

Monthly Message from the Chief

May 2013

Although we had been planning for an early fire season for several months, the increased level of activity and extreme fire behavior we experienced the first week in May came on with a vengeance. The Springs and Summit fires in Southern California burned as though they were in a Fall Santa Ana wind event and the Panther Fire in Butte/Tehama burned in heavy timber with an intensity expected in July or August. At the same time, there were other extended attack fires burning around the State as well as an increased initial attack workload. On May 1st, the Predictive Services Unit released its monthly report and for the first time ever in May, issued an **Above Normal Large Fire Potential** for Northern California.



It was clear on May 1st that California was in fire season statewide and we needed to accelerate staffing and resource availability to meet the threat. In just a few short days, we processed hundreds of medical clearances in order to immediately hire back seasonal fire fighters and accelerate their rehire training. We opened numerous fire stations and put most of our aviation fleet into service. The Training Program, recognizing the critical staffing needs, worked through the weekend and graduated a company officer academy almost a week ahead of schedule in order to provide company officers to cover additional fire engines. Finally, the value of our cooperative agreements once again stood out as many of the fires were supported by local government resources. On the Summit Fire alone, there were 38 Riverside County Fire Engines as part of the initial and extended attack.

The early fire activity put fire season front and center as the Department hosted seven press conferences from Yreka to San Diego during Wildfire Awareness Week. Governor Brown and Natural Resources Agency Secretary Laird understand the conditions we are facing and supported our early staffing efforts.

No other organization can react and effectively respond to changing conditions at the pace and in the manner demonstrated by CAL FIRE this month. The speed with which we ramped up as an organization was unprecedented and is a direct result of our long standing work ethic and values. I am very proud of all of you. Having said that, we must remember to pace ourselves. We are approaching peak staffing in response to increased fire potential almost a month early. It has the earmark of a long fire season ahead and we must ensure everyone returns home safe and healthy.

KEN PIMLOTT
Director