



**U.S. Forest Service  
Pacific Southwest Region  
Mendocino National Forest  
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## **News Release**

For Immediate Release  
Sept. 21, 2018

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### **Saipan crew travels 8,000 miles to work on northern California fires**

**WILLOWS, Calif.** — There are 541 wildland hand crews available each year to fight fires across the United States. These crews travel to incidents, work long, hot, arduous days, and rest only a few days before returning to the fire. One of these crews traveled approximately 8,000 miles from their home in the Marianas Islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota to assist on fires in California.

The Commonwealth of Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) Crew came to California Aug. 6, 2018. The crew is comprised of ten professional firefighters with the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services and five volunteer/surge firefighters who sign up and train to fight wildfires through the department. The CNMI crew is certified as a Type 2 U.S. Forest Service hand crew.

The crew worked the Carr and the Delta fires in northern California. While driving into the Carr fire vicinity, squad boss trainee, Linus Mizutani said, “All we could see on both sides of us was burned area. It was huge!” When asked to put the size of the fire into perspective, Mizutani said, “More than 15 of our islands would have fit within the fire area.”

At the Delta Fire, the crew assisted the Mendocino Hotshots with fire suppression tactics such as holding of a large tactical firing operation and extinguishing hot areas inside the fire perimeter near containment lines. Mizutani said the crew really enjoyed working with the Mendocino Hotshots and seeing new ignition techniques when they were doing the night burns. Mizutani added, “It’s one thing to read about it in books or watch it on YouTube, but feeling and smelling it, you won’t forget that. Now, we will go home and share that experience with our brothers.”

The crew was joined by mainland fire overhead who provided mentorship: Crew Boss trainees Jeremy Lander, Mark Walls, and James Blas and Crew Boss Ricky Auspiro, Nate Goodchild, Lee Ibarra, Andy Reyes, Edgar Valencia, Chris Mallek, and Jeremy Vance. They also reunited with the Feather River Hotshots and fellow son of the Marianas David Palacios, who was assigned to the fire.

Several crew members – Sixtus Aquino, Saturnino Kaipat, and Linus Mizutani – were in leadership roles as squad bosses or type 1 firefighters on this assignment. Squad bosses supervise up to six firefighters. “We want to recognize our mentors on the mainland this year; we consider them part of the crew,” said Mizutani.



## Page 2 – Saipan crew in the US

Marlon Garde, Shelwyn Taisacan, Jamaal Mresbang, Mizutani and Kaipat performed as sawyers for the first time since completing the wildland power saws course that the Mendocino National Forest presented to them this summer. They are joined by crew members Kyoshi Kileleman, Mathew Dela Cruz, Joseph Sablan, Raccine Hizon, Lucio Kalen, Sammy Litulumar, Matthew Duenas and Stanley Santos.

Garde, Kalen and Taisacan will stay back to fight more fire after the rest of the crew returns home. They will be assigned for the remainder of the fire season to the Los Padres National Forest fire organization.

The crew is hosted by the Mendocino National Forest while on the mainland. Through the U.S. Forest Service's Cooperative Fire Program, fire management personnel traveled to the islands in early 2018 to deliver a basic wildland firefighter training course to make it possible for resources such as the CNMI crew to be qualified to assist on wildfires in the U.S. The mission of this program is to work with Pacific Island partners in: the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau, American Samoa, and the Federated States of Micronesia to increase capability in the fire community. Thanks to the Saipan crew members for their assistance during this long, challenging fire season.

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