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News Release

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Forest Service Rappel Crews Descend on John Day

JOHN DAY, OR – U.S. Forest Service Helicopter Rappel Program staff from throughout the agency will be conducting their helicopter rappel refresher this week at the Grant County Regional Airport – U.S. Forest Service John Day Airbase.

The Malheur National Forest Airbase will host (1) week long annual refresher session this year for returning rappellers. The training sessions are also refreshers for helicopter rappel spotters, and helicopter rappel pilots. There will be two additional sessions in Salmon, ID, one for experienced Rappellers, and one for new recruits.

This week approximately 80 rappellers, from multiple regions, will utilize the 50' rappel tower, two rappel simulators, and four Bell Medium Helicopters to accomplish their annual refresher.

The National Rappel Academy is a performance-based training setting, which requires all veteran rappellers and new recruits to demonstrate full proficiency at each stage of the training before continuing on. The Academy objective is to ensure that all veteran rappellers, new recruits, and rappel spotter trainees receive the highest quality training experience possible. The centralization and standardization of our academy makes this possible, ensuring all participants meet the same high standard. Developing and promoting an attitude of safety is also a top concern, and is an integral part of the academy and agency philosophy.

Returning Rappeller sessions are held for recertification purposes; the sessions involve safety review, tower training, helicopter mock ups and live rappels.

New recruits will begin in the classroom where they will become familiar with equipment and basic safety procedures. Hands-on training will follow as recruits learn to fit their equipment and begin initial ground training. Descent devices and ropes will be introduced, and recruits will cycle through the ground station until academy spotters are confident in their abilities.

The recruits move on to the low tower and high tower simulators and must achieve full tower proficiency in all parts of the rappel sequence before continuing on to live helicopter rappels.

After tower rappels, the recruits will experience live rappels from helicopters beginning at roughly 75 feet on flat, open ground and progress to 250 foot rappels in sloped timber. These will be conducted at a secondary training site on the host Forest.



for the greatest good

Rappel operations are conducted in an environment where all communication takes place using hand signals. Recruits will be expected to learn and employ numerous signals and will

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need to demonstrate full proficiency. Rappel aircraft configuration and further equipment is introduced, and emergency procedures are demonstrated. Recruits will have the opportunity to respond to many scenarios they could face during live rappel operations. Some of the scenarios students will be facing include tangled or knots in the ropes, rappel site challenges and aircraft performance scenarios. This will be one of the most strenuous parts of the academy, cycling students through tower rappels many times wearing full gear.

Rappelling provides for rapid deployment of personnel nationwide in areas with limited landing areas. U.S. Forest Service Rappellers may respond to wildland fire, medical or all-risk incidents.

For additional U.S. Forest Service Helicopter Rappel Program information contact Eric Bush, John Day Airbase Manager – Unit Aviation Manager

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