



National Fire Plan

A rural fire department in California's Central Valley will be buying more and better firefighting equipment because of a grant issued through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Fire and management staff at Coleman National Fish Hatchery Complex, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and California Nevada Operations Office obtained \$14,000 through the federal Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program for the Cottonwood Fire Protection District. The Cottonwood district is about 20 miles south of Redding.

"This funding will go a long way toward helping us obtain safety equipment we desperately need," said Cottonwood Fire Chief Randall Armstrong. He added that fire shelters and other personal protective equipment will be the first items purchased.

In June 2005, the Cottonwood fire department was instrumental in preventing a wildfire from creating significant damage to both Fish and Wildlife Service and nearby Bureau of Land Management property.

"The Cottonwood FPD contributes a great deal to our community, it's great that we can give something in return," said Coleman Hatchery Project Leader Scott Hamelberg.

The RFA program is one of the most celebrated programs belonging to the Department of the Interior (DOI). Driven by the National Fire Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other DOI agencies receive a yearly budget for the grant program. All of the money goes directly to the applicants with no administrative costs deducted. The Service receives about 12 percent of the total program funding, which is further split to its various regions.

The grant program has been focused on providing money to rural volunteer fire departments that abut DOI lands in order to enhance their wildfire preparedness. The maximum award to any one fire department is \$20,000. The money is used to purchase communications, water hauling and other equipment, firefighting tools and training programs.

Along with communities, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has benefited greatly from the rural fire assistance program because the majority of Service lands don't have dedicated wildland fire staff, and depend on rural departments to assist them when wildfires strike. The program has in turn allowed the Service to help rural departments increase their level of preparedness and safety, which improves fire protection for surrounding communities and federal lands.

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