

Written Statement by Troy Kurth, General Manager, Rocky Mountain Fire Company.

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My name is Troy Kurth. Thank you for the opportunity to present information about our Montana based private contractor wildland fire suppression company, ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIRE COMPANY.

I have been engaged in the wildland fire protection business since 1956. I retired from the US Forest Service with 37 years of service. I served as Fire management Officer and Regional Fire Prevention Officer in California and as Regional Fire Operations Chief in Montana and North Idaho. And, as Assistant Director, I was responsible for the Regional fire program planning and management, and a \$35 million dollar budget. I retired with National fire qualifications as Area Commander, MAC group Coordinator, and Military Liaison Officer. I still maintain Division Supervisor qualifications. After Retirement, I engaged in international consulting, working primarily in Japan and Istanbul, Turkey

I wish to convey information about the Montana Private Contractors who provide much needed firefighters and equipment to Federal agencies and primarily the 11 western States. In addition I will provide estimated cost data, and describe the economic Impact of these companies have with the State of Montana.

We formed our business, ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIRE COMPANY in 2000. We are located in Missoula Montana. We contract wildland engines with the USFS and hand tool modules with MT DNRC. In addition to our contractual arrangements, we operate under several Regional Inter- agency MOUs within Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, Washington and Oregon. These MOUs allow us to conduct firefighter training, fire qualification verification, and equipment inspections, that meet the National Wildfire Coordination Group standards.

We engage in Wildland Interface Structure Protection for Insurance companies with the Wildfire Defense System, Bozeman MT.

We are just one of several Montana and north Idaho Private Contractors that have invested over \$8 million dollars in 200 wildland fire engines and another \$8,400,000 dollars in 120 Water Tender.

Private Contractors are awarded competitively bid agreements (contracts) by the US Forest Service. Our contracts are available to all federal agencies and the States. As reliable contractors, we operate under good faith that "if work is available the US Forest Service will hire us". Every year we must spend thousands of dollars to assure our personnel and equipment meet our contractual requirements.

Private contractor equipment and personnel meet or exceed National standards set by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) for the Kind and Type of equipment. The contracted equipment operates from 12 Inter agency Dispatch Centers in Montana and Idaho. Equipment is dispatched from a priority list based upon the Best Value Equipment being dispatched first. Best Value engines are those with the best measured performance attributes with the lowest cost.

Unfortunate for the private contractors, the US Forest Service has adopted a policy to utilize local government engines operating under State agreements before using their own contract engines to

engage wildfires on the National Forests in Montana and throughout the 11 Western States. As a result, especially during low fire occurrence years, there is no work available for the private engines.

This is a good policy for MT DNRC to use local government for initial attack and extended attack on State responsibility lands. My thoughts are that local government should return to community protection and initial attack readiness as soon as possible.

Private contractors function best on large fires. We are required to staff our engines with 3 firefighters due to the 50% increase in productivity. Local government and MT DNRC staff their engines with 2 firefighters, Local government functions best on structure protection and initial attack. US Forest Service and MT DNRC have excellent fire programs.

The MT DNRC could certainly be more effective if their FTEs were increased so their engine crews could be increased from 2 to 3 firefighters.

Our company, one of many in Montana, put forth the following effort during 2015. our company has agreements to place 6 engines and 4, 5-person tool modules in the field. This year, we started suppression work in March near Columbus MT. We still have 2 engines engaged on fires in California.

1. We placed 6 engines in the field with a capital investment in trucks, and equipment. \$400,000 dollars.
2. We paid Workers Comp, Vehicle insurance and liability insurance at an annual cost of \$10,000.00.
3. We trained and equipped fire fighters at a cost of \$1,085.00 per fire fighter. \$32,550.00.
4. Our engines engaged in suppression efforts on 21 wildland fires in California, Idaho, Washington and Montana.
5. We paid for engine fuel, service, repairs and tires, as well as meals and lodging and replacement of firefighting equipment, supplies, and personal protective equipment at local business in Montana and other Western States. approximately \$100,000.
6. We will pay the Federal Government and the State of Montana about 40% of our net profit.
7. Our company Firefighters have spent 8491 person hours in the performance of their work on fires.
8. Our company firefighters have earned \$ 194,063 dollars.

We estimate that other companies similar to our company also :

- A. Have more than 1,000 Montana contract firefighters worked an estimated 102,800 hours.
- B. These Montana contract firefighters earned \$10 Million dollars.
- C. These Montana companies spent \$ 1,800,00 in direct operating cost.
- D. These Montana companies also paid near \$200,000.00 dollars in workman's comp insurance to Montana as well as other State who do not have agreements with the State of Montana.

10. **Montana Private Contractor engines made a difference** .The2015 National suppression effort involved 30,000 firefighters - hundreds of crews, hundreds of aircraft, dozers , water tenders and 1900 wildland fire engines. This was not enough. many fires went unstaffed due to lack of resources.

11. **Most notable but unheralded, when Montana and North Idaho fires burned out of control, and no engines were available to meet the need. We contractors disengaged from our well paying out of state suppression assignments and returned to Montana where we re-engaged in direct suppression efforts on these fires. This cost every contractor extra expense and reduced income. I never heard one complaint. I did hear , whit pride, "we did it".**

12. **We lost 13 of our brothers to these fires.** Montana Private Contractor engines had an excellent safety rec.ord this year as did the Federal agencies and the MT DNRC

Again, thank you for allowing me to share information and my optimisms.

Troy Kurth

General Manager

Rocky Mountain Fire Company