minnesota, with temperatures hovering right around average across the state.

Winter of 2019-2020 was generally around average for temperatures, with the eastern portions seeing temperatures between one to two degrees above average. It was a very wet and snowy season overall, particularly across the northern half of the state. Two significant winter storms bookended the Thanksgiving holiday, with a post-Thanksgiving winter storm dropping nearly 21 inches of snow on Duluth in a 24 hour period at the end of November.

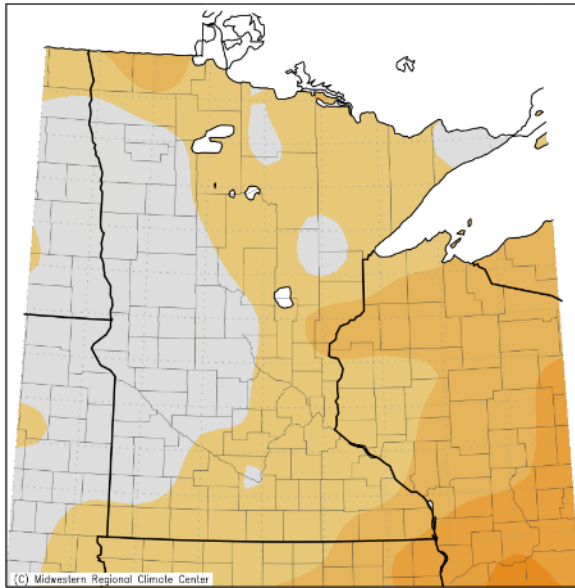
There was a large shift in the weather pattern that yielded a much drier spring season, especially across the northwestern two-thirds of the state. Some areas saw nearly 25 to 50 percent of their average precipitation from March through May. Temperatures generally remained seasonal across much of the state, except for the northwestern corner, where temperatures were as much as three to four degrees cooler than average around Grand Forks, ND and Fargo, ND.

Given the precipitation amounts were well below average during the spring, this led to a more active fire weather season, with an increase in the number of Red Flag Warnings issued compared to the previous year. Much of the state was under at least one or two Red Flag Warnings, with even more issued along and south of the Minnesota River in the southwestern part of the state. The bulk of the Red Flag Warnings were issued in mid- to late-April and into early May.

The summer saw some relief from the very dry spring, with precipitation amounts well above seasonal averages, particularly over the northwestern portions of the state. The summer was also a warm one, with most locations seeing temperatures 1 to 3 degrees above average. The fall season has seen a return to very dry conditions, with most of the state well below average for precipitation amounts. Temperatures have been well below average, as well.

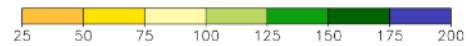
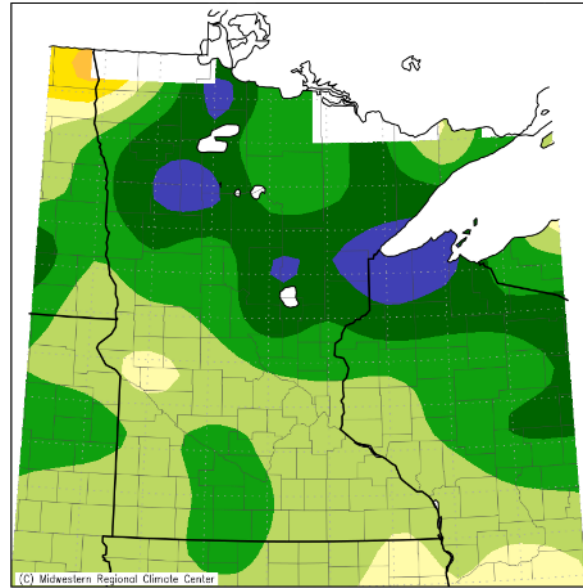


Average Temperature (°F): Departure from Mean
December 1, 2019 to February 29, 2020



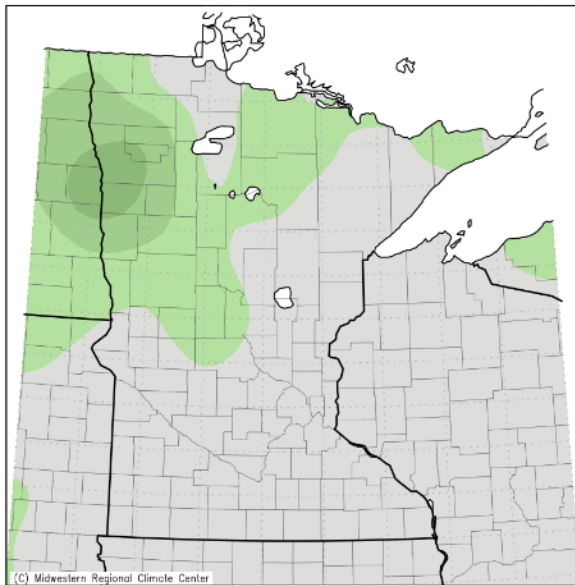
Midwestern Regional Climate Center
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Accumulated Precipitation: Percent of Mean
December 1, 2019 to February 29, 2020



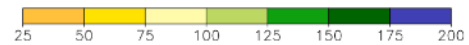
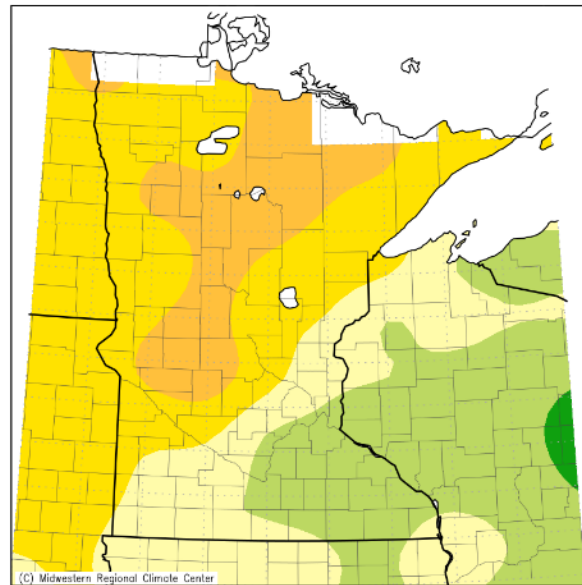
Midwestern Regional Climate Center
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Average Temperature (°F): Departure from Mean
March 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020



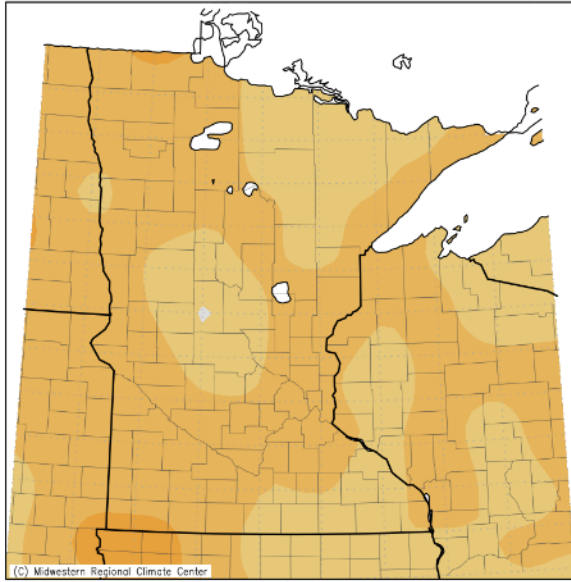
Midwestern Regional Climate Center
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Accumulated Precipitation: Percent of Mean
March 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020



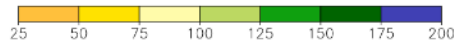
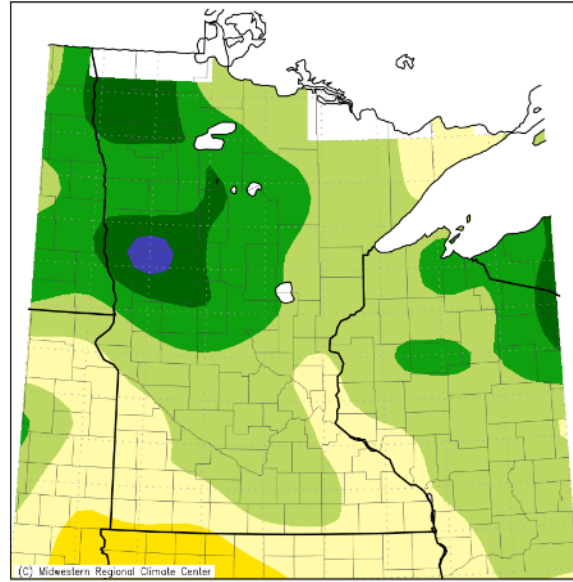
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Average Temperature (°F): Departure from Mean
June 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020



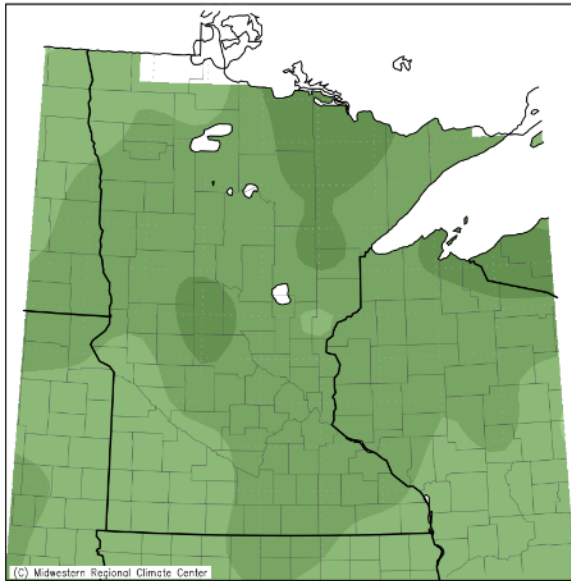
Midwestern Regional Climate Center
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Accumulated Precipitation: Percent of Mean
June 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020



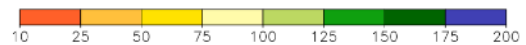
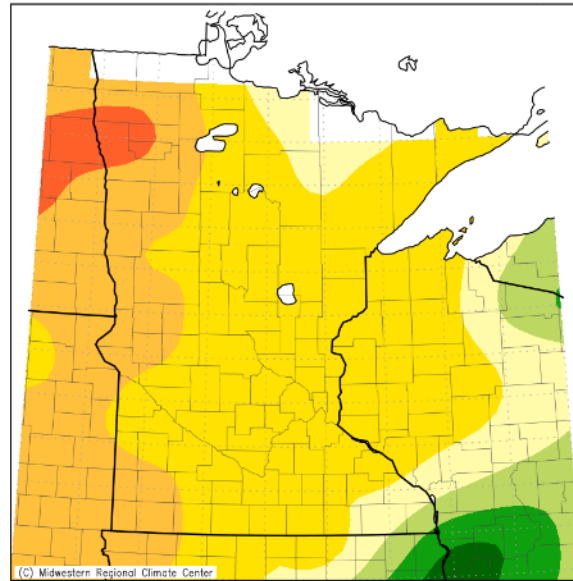
Midwestern Regional Climate Center
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Average Temperature (°F): Departure from Mean
September 1, 2020 to November 1, 2020



Midwestern Regional Climate Center
cli-MATE: MRCC Application Tools Environment
Generated at: 11/3/2020 9:35:46 AM CST

Accumulated Precipitation: Percent of Mean
September 1, 2020 to November 1, 2020



Midwestern Regional Climate Center
cli-MATE: MRCC Application Tools Environment
Generated at: 11/3/2020 9:34:46 AM CST

MNCC

Minnesota Interagency Coordination Center

Fire response in Minnesota throughout the 2020 spring wildfire season resulted in average spring wildfire activity. This was the second year MNICS rostered three Type 3 Incident Management Teams (IMT) for the spring and fall wildfire seasons. MNICS partner agencies contributed to filling the rosters for all three teams and supporting the Eastern Area Type 2 IMT rosters. Due to no large fire incidents within the state, neither the MNICS Type 3 IMTs nor the Eastern Area Type 2 IMTs were called upon for in-state wildfire response.

COVID-19 presented many challenges to individual agencies from a cooperative fire response perspective. Working together, MNICS agencies adopted a *module of one* concept. These small teams of personnel, who consistently worked together, were deployed for fire response within each agency. The sharing of these agencies' *module of one* resources across the state worked out well. We were successful in keeping fires small and providing protection for firefighters against COVID-19.

Mike Mackey, USFS, accepted the MNCC Coordinator position.

Out-of-state mobilizations (Oct 1, 2019 – Sept 30, 2020)

The 2020 wildfire season has been a record setting year for wildfires across the west. MINCS agencies out-state efforts lead to the mobilization of over 700 resource orders with agency personnel, modules, engines, and aviation assets to 13 states.

Resources	MN DNR	USFS	FWS	BIA/Tribal	NPS	MNICS Total
Crews	14	13	2	7	2	38
Rigs in support of crew mobilizations * Not included in personnel totals	7	11	4	1	-	23
Engines	11	21	15	13	-	60
Aviation	8	2	-	-	1	11
Single Resources	180	251	57	85	2	575



MNCC Dispatch

MNCC Aviation Dispatch

Early in the spring season, the Aviation Desk implemented COVID-19 mitigation changes to ensure continuity of operations to meet fire and aviation radio coverage. Temporary trailers were set up at MIFC to provide social distancing between dispatchers and to ensure continuity of operations in the event of a COVID-19 exposure or illness. The separation redesign continued the entire fire season. Eventually, as outside temperatures began to drop, the plan shifted, and alternative office space inside the MIFC building was setup for aviation dispatchers.

Not only were dispatchers separated into modules, aircraft and aviation personnel were also setup in strategic locations throughout the state that allowed for better social distancing while ensuring proper coverage.

Our success is attributed to many people. We express our gratitude to:

Our local and out-of-state dispatchers, who remained flexible this season and offered staffing assistance when needed at the Aviation Desk

The staff who helped in planning out and moving our staff to improved social distancing facilities

The Tanker Base personnel who jumped in and offered assistance when needed

MNCC Logistics Dispatch

This year we said goodbye to our old dispatch software system, Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS), and said hello to Interagency Resource Ordering Capability (IROC). The transition took place in early March. It had a rough beginning, but developers and SME's worked behind the scenes installing fixes and increased functionality

throughout the season. We are looking forward to next year to see what a fully developed program looks like. Overall, it has been a huge improvement over the old system.

A big thank you goes out to all our supporting dispatchers in logistics, aircraft, and operations for helping out however you were able this season. We appreciate your dedication and skill.

MNCC Operations Dispatch

The MN Coordination Center has been striving to develop a truly interagency functionality, which included initial attack dispatching for Grand Portage Forestry, Bois Forte Forestry, and Two Harbors DNR.

Dispatchers from the MNCC initial attack function were sent to support unit operations in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Nevada. We also welcomed detailers from partner agencies in Minnesota and a long-term detailer from Wyoming, who was integral to our continued coverage over the unusual summer season.

We also received operational support from Mike Mackey while detailed in the early spring as an interim Center Manager at MNCC. Additionally, we received operational support from Eric Wiersma during his role in the 120-day detail, as our interim Center Manager during the summer months. Eric is from the Mark Twain National Forest and the Missouri Interagency Coordination Center, where he serves as the permanent Assistant Center Manager. Dave Jalonen, our Radio Technician, also played a huge role in the success of operations, continually helping to keep our communications equipment serviceable in spite of many hurdles this past season.

Thank you to everyone who helped out in the office and supported our program this year.

International Assignment to Australia



The skills that prepare MNICS wildland firefighters are often called upon to support assignments in Minnesota and throughout the United States. Less common is for these skills and preparedness to lead to an international assignment.

At the end of 2019 an international partner – Australia – was in dire need as it faced a significant and catastrophic bushfires. Through international agreements, the USDA Forest Service and Department of Interior agencies sent qualified agency personnel, including two wildland firefighters from Minnesota, to help support the battle against the largest wildfires in Australia's history. Marty Cassellius, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Mike Crook, Superior National Forest share their Australian wildland fire experiences.

Mike Crook, Superior National Forest

Australia Detail December 19th, 2019-January 26th, 2020

I went to Australia to help with the extreme wildfire situation as a Fire Behavior Analyst (FBAN). I spent my first week in Sydney working with the Australian Rural Fire Service along with two US and three Canadian FBANs. We were trained in the Australian system of fire behavior forecasting and calculations. After I finished the training, I was assigned to the Gospers Mountain Fire about 40 miles northwest of Sydney. The fire was over a million acres in size and had exhibited extreme fire behavior. There were days fire growth was well over 100,000 acres and spotting distances of almost ten miles. The temperature exceeded 120F with humidity at two percent and negative dew points while I was on this fire.

I spent a week with the IMT on this fire to cover for the FBAN that was assigned and needed time off. I was then sent to southern New South Wales to work on the Dunn's Road Fire in Tumut, Australia. This fire was nearly two million acres when it combined with the surrounding large fires.

The temperatures were in the 100's daily with single digit humidity. I experienced many days of extreme events on this assignment. The more memorable event was a spot fire out 19 miles from the head of the main fire. On this day, the fire saw growth that exceed 150,000 acres. The Dunn's Road Fire was an extremely challenging assignment with significant values at risk and a lot of decision making based on



forecasting and calculations on fire behavior assigned to me.

I really enjoyed my experience in Australia. I have been on assignments in Portugal and Ethiopia prior to this, but this experience was the most challenging in terms of fire behavior. I had to recalibrate to a different system for calculating and forecasting, including the use of the metric system and weather patterns in the southern hemisphere.

The incident command structure was similar, but with enough differences that it was difficult at times. The firefighting structure is heavily dependent on a national volunteer system, which strained the ability to be organized. The Australians involved are very resilient, and they fight fire aggressively, similar to the United State.

The terrain was similar to how things look in southern California, but the fuels were mainly dry/wet eucalyptus trees, which have evolved to depend on fire at what we see as stand-replacing. The trees actually regenerate new limbs and sprout new leaves and bark after a fire. The bark is easily lofted and spreads fire great distances.

One experience that really stands out from this assignment occurred on my first shift on Dunn's Road Fire. I arrived in late afternoon and the fire was making a huge push. It was threatening several small

towns. I was asked (before I was even set up) if the fire would reach these values and what the timeframes for growth were so that evacuations could be planned. I had to work on "quick and dirty" calculating. The numbers did not seem real to me. Based off the data I was getting, the fire was expected to travel 22 miles in about three hours and approach our ICP by late evening having spread through several towns. I felt very hesitant to give that information to the team until I could do more validating, but they were pressing me hard so they could start making plans. I briefed the IC, Plans and Operations Section Chiefs thinking they might be frustrated with such extreme predictions, but they all listened carefully, and immediately began planning for mass evacuations without hesitation. The fire did indeed make the run I predicted. With robust firefighting, each town was saved. By late evening the situation moderated and the town of Tumut was out of danger for the time being.

Looking back on my experience, I would gladly accept another assignment to Australia. The experience was challenging, but I enjoyed my time there. I worked hard to be a productive member of each of the IMT's I worked with and it paid off, and I felt that my role was invaluable to those I worked with. I made many friends with Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and fellow Americans.

For others who may consider international assignments in the future, I think it is important to keep an open mind about how other countries fight fires. A lot of the systems they had in place were like ours, but there were enough differences that it took some time to adjust. Before questioning things, take the time build your understanding from their viewpoint. Also, in this day and age, we are hard pressed to work without our digital devices. Make sure to have cellphone's with international plans set up before leaving the U.S. I scrambled with that before I left, but it paid off in the end. This wasn't as important several years ago, but the complexity of the situation calls for the need for modern technology to communicate anymore.

Martin Cassellius, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Australia Detail January 1, 2020 – January 29, 2020



I was ordered as a Division Supervisor on a team of 40 American firefighters to travel to Australia and provide on-the-ground firefighting assistance. This was the first group of the year to be deployed as on-the-ground firefighters, all previous deployments were overhead and aviation resources. Although we were expected to provide on-the-ground firefighting assistance, all members of our group were qualified as Task Force Leaders or higher with a few Operation Section Chiefs in the group.

We arrived in Brisbane, Queensland on January 1st. Due to crossing the International Date Line, we missed New Year's Eve completely. It was quickly determined that we were needed in Victoria and flew to Melbourne the following day. While in Melbourne, we received detailed briefings on unique hazards, fuel types and fire behavior. We were also trained in the use of a "Country Fire Authority" tanker, which is the equivalent of a Type 4 Engine. We were then split into two strike teams of five tankers with four Americans in each tanker and an Australian driver.

We were assigned to structure protection on the fires in southeast Victoria. We spent two weeks in that capacity until being shifted to Ultra-light engines for greater maneuverability. The Ultra-light engines allowed us to get out into the Bush and be more proactive with burnout operations.

My fondest memories of the detail is the hospitality of the Australian people. They by far exceeded my expectations for gratitude and grace. I wouldn't hesitate to accept another foreign assignment and would advise anyone taking these assignments to remain as flexible as possible. We expected to be in a leadership role on this assignment and many chaffed at being part of an engine crew. My attitude for any fire assignment is to assist the requesting unit in any way that is needed and I am capable.



Dispatching Amid IROC and COVID

A new way to operate

No doubt, 2020 will be remembered for the many twists and turns forcing the Minnesota Incident Command System (MNICS) agencies to rethink and strategize how to move personnel during a global pandemic safely. With the onset of COVID-19, another change was also taking place as wildland fire agencies nationwide transitioned from the Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS) to the Interagency Resource Ordering Capability (IROC) program.

While ROSS had become synonymous with storing our qualifications and producing our assignment resource orders, IROC provides the same capabilities and more. And unless you were highly involved with the changeover to the IROC system or encountered issues with records not successfully transferring, you may not have even noticed any change this year. But for our MNICS dispatchers and dispatchers throughout the nation, the release of IROC is a welcomed game-changer.

Why the change?

ROSS had serviced resource orders for almost 20 years. It rolled out in 2002, and despite a few functionality changes, the forms-based system was cumbersome. "It became clear that ROSS was nearing the end of its functional lifespan," shared Tasha Woodwick, MNCC Assistant Center Manager for Logistics. "At a national level it was recognized a modern, user-friendly system that could support greater capabilities was needed."

With the ROSS contract nearing its end in 2020, the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) began reaching out to dispatchers across the country as early as 2016. They sought ideas from dispatchers for creating a user-friendly dynamic experience. A national development team was organized and set out to find a program. They worked directly with software developers and settled upon IROC. The program replaced ROSS in early March 2020. It was during this time of release the threat of COVID-19 was also becoming a national concern.

Woodwick recalls that from the first week of release, MNCC Logistics was testing IROC's capabilities with resource order requests. "We mobilized a team to the Twin Cities to support the newly formed DNR COVID-19 Incident Management Team. At the same time, we had federal resources that were requested to work virtually in a national capacity writing national COVID-19 plans," said Woodwick.

IROC Stumbling Blocks

With any rollout of a new process or technology, there are bound to be stumbling blocks. One of the first challenges IROC users experienced on a national scale was the unsuccessful transfer of some records into IROC. The MNCC was not immune from this experience. Not fully aware of what impacts the changes IROC could have on resource ordering, MNCC started preparing for the transition six months before the planned release date, cleaning up records in ROSS.

Soon after the IROC release, MNCC discovered some individual records were held up between the ROSS and IROC transfer. Most notably, the interfacing of IQS - the software that houses the system of record for state agency personnel - was creating a transferring challenge. While developers were aware of IQS concerns, much of the fixes occurred as the issues were discovered. Woodwick explained it was a struggle upfront to get orders for individuals filled because their information wasn't showing up in the system. A group of 12 interagency subject matter experts (SME), serving as a makeshift helpdesk, and IROC software developers continued to identify shortfalls behind the scenes. They developed software fixes to resolve the issues.



MNCC dispatchers were prepared and ready to handle stumbling blocks and implemented back-up protocols when data transfers popped up to keep resources moving. MNCC Logistics dispatchers worked directly with Minnesota DNR's Todd Manley, Training Coordinator, Diane Nygaard, Intelligence Specialist, Terry Flatley, Training Office Manager, and the IQS and IROC SMEs to implement the necessary fixes to upload IQS records. The fixes worked, and MNCC is now fully operational in the IROC system for all MNICS federal and state Agencies.

IROC's First Season

The release of IROC arrived as resource ordering activity was picking up throughout Minnesota. MNICS agencies were beginning to support the Southern GACC and had sent resources to help with prescribed burning. MINCS agencies were also shifting into spring wildfire season.

Toward the end of March, it was apparent COVID-19 was not going away. MNICS agencies turned to precautionary safety measures, with telework becoming the norm. Under guidance from the MNICS Task Force, MNICS agencies developed COVID-19 best management practices for emergency response. MNICS agencies suspended prescribed burning, and spring wildfire season picked up.

By the end of May, the development team and software programmers worked through many of IROC's glitches. Agencies were also fully implementing COVID-19 mitigation checklists as requests for resources continued to filter in. MNCC aviation dispatchers used IROC for many aviation assets supporting the late spring wildfire season. Out-of-state federal modules came in from Wisconsin and Michigan to support the national forests, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the tribes.

Woodwick noted that while there was a fair number of out-of-state resources in Minnesota at this time, the numbers were lower than in similar years.

As Minnesota transitioned out of the spring wildfire season, western mobilizations continued to increase. By July, all agencies were implementing their COVID-19 checklists to assure requesting units were prepared for MNICS resources while on out-of-state assignment.

For the first time, requesting agencies could upload their support documentation with their resource order request. While the duty officers for each MNICS agency was responsible for completing their agency's checklist, MNCC dispatchers helped facilitate the transfer of information duty officers needed to check all of the boxes before releasing their staff to out-of-state assignments.

In mid-August, IROC's functionality was tested at a national preparedness level 5 (PL-5), which remained in effect for 47 days. Nationally, dispatchers worked tirelessly in IROC to locate and fill resource orders throughout the nation.

Continuous improvements

"I feel the transition into IROC has been a success, and the program has great potential," shared Woodwick. "It is by far a superior user-experience to ROSS." Despite the program not running at full functionality, fixes planned for the winter will bring many improvements, including the formation of an IROC helpdesk. Woodwick anticipates by the 2021 fire season, IROC will be running at nearly 100 percent functionality.

The changes that have occurred in 2020 had an impact on MNICS. Thanks to all involved with the transition to IROC and COVID-19 mitigation planning. Our MNICS resources continue meeting local and national needs.

MNICS Type 3 IMT Simulations

Preparing for Minnesota's wildland fire seasons and all-hazard emergency response is a continuous practice. Training and development occur at every level, from individuals working on task-books to agencies preparing for the next incident response on federal, state, and tribal lands.

In early March 2020, the MNICS Type 3 Incident Management Teams (IMT) met (pre-COVID-19 response) for their pre-season meeting. Agency administrators also joined the IMTs to conduct delegation of authority and transfer of command simulations with the teams. The simulations involved rapidly-evolving wildland fires, impacting different Minnesota landscapes and public concerns.

Agency administrators from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the White Earth Nation, the Minnesota DNR, and the Superior National Forest developed scenarios that an IMT would likely be called in to support. The first scenario was based on an advancing wildfire close to a Tribal community and high use lake access area on the White Earth Reservation. The second scenario involved MN DNR's response to a large fire on private property that had breached the Canadian Border. The third scenario involved the U.S. Forest Service response to an escaped fire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Each team participated in a traditional in-briefing with the scenario agency administrator. Command and general staff asked their scenario agency administrators questions to prepare for the next operational shift. While each IMT conducted their simulation, the other MNICS IMTs observed and participated in an After Action Review (AAR) upon completing each scenario.

The simulations and AARs allowed teams to experience an in-briefing and build upon team camaraderie while sharing ideas between teams. Though 2020 did not result in a wildfire response transfer of command, the IMTs recognized each simulation's value.



MNICS Team B, led by incident Command Nick Petrack, briefs with MN DNR Agency Administrator Adam Munstenteiger during the simulated Delegation of Authority and Transfer of Command.

SNS/RSS Mobilization

On March 13, 2020 a Type 3 Incident Management team was rostered for the activation of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)/ Receipt, Store, and Stage (RSS). Originally team members were only state employees. The National Emergency Presidential Declaration signed on March 17 allowed federal agency employees to become available for support, and a multiagency MNICS team was rostered.

After maintaining a very fluid team roster for two weeks, the request came in on March 22. The team mobilized to a warehouse location in the Twin Cities metro area March 23, arriving at the site in the morning.

A shipment arrived on March 22 with PPE from the SNS and PPE that had been stored at a nearby military facility. Initially, the unloaded material was organized by the warehouse manager, Charley Rogers. His effort greatly facilitated the team in achieving the Delegation of Authority objectives:

- Maintain personnel safety throughout the SNS response.
- Activate the designated RSS site.
- Establish good communication, using a Liaison Officer (t), with the RSS site owners, participating law enforcement agencies, federal liaisons, and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).
- Provide security within the RSS site in conjunction with law enforcement agencies.
- Follow CDC guidance and work with MDH to develop and train SNS teams to set up, receive SNS supplies, store, manage inventory, and package and prepare supplies for shipping.
- Report to the MDH Department Operation Center or State EOC if requested.
- Coordinate return of any unused assets to CDC and demobilization of the RSS site and personnel.
- Assist in providing any required documentation for insuring inventory control and chain-of-custody for supplies maintained.

By the end of the first operational period, the team inventoried all boxed SNS items and 75 percent of the bulk military items. The site was mapped to facilitate distributing material orders. Coordination and notification also occurred with local fire and police departments.

At the end of March 24, inventory was complete, a distribution plan was in place, and other delegation objectives were accomplished. The majority of the team was demobilized that evening or the following morning. A portion of the team's command and general staff (IC, IC(t), Plans, Operations, ITTS, and Finance) remained to support the next stage of distribution and other support as needed.

On March 26, a National Guard warehouse manager was assigned to the facility. Friday, March 27, the rest of the team demobilized.

Lessons Learned:

- Prior RSS/SNS simulation exercises with MDH were extremely valuable to this assignment.
- A warehouse manager present at the unloading of material saved at least a day in achieving the objectives.
- All team members were told and complied when asked with the expectation to help in any capacity needed, often outside the normal duties of their IMT red card position.
- It took time and effort away from the ICP and Warehouse to track down and make all of the contacts with local police, fire, and warehouse owners. Dedicating a LOFR for this task was needed.
- Despite being in the metro location, ITTS support was needed and essential in addressing connectivity issues and timely meeting objectives.
- Logistics found that ordering and receiving supplies, along with feeding and housing staff during a pandemic can be a changing and challenging endeavor.
- A finance person able to pay bills on the spot was very helpful in leaving the incident with a clean finance package.

Aviation Report



2020 Minnesota MNICS Aviation Program Summary

Minnesota Aviation Program

- Spring 2020 – October 15, 2020
- MNCC Aviation desk received 180 aircraft requests for 104 fires
- Aircraft Contracted / Utilized / Shared in Minnesota:

	Helicopters				SEATs		Fire Boss		Fixed Wing			
	T3 Excl Use	T3 CWN	T2 CWN	T1 EU	Excl Use	CWN	Excl Use	CWN	LAT	CL- 415	ATGS	Lt F/W
BIA	1				1		1				2	
DNR/ USFS		1						1				
MN DNR Forestry	8	1			2		4				5	16
USFS	1	1	1	2				1	1	2	2	5
State Patrol	X											
MN DNR Enforcement		1										3
MNARNG				X								

X = no requests

Wildfire Academy

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the 2020 Minnesota Wildfire Academy was canceled.



Aviation Report



Hosted MNICS/GLFFC Virtual Meeting

- Clarified a border crossing closure does not hinder emergency response efforts

Accomplished the following DNR helicopter projects

- Aerial Seeding (fall 2020) and Seedling Transport

Accomplished the following USFS Aviation projects

- Stocked fish in 24 lakes for MN DNR Fisheries
- Performed 16 Search and Rescue missions
- Completed 13 Wolf, Moose and Deer Surveys for USGS

Training and Briefings

- Annual Minnesota Aviation Workshop in February at Camp Ripley, included Wisconsin aviation personnel
- ATGS Simulation training, included Manitoba aviation personnel
- Developed and shared "Aircraft Accident Scene Response" at wildfire refreshers

Assistance to Minnesota (Jan 1 – Sept 18, 2020)

- USFS provided (2) Type 1 Helicopters, (1) Type 2 Helicopter, (2) Type 2 Airtankers and (1) Type 1 Airtanker to assist in MN fire response.
- Tennessee and Illinois provided support to the Aviation desk by sending aircraft dispatchers



Aviation Report



Out-State Assistance

- USFS Exclusive Use helicopter mobilized to Oregon for 63 days (7/22 – 9/30) and supported 20 different fires for a total of 95.2 flight hours
- USFS helicopter supported 3 PSD aerial ignition Rx burns and one wildfire on the Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri
- MN DNR Helitack supported a CWN Helicopter assigned to Colorado.
- MN DNR Exclusive Use Helicopter mobilized for 17 days to Oregon.
- MN Exclusive Use Fire Boss FB-204 mobilized for 33 days to South Dakota, Nebraska, Idaho, Washington, Nevada and Utah. (8/24-9/27)
- 53 aviation overhead resources mobilized – including two ATGS trainees – out of state this year to 11 states and supported 38 separate incidents.
 - One ATGS trainee became fully qualified.
- ATGS, HECM and HMGB were the most common requests filled.



Homeland Security and Emergency Management



COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Many of our lives were disrupted in March when Minnesota reported its first confirmed cases of COVID-19. From that moment on, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DPS-HSEM) went into response mode. The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) fully activated on March 15 and will remain that way until the threat of the pandemic no longer exists. The COVID-19 activation is the longest the SEOC has ever seen as HSEM continues to lend support to federal, state and local partner agencies through the COVID-19 response efforts.



Civil Unrest Response

At the end of May and beginning of June, the SEOC worked under a dual activation following the Minneapolis police-involved death of George Floyd and the civil unrest that followed. The SEOC coordinated with the multi-agency command center (MACC) to coordinate and support actions intended to keep people and the community safe. The SEOC and its media room was also the location of many of Governor Tim Walz's news conferences, which regularly updated the public about curfews and emergency response efforts during the incident.



Homeland Security and Emergency Management



EMAC to Oregon

HSEM is accustomed to coordinating Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) requests, but a two-week deployment to Oregon was different. In September, Oregon officials requested ten fire strike teams or task forces from around the country to help with wildfire response efforts. Governor Tim Walz authorized the mission for seven local fire departments across the state. Twenty-nine firefighters and nine fire trucks were assigned to the Slater Fire on the Oregon-California border.

It was the first time Minnesota has ever sent firefighters or apparatus to another state for mutual aid under the modern EMAC. In fact, the last time Minnesota sent municipal fire departments and crew on an out-of-state mission was the Yellowstone National Park wildfires in 1988.

HSEM also coordinated the EMAC deployment of a Minnesota Department of Human Services' employee to Oregon. They served in the state emergency operations center for two weeks, coordinating activities around mass care, health, medical treatment food, water, volunteers, and donations.



State Disaster Declarations

As of October 2020, Gov. Walz has authorized the use of the State Disaster Contingency Account for ten severe weather incidents indicated in the table below. Disaster recovery specialists from HSEM are currently assessing damages from several other events, which may lead to additional state disaster declarations.

Public Outreach

As DPS Commissioner John Harrington shapes DPS to his vision. He has made public outreach a priority across the state, including The public outreach includes increasing multilingual communication through a unique partnership with Twin Cities Public Television's TPT|Now (a public service channel) public health and public safety agencies. The collaboration allows DPS to communicate public safety messages in four languages – English, Hmong, Spanish and Somali.

State Disaster Declarations

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Incident Period	Incident Type	Counties Included in Declaration
July 15-17, 2020	Severe thunderstorms with heavy rain, flooding and damaging winds	Cass, Kittson and Marshall counties
July 6-8, 2020	Severe thunderstorms with damaging winds	Wilkin County
June 23-July 3, 2020	Heavy rains and flooding	Kittson, Le Sueur, Morrison, Nicollet, Renville and Washington counties
June 17, 2020	Severe storms and flooding	Roseau County
June 7-10, 2020	Severe weather and flooding	Kittson County
March 9-May 7, 2020	Spring flooding	Hubbard, Kittson, Marshall, Norman and Polk counties
March 29, 2020	Rain and heavy snow	Morrison County
December 29-31, 2019	Severe winter storm	Renville County
September 20-October 17, 2019	Heavy rains and flooding	Carlton, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall and Roseau counties
October 12, 2019	Severe thunderstorm with heavy rain and hurricane-force winds	Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

State Emergency Operations Center

When disaster strikes, Minnesotans depend on the state and its resources to effectively and efficiently respond and recover. That's why, in January, Gov. Walz recommended \$29.5 million as part of his bonding package to acquire land , design, develop, construct, and equip a new SEOC and HSEM office.

During the COVID-19 activation, the SEOC experienced a burst sewer pipe, had bullets pierce a street-side window, and had a break-in. The location was also not large enough to accommodate the personnel in a socially distanced manner.

After several special sessions, state legislators approved the governor's bonding bill in October, which means the new SEOC project is funded. HSEM Director Joe Kelly and Deputy Director Kevin Reed will now begin efforts to find the right property and work with contractors to design and build the new facility.





Bureau of Indian Affairs



The MNICS partnership is part of the foundation that allows for safe and effective wildland fire operations in Minnesota and throughout the United States. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Tribal Fire Programs of the Minnesota Agency and Red Lake are proud to serve their communities and assist our interagency partners.

Like everybody else, 2020 has brought its share of challenges to the BIA, but through it all the Bureau and Tribes have had an extremely successful year fighting fire in Minnesota and supporting efforts across the country and around the world. The pandemic initially brought a suspension to all prescribed burning activities, but eventually both the Red Lake and White Earth Tribes were granted permission to conduct critical hazardous fuels reduction burns. Initial attack efforts were successful throughout the season, despite having less resources available than normal.

BIA continued exclusive use aircraft contracts for a Fire Boss and SEAT at the Bemidji Interagency Airtanker Base. The Red Lake Helitack crew staffed the BIA exclusive use Type III helicopter in Red Lake and began a new contract for an A-Star that is shared with the BIA Billings, MT helitack module. Some of the Red Lake helitack members were able to boost the Billings program during the season.

Reservation	Wildfires	Acres	Prescribe Fires	Acres
Red Lake	233	265	14	8596
White Earth	86	142	13	400
Fond du Lac	11	35	0	0
Mille Lacs	11	9	0	0
Bois Forte	1	1	0	0
Grand Portage	2	2	0	0
Leech Lake	13	3	0	0
Totals	357	457	27	8996



BIA and Tribal resources mobilized many times during the season. Assignments were taken to New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Most resource mobilizations were in an Engine Module configuration supporting other tribes throughout the West, but the BIA also filled orders for division supervisors, communication techs, air attacks, security specialists, SEAT managers, helitack, medical unit leaders, and a 13-person Suppression Module made up of firefighters from Leech Lake, Shakopee, White Earth, Fond du Lac, Mille Lacs, and Bois Forte that went to South Dakota and Colorado. The BIA Engines supported needs in Southern Pueblo Agency, Pine Ridge Agency, Cheyenne River Agency, and Fort Peck Agency with multiple rotations of firefighters. Multiple engine assignments were also taken to California.

National Park Service



The Border Park Zone consists of seven National Park Service units in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Voyageurs National Park, Grand Portage National Monument, along with the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Isle Royale National Park, and Keewena National Monument make up the Border Park Zone. The North Dakota Park units include Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Fort Union National Monument Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site with a Zone FMO - Rod Skalsky, who is located at Knife River.

As with all agencies experiencing the challenges of working through a global pandemic, 2020 has been a challenge for all of us in the National Park Service. While hiring was limited, we were successful in hiring one seasonal firefighter at Voyageurs National Park. Hopeful that 2021 gets us back on track.

Wildfires

Voyageurs National park reported seven wildfires this summer, five of those fires were human caused along with two lightning strike fires. Minimal acres were burned. The Park received support from the Superior National Forest and a helicopter to suppress the remote lightning strike fires.

Western mobilizations

The border park zone was able to send two firefighters along with a six pack on two separate assignments. The first assignment two NPS firefighters and an agency six pack vehicle joined a *module as one* with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The second assignment two NPS firefighters along with an agency six pack joined a module as one with the MN DNR. Thanks to our partners for taking care of us.

Fuels Reduction Projects

The park was able to work on three hazard fuel reduction projects this year, cutting and piling 75 piles that are planned to be burned this winter. In October, the park was also able to carry out some prescribed burning to treat cattails as part of a wetland reclamation project with fire.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



The year has been full of challenges. The 2020 wildfire season followed an extremely wet fall and snowy winter that rolled right in to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency made the decision in March to suspend all prescribed fire operations. We shifted gears at that time to focus our attention planning for suppression efforts and established our best practices for wildfire suppression during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we moved into the fall wildfire season, all pile burning and blackline operations were approved on a case-by-case basis.

Prescribed fire totaled 11 treatments for 96 acres for all 15 Refuges and Districts in Minnesota. The wildfire season was active, with 39 wildfires for 2,978 acres on FWS property. FWS fire staff assisted our MNICS partners on many other fires throughout the season.

FWS planned to host two fire training sessions in 2020 – S-219 Fire Operations and RX-301 Prescribed Fire Implementation. Both trainings have been postponed, indefinitely. As we transition to smaller class sizes and virtual training experiences, we are looking forward to getting back on track.

FWS missed the interagency blend of the MNICS organization in 2020, and is looking forward to finding opportunities to maximize our partnerships in 2021 as we strategize ways to operate on an interagency level during this pandemic.

A special thanks to MNCC for your efforts mobilizing 109 US Fish and Wildlife resources into the national suppression effort this year.

Personnel Changes

- Ryan Williams joined Minnesota Valley NWR from BLM – Elko, NV
- Zac Doffin joined Fergus Falls WMD as a fire Technician
- Jacob Johnson joined Minnesota Valley NWR as a Fire Technician



USDA Forest Service



Wildfires

The Chippewa National Forest began spring fire season on April 8th. There were a total of 43 fires for under 50 acres. The Up North Fire on the Deer River Ranger District was first fire, and largest for the season. It burned close to 18 acres in grass and timber.

The Superior National Forest's first fire of the season was April 16th. There were 65 fires in total for approximately 71 acres. The largest fire was the Denley Fire which ignited on May 18th, and burned about 20 acres. Beaver 2 and 18BH assisted with suppressing the fire.

Both the Chippewa and Superior National Forests were able to send resources frequently, adjusting and remaining flexible to the ever-changing conditions of the season, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to assist in the national suppression effort

Prescribed Fire

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 there was no prescribed burn action taken on either of Minnesota's National Forests.

Wilderness Crew

This season, MNCC Operations dispatch piloted a program with the Superior National Forest Wilderness Program to assist in the tracking and movement of wilderness rangers in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Wilderness rangers assisted with search and rescue and fire reporting and response this season and dispatch was able to provide weather and location tracking for personnel safety.

USFS Search and Rescue

The Superior National Forest welcomed a new USFS Pilot, Joseph Schoolcraft this summer. The program now maintains two full-time pilots out of the Ely Seaplane base. We assisted with 34 Search and Rescue, Medical Assistance, and Public Assistance incidents in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness at the time of reporting. Our aviation staff was flexible in their approach to providing excellent public assistance in the midst of a pandemic, cooperating with emergency services partners, and still providing for responder safety, always.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



Fire response in Minnesota throughout the 2020 wildfire season resulted in average wildfire activity. As of November 16, 2020, the MN DNR has reported suppression action on 878 wildfires for 5,171 acres burned.

There were two large fires on land managed by State DNR. The Knoll Fire in Morrison County burned 370 acres of grassland on May 10, 2020. The Caribou Fire in Northwest Minnesota burned 400 acres of grassland on November 4, 2020.

2020 has proven to be a dynamic year. Amid the pandemic, Minnesota has been active with COVID-19 response and support. On April 1, 2020, DNR implemented its decision to postpone prescribed burning projects on all DNR administered land. An internal Incident Management Team was organized in April to support the department's preparedness and response to COVID-19. The internal DNR IMT continues to operate today developing guidance centered on health and safety measures as the agency continues its operations.

A Type 3 IMT responded in April to the activation of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) warehouse. The team consisted of 15 positions that supported warehouse coordination and distribution of items received through the SNS.

The Division of Forestry's Wildfire Section developed the Agency's Wildland Fire Best Management Practices to prepare DNR's firefighters with health and safety guidance for emergency response to wildland fires during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working together, MNICS agencies adopted a *module of one* concept. These small teams of personnel, who consistently worked together, were deployed for fire response within each agency. The sharing of these agencies' *module of one* resources across the state worked out well. We were

successful in keeping fires small and providing protection for firefighters against COVID-19. The DNR's travel restrictions and the reluctance of moving resources across greater distances early on to prevent the spread also resulted in fewer resource requests early in the season.

In late May, while assisting with the State's COVID-19 response, DNR was requested and responded to the State EOC and responding agencies by providing logistical support for the civil unrest incident following the death of George Floyd.



Western wildfire smoke visible in Minnesota 9/15/2020

Staffing Updates

- Travis Verdegan – Filled the predictive services position in December, 2019
- MIFC Front desk position – vacant
- Logistics dispatcher – vacant
- Statewide prevention specialist – vacant

Training

The Minnesota Wildfire Academy was canceled this year due to COVID-19 concerns. Future Minnesota Wildfire Academy training sessions will consider options to host courses over extended periods of time and utilize multiple locations compared to the traditional weeklong Wildfire Academy event hosted at the Itasca Community College located in Grand Rapids, MN.



Prevention and Firewise

The impacts of COVID-19 have not changed the emphasis Minnesota places on sharing the fire prevention message. Fire prevention remains a top priority for the Minnesota DNR. This year Firewise community presentations were hosted virtually, including a full virtual rollout of Firewise in the Classroom this spring.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted celebrations and educational Smokey Bear events. The annual Governor's Fire Prevention Day moved to a virtual eight-week campaign due to the cancelation of the 2020 Minnesota State Fair.

The DNR electronic fire danger and burning restrictions maps were updated to improve accessibility. An open burning restrictions level was added to the burning permit system this year for agency approved permits. The permit system now allows the activation of certain burning permits (when specific criteria are met) during restricted burn periods. These modifications will help to implement controlled burns, reduce the spread of uncontrolled wildfire, and improve wildlife habitat.



Rural fire department assistance

The Minnesota DNR Rural Fire Program awarded 172 grants this year under the Volunteer Fire Assistance grant program, totaling \$534,867. VFA grants support Minnesota fire departments who protect communities with populations less than 10,000. Local fire departments use VFA grants to purchase a wide range of valuable equipment, including radios and pagers, personal protective gear, water movement equipment, and wildland firefighting safety items. The VFA program will continue receiving a boost of funding with the Minnesota legislature's decision to divert 25 percent of the fireworks sales tax revenue into the grant program. During the fiscal year 2020, the funding assisted 44 additional communities.

Aviation

Incursions of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (drones) continue to occur in Minnesota in restricted airspace above active wildfires. One known incursion happened during the 2020 spring fire season. Firefighting aircraft (air tankers and helicopters) fly very low, typically in the same airspace level as drones, a couple of hundred feet above the ground. The restricted airspace creates the potential for mid-air collisions and injuries. When drones are spotted over wildfires, aerial firefighting operations immediately halt until the airspace is cleared and safe.



Northeast Interagency Cache

Northeast Interagency Support Cache 2020 Summary

While the fire season in the Northeast was slow this year, the COVID-19 Pandemic added a new twist to our fire season preparedness. The Northeast Interagency Support Cache (NEK) added fourteen National Fire Equipment System (NFES) items to our warehouse inventory. These items included: disinfectants (wipes, four sizes of hand sanitizer, and bleach), various sizes of nitrile gloves, spray containers for disinfectant application, and digital infrared thermometers. These items proved to be quite a challenge to procure given the national shortage. The cache also helped support the State Emergency Operations Center when it was activated during the civil unrest in Minneapolis.

NEK processed and shipped 3,010 line items of supplies that totaled over \$1.1 million. We processed 776 line items of returns for a total of \$621,551.

NEK supported the National Cache System by shipping over \$2.8 million worth of supplies to caches in several states including California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. NEK also supports the National System by refurbishing pumps for the Southern Area and Rocky Mountain Caches.

We also outfitted one engine module, one crew module, and one Strike Team of Fire Department Engines for out of state assignments.

The Cache provided supplies and equipment of over \$106,000 for the following training sessions: Itasca Community College's Natural Resources Program, S-212 Wildfire Powersaws, S-130 and S-190 Basic Firefighter, and Lake Superior College's Emergency Response Training Center. We provided supplies to nine contract helibases and three tanker bases.

NEK staff supported the western fire season by assisting in the following positions: Cache Liaison, Logistics Section Chief, Base Camp Manager, Aircraft Dispatcher, Expanded Dispatch Supervisor, Supply Technician, Small Engine Mechanic, and Initial Attack Dispatcher. Cache personnel did a total of eleven fire assignments.



The National Symbols Cache

The National Symbols Cache processed 2,232 orders for over \$660,000 in sales in fiscal year 2020. This number was down substantially from our average of approximately \$1 million in sales in a normal year. This was obviously caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic since events that would normally distribute these items were non-existent in 2020. However, our website was updated this past year into a much more user-friendly and modern looking format. Customers will be surprised at what a large improvement was made. Please visit the National Symbols Program website, and check it out. We currently stock 91 products, plus 24 digital downloadable products. New products this past year included Woodsy Owl reusable straws and Woodsy Bandanas. These products, along with our standard product offerings, can be viewed and ordered on the website.

In December, Keith Slack filled our vacant Materials Handler position in the National Symbols Cache. Keith brings a vast amount of warehousing experience and knowledge and is a much-needed addition to our team.

Working Team Reports

Communications Working Team

Due to a short spring and summer fire season, there were no incidents that required incident management teams in the state and no requests for the communication trailers or portable towers. All radio kit orders were fulfilled this year. Two communication trailers were set up outside the fire center to help with MNCC COVID-19 social distancing. Half of the Air Desk dispatch utilized the Minnesota Interagency Coordination Center (MNCC) floor, while the others were set up in the communication trailers. The change worked out well for all involved.

New radios were distributed to many folks this year. The radios require a more substantial power supply and are now shipped with a Li/Ion battery charger and clamshell.

The five consoles at the MNCC Air Desk have been tied into the LAN system. The consoles can now dispatch on all the new air-net repeaters, our base station, and the Guard/FF base stations installed at Carlos Avery, Park Rapids, and Wannaska.

The Air Desk dispatch upgrades are running well. The Grand Portage Bureau of Indian Affairs (Mt. Maude repeater) addition to the air desk dispatch consoles, along with Nett Lake are now complete, and US Forest Service dispatch partners are helping these areas with dispatching,

All five tanker bases in Minnesota use the IP-1616 consoles to access repeaters via the LAN system and MNCC base station. Tanker bases and MNCC can now talk statewide to an airplane or helicopter through the repeater network and the Guard/Flight Following base stations.

The Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact (GLFFC) partners met virtually this fall. The GLFFC zone went through a major update this year and will reside in Group 21 for our State program.

Manitoba is updating its law enforcement system and moving to a P25 700 MHz system. Minnesota DNR Forestry will stay on VHF with the new radios and repeater upgrades and narrowband its channels. Though it is still in the setup phase, they

plan to narrowband frequencies and use PL tones by spring 2021.

Ontario is also in the process of revamping their radio system. They plan to be on VHF (150-174 mhz) by 2023. Because it's a *BIG* province, and the conversion will take time to complete, they will remain on the low band system through 2021.

Wisconsin migrated their system repeaters to a P25 digital format in 2019. They will leave the Tac and Air to Ground (A/G) channels on analog. The MN DNR Cloquet and Sandstone areas program radios to access the P25 sites, and have had no issues.

As mentioned earlier, the federal partners have installed an Air Guard and Flight-Follow base station here at MIFC. It's now tied into the State Air-Desk consoles. Three other base stations are also installed at Carlos-Avery (metro area), Park Rapids (west), and Wannaska (northwest). The Federal partners have installed the Air Guard and Flight-Follow radios at Ely and Tofte. All of these radios are tied back to the Air-Desk for dispatch. Statewide these two frequencies are in place at nearly one hundred percent coverage.

Our Air-Desk now tracks the aircraft in the BWCA and other areas in the state on these frequencies for emergencies or redirection using the Flight-Follow and Air Guard. The Federal dispatchers handle initial Attack for the Superior and Chippewa National Forests and dispatch duties for the Nett Lake, Grand Portage, and the State's Two Harbors. Issues are being worked they arise.

The Superior National Forest has changed the East Zone radio channels (frequencies) to two separate MNCC Dispatch zones – east and west. The west zone retains the original Superior frequencies. Please contact Dave Jalonen if you have any questions about this change.

Pat Coughlin & Dave Jalonen, Working Team Members

Dispatch Working Team

COVID eliminated any planned IROC face-to-face dispatch training in 2020. As we look toward the future, virtual training will be our platform until we can return safely to the classroom. Training dates will be scheduled for IROC orientation and IROC basic users in early 2021. The MNICS Dispatch Working Team will be planning other virtual dispatch classes in partnership with the Eastern Area Dispatch Working Team. The courses and dates are not confirmed but will be in 2021.

There were many mobilization opportunities this fire year for those who were comfortable traveling. MNCC mobilized 11 dispatchers to assist nationwide, providing much-needed support to busy centers and expanded dispatch locations. Our trainees who were assigned gained valuable western experience.

Missy Gregerson, Working Team Chair

Finance Working Team

The Finance Working Team continued to discuss issues related to administrative management on emergency incidents in 2020.

Calendar year 2020 brought with it interesting challenges with COVID-19. The fire academy in June was cancelled so we were unable to put on any finance classes. All Finance members were encouraged to sign up as priority trainees if they had an open task book. We participated in the Incident Management Remote Response weekly Finance calls where there was discussions on how to accomplish Finance goals in a COVID environment. This included on site, remote and virtual processing of information. These weekly calls were invaluable to give the entire Finance community, nationwide regardless of agency, the same information at the same time.

Although MN did not have any T3 incidents, the western fire activity in 2020 made it possible for several trainees to go on assignments. While these experiences may have been different with COVID mitigations in place, these trainees still gained valuable experience and progress towards task book completion.

Donna Edelman, DNR, Working Team Chair

ITSS/GISS Working Team

Last January, the newly combined Incident Technology Support Specialist (ITSS) and Geographic Information Systems Specialist (GISS) Working Team met virtually to discuss hot topics, strategies, and needs that included:

- ArcGIS Online (AGOL) and Collector-ArcGIS training.
- COVID-19 protocols and procedures
- ITSS/GISS position training and recruitment
- Eastern Area Team Trailer set up
- A formal Agreement between Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) and MNICS for incident support.
- Number of people in GISS/ITSS positions, only two certified and one trainee in both supported the position for 2020.

The ITSS-GISS working team is planning its winter refresher to discuss the implementation of goals and new procedures this upcoming April. At this time, GISS, ITSS, and SITL working team members will learn core concepts including ArcGIS online (AGOL), Collector, Setting up and incident (ITSS), and Status check-in. The working team also plans on discussing recruitment, training, and retention for ITSS and GISS positions in the state.

During the 2020 western fire season, six GISS/GSAN/ITSS/SITL positions were on assignments in four states. They assisted with fires in Colorado, Montana, and California.

Joel Perrington, Working Team Chair

Information Management Working Team

Public Information Officers (PIO) were not excluded from the many adaptations we all faced navigating through the changes brought on by COVID-19. As our work continued on, the Information Management Working Team (IMWT) focused our efforts on recruiting and training Minnesota's PIOs.

The IMWT hosted the biannual Minnesota PIO workshop in early February at the Minnesota Interagency Fire Center. Thirty PIOs from state and federal agencies, and ADs attended the two-day event. The workshop topics included:

- MNCC – Type 3 Teams and FireNet updates
- 2020 fire weather briefing
- Role of the PIO during an Incident within an Incident
- Incident Commander and Command and General Staff Panel
- Preparing for a PIO assignment and innovative tools PIOs are using on incidents
- MNICS Information Working Team updates.
- Agency updates

Several MNICS subject matter experts from incident command and general staff shared their perspective on how their work interacts with Public Information Officers during assignments. Thank you to all who participated in and shared your ideas for our 2022 Minnesota PIO Workshop.

Minnesota's PIOs continues to support the MNICS Type 3 Team's, and several PIOF and trainees stepped up to fill all three team's positions. We extend our appreciation to the PIOs who filled in for the Team PIOs throughout the spring, summer and fall months as alternates.

The postponement of prescribed burning for many MNICS agencies, a low need fire season, and the postponement of the Minnesota Wildfire Academy resulted in limited in-state training opportunities this year. However, the western wildfire season provided our PIOs and trainees with many great assignments. Though a few of our PIOs supported efforts virtually from Minnesota, many traveled out-state and implemented new

information strategies that focused on public safety and social distancing measures – like organizing virtual public meetings and alterations to information traplines and bulletin boards. Congratulations to our PIOs who completed their task books this season.

MNICS PIOs are looking forward to opportunities in 2021 to continue our training and recruiting efforts. Of course, our work would not be complete without a reminder to all MNICS partners to keep on sharing the photos and stories you capture during wildfire and all-hazard assignments with MIFC PIO, Leanne Langeberg. Thank you, everyone, for making the most out of this incredible year.

Leanne Langeberg, Working Team Chair



Logistics Working Team

The Logistics Working Team (LWT) continues to review training needs for FACL and MEDL. The team is looking into options to host a Workshop in 2021, and taking into consideration the current COVID-19 guidance on in-person training. If an in-person workshop is an option, the team will consider hosting the workshop at Camp Ripley or Willow River. Otherwise, the workshop may be offered virtually. The FLOP will be offered in 2021.

LWT is working toward reducing the Type 3 trailer fleet. The team is identifying requirements to ensure proper maintenance and use when supporting MNICS Incident Management Teams on incidents. Any needs for they Type 3 IMTs beyond the base requirements may require a plan for rentals or other means.

LWT is looking at options to maintain two Communications Trailers and two Office or General Use Trailers. LWT made the recommendation to establish a succession plan for future needs whether it be through the procurement of new trailers or maintaining a life span for the current fleet.

Ryan Kingsley, Working Team Chair

Operations Working Team

Following the Operation Working Team (OWT) group approval of the team charter at the December meeting, the OWT submitted the charter to the Task Force in January. The primary task for the beginning of the year was to prepare for the Type 2 IA crew cohesion meeting and crew rostering process. That process and the MNICS T2IA crews were postponed for the year due to COVID-19. Hopefully, we will be able to roster crews for the 2021 fire season.

OWT is gathering old notes, meeting minutes and other available information from past OWT meetings and archiving them with the assistance of Leanne Langeberg, MNICS Public Information Officer. Past issues, solutions to those issues, and other information will be available for future use through the working team webpage. Anyone who has access to these resources from past OWT meetings are asked to send them to Aaron Mielke, DNR or direct to Leanne Langeberg.

OWT along with the Training Working Team and others are working toward using the NWCG and FEMA crosswalk processes. This new process will enable the many qualified and motivated individuals throughout the state to participate in MNICS and the work we do.

Jim Edgar, Working Team Chair

Prescribed Fire & Fuels Working Team

Ugh! No prescribed season. Never thought I'd say that in my 27+ year career in natural resource management. Over the decades, I've seen prescribed burn seasons where we've had Noah's ark type wet conditions, we've had popcorn-fart dry weather, we've had near typhoon caliber windy springs and we've had years where it seemed winter would never leave us. In all of that, we've still managed to get some prescribed burning done. It took a microscopic virus and a resulting pandemic to shut it down.

As many of you reading this are aware, most federal, state and private conservation agencies suspended prescribed burning this past spring and summer season. With the exception of BIA conducting some spring fuels reduction burns and DMA carrying out prescribed burning (critical fuels reduction) on Camp Ripley, there was relatively no agency prescribed burning to speak of during spring and summer. Some federal agencies developed a stringent review and approval process for conducting limited fall burning, mostly debris pile burning. The Nature Conservancy and MN Dept. of Transportation continued with some small, low complexity late fall burns. The MN Dept. of Natural Resources continued with the prescribed burn suspension through at least the end of the calendar year, pile burning will be allowed during continuous snow covered conditions.

Annual Tasks

One of the PFFWT's important annual tasks is to solicit, consolidate, and prioritize aerial ignition project needs and report these to the MIFC aviation unit. There was no need for this exercise this year. In fact, we canceled our virtual meeting in late-March as many of our agenda items dealt with what we thought would be a spring prescribed burn season and the normally held in-person spring/summer fire training courses.

Many of our team members and presenters were frantically busy with figuring out how to deal with the pandemic and develop COVID-19 guidelines and protocols. Many members were also transitioning to teleworking during this same time period. On a high note, we were able to complete and approve our working team charter and the 2018 Air Quality Report via email correspondence.

Not all was lost during this past year with the looming pandemic. The PFFWT had a virtual meeting in August with a packed agenda. I need to note that we would normally meet in-person during our summer meeting at a location where we could get some good work done plus take a field trip to look at soon cool prescribed fire projects. I can say for myself and probably speak for many of the Team members, I missed not having this summer in-person meeting.

August Meeting

The meeting in August consisted of Brianna Schueller who provided a concise overview and demonstration of the recently released IFTDSS Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment tool. Jack McGowan-Stinski provided us with a quick update on the progress for the MN Fire Needs Assessment and the Lakes States Fire Science Consortium activities and upcoming events. Tracy Fifarek, MNICS Training Working Team, discussed what fire training may be available and what it might look like in a pandemic future. A lot was still up in the air regarding future training. The training team is working hard in trying to develop and deliver training in a time where large, in-person groups just can't happen. Paul Priestly, TNC, gave us an update on the TREX training that was planned for May 2020. It was postponed with the hope of holding it in the spring of 2021. The Team started discussions on reviewing and updating the MN Smoke Management Plan. This plan is scheduled to be reviewed and update on a five year cycle. The most recent version was completed in 2016.



Minnesota Interagency Fire Danger Operating Plan



Fire Danger Operating Plan

One of the main items the Team has been working on for that last two plus years is the MN Fire Danger Operating Plan. The Minnesota Interagency Fire Danger Operating Plan (MN FDOP) is intended to document a decision-making process for agency administrators, fire program managers, fire operations specialists, dispatchers, agency co-operators, and firefighters by establishing interagency preparedness, staffing, response, and prevention levels using the best available scientific methods and historical weather/fire data. A subgroup of the team has been working hard this past year on finishing the plan. Travis Verdegan provided the Team with an update with the progress on the plan. I am happy to say, the PFFWT approved the final draft of the plan at an impromptu meeting in October. The MN FDOP has been sent to the Task Force for review and approval.

The PFFWT hopes, like many others, that we can return to some resemblance of a normal prescribed fire season in 2021. Along with our normal annual tasks, the review and update of the Smoke Management Plan and developing a MN Fire Needs Assessment will be at the top of our list to complete during 2021.

Donovan Pietruszewski, Working Team Chair

Training Working Team

Unfortunately due to COVID, the Wildfire Academy was canceled this year. We are working closely with Itasca Community College to discuss alternate methods of fire training delivery for the upcoming year. As a result of COVID and ongoing concerns, most other MNICS scheduled training courses were also canceled. In working with NWCG and our partners, we hope to get back on schedule with the MNICS training program in 2021 – whether those courses be virtual, blended, or in-person.

Tracy Fifarek, Working Team Chair

Type 3 Incident Management Working Team

It was a busy year for the MNICS Type 3 Incident Management Teams (Type 3 IMT). Even though we did not mobilize a team to an incident, we spent an incredible amount of time planning for a mobilization in the COVID19 environment.

With the additional planning required by our Incident Commanders, it became clear that a MNICS Working Team focused on Incident Management Teams would provide benefits to the planning process and more fully represent our MNICS organization's interagency nature. The organization of this team is was a continuation of an idea that started during our meeting last December.

The framework of the Working Team developed from the members of the original Type 3 IMT Subcommittee. While our team is beginning to lift off the ground in its new capacity, we are looking forward to becoming a fully functioning team in 2021.

Our members will participate in providing guidance and review of the Type 3 IMT Standard Operating Guide, annual recruitment and rostering of teams, planning for the Annual Team Meeting and working to provide support to the T3 Incident Management Teams throughout the season. Our first order of business will be establishing our Type 3 Incident Management Working Team Charter and hope to accomplish much more this season.

We are looking for a diverse membership and welcome anyone interested in providing Logistics, Finance or Planning expertise. Please contact a Working Team member for more information.

Tasha Woodwick, Working Team Rep



MNICS Awards

Leadership Award

DARREN NEUMAN

Partnership Award

CHARLEY ROGERS

Safety Award

MIKE MCLAUGHLIN

Outstanding Performance Award

TASHA WOODWICK

TERRY O'CONNOR

Retirement Award

MARV NYGAARD



Team Award

Minnesota Fire Danger Operating Plan Contributors

TRAVIS VERDEGAN

DONOVAN PIETRUSZEWSKI

BLAIR OLSON

ARTHUR BRAUN

CARL CRAWFORD

CHRIS MURSU

BRIAN JENKINS

JON HANDRICK

JOEL PERRINGTON

JEREMY FAUSKEE

WADE MAPES

DIANE NYGAARD

LEANNE LANGEBOG

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(AND ANYONE WE MAY HAVE OMITTED.)