



# Boosting Fire Suppression Capability

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The Fairbanks area Washington Creek, South Fork Chena, and Salcha Fuels Mitigation Projects were created with economic recovery funds. They also created 41 new positions, including two 20-person fuels mitigation/wildland fire suppression crews and one administrative assistant. Employment began May 3, 2010. During this period, the crews completed training on basic firefighting and chain saw operation. Several crew members also completed training for Crew Boss, Leadership, Ignition Operations, and Fire in the Wildland Urban Interface. Training lasted approximately two weeks and the crews immediately began fuels mitigation work. After just five days, the crews were mobilized to wildland fires. Forty-five days were spent on 10 wildland fire assignments that covered the Fairbanks Area, Tok Area, Tongass National Forest, and Alaska Fire Service protection lands under various ownerships.

The Tiikaan and White Mountain crews are Type 2 Initial Attack crews which is an advanced designation that requires extra training for crew members. These two crews are composed of about 50% Alaska Natives, including the supervisory positions. The crews received excellent performance evaluations on their fire assignments this summer.

Once the ARRA funding expires, it may be necessary to disband the crews; however, since there is a need for the crews, the State of Alaska would like to secure a permanent



*Tiikaan Type 2 Initial Attack Crew*

funding source if possible. If the crews are disbanded, the State of Alaska Division of Forestry will likely pick up several crew members as regular permanent technicians. The following is a summary of the fuels mitigation projects they have been working on this summer:

- The **Washington Creek Fuels Mitigation Project** includes two treatment areas. The first unit is adjacent to McCloud subdivision, and the second treatment area is adjacent to Himalaya Road with a design that is intended to work in concert with the shear blading contract that was awarded last quarter. The hand crew work is expected to be completed by August 15, 2010.
- The **South Fork Chena Fuels Mitigation Project** is currently being re-evaluated because of concerns about potential military ordinance in the proposed treatment area. Project managers are considering a slightly different layout of the fuel break; however, the project completion date is still expected by early September 2010.
- The **Salcha Fuels Mitigation Project** is also being re-evaluated due to difficulties with a patchwork of private land ownership mixed with State ownership. This ownership pattern has increased the difficulty of project layout for the proposed fuel break, but the completion date is expected by September 30, 2010.

The first priority for the Tiikaan and White Mountain Crews is to complete the fuels mitigation work for which the ARRA grant funds were provided. However, if the fire season in the Lower 48 states continues beyond September, the crews will likely be mobilized there later this fall.