

BORDER AGENCY FIRE COUNCIL



Year End Report 2011 & 2012

Border Agency Fire Council History

The Border Agency Fire Council (BAFC) is made up of thirty-one United States and Mexican government agencies and organizations representing fire protection, law enforcement, legislators, emergency responders, natural resource managers, and elected officials that address public safety issues pertaining to wildfire along the U.S/Mexico international border. It is a fact that people from other countries have and will continue to enter the United States illegally by crossing from Mexico into the United States. In an effort to stop the flow of illegal immigration, in 1995 the United States government began "Operation Gatekeeper", in an effort to tighten border security near the city of Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. It instead pushed the crossers to the rugged east of the county and started a new immigration pattern. In desperation, people started entering on foot from the eastern part of Tijuana and without knowing, a trip that formerly took a few hours along the coast, turned into several days and involved a strenuous hike through rugged wilderness. People were not prepared for the summer heat that swelters or the winter where the temperature drops below freezing at the higher elevations.

Many of these people simply didn't understand the difficult conditions they would encounter and this lack of knowledge proved to be life threatening.

The Border Agency Fire Council was formally created during the 1996 fire season, with the first meetings conducted in the fall of 1995 due to a dramatic increase in wildfire activity in southeastern San Diego County. Investigators had determined that improperly extinguished campfires left by immigrants and torches being carried to guide their way at night were causing these fires, as they traveled through the San Ysidro Mountains. Fire agency officials concluded that these two activities were responsible for a huge increase in the number of wildfires and needed to be addressed. This meant hundreds of people were on foot every day in steep, rugged terrain with the potential of wildfires to start around them.

As people continued to accidentally set fires, local officials realized that they were putting their own employees in danger. Emergency response vehicles could not travel safely on the narrow dirt paths, there were no safe places for firefighters to stage at, there were no safe places for rescue helicopters to land and there was little cooperation between both countries on these border fires. The Border Agency Fire Council was formed with the goal of saving lives, property and to protect the sensitive habitat of the border area.

Three important goals of the Border Agency Fire Council Charter are:

1. Establish and maintain relationships with Mexican government agencies.
2. Strengthen awareness and cooperation on biodiversity.
3. Continue effective fire prevention, suppression, and emergency response.

Through collaborative efforts, the BAFC has improved the environment that runs along the border to allow better access into the wildland for emergency responders. At the same time, threatened or endangered species or habitat are now better protected because of the partnership brought together through the BAFC. Member agencies have enhanced communication among responders on both sides of the border, and have reached out to people in both countries with fire safety messages.

An unprecedented binational Mutual Assistance Plan is in place and working because of this program. This important agreement established dispatching and resource utilization procedures that enable participating agencies to work cooperatively to suppress fires and take appropriate actions on emergency situations on border lands of the U.S. and Mexico.

Highlights and Issues of 2011 & 2012

The key to success has been the ability to establish partnerships that allows difficult issues or hurdles to be overcome. Without such partnerships, individual departments may not accomplish goals or objectives in a timely manner, if at all. This section of the annual report is a continuing opportunity to identify significant events that are unreported in the media or appear to go unnoticed except for members of the BAFC. The years 2011 and 2012 were no exception, as the organization continued to collaborate with information on problems and potential solutions in an open forum.

This summary is only a snapshot of the activities and issues that partner agencies address each year. The BAFC believes its efforts have saved lives and property! The BAFC must always be on alert through its emergency response agencies and political partners to potential problems that wait in the future.

Fire Season 2011 & 2012

Annual grasses coupled with strong public awareness of fire danger, resulted in two very mild fire seasons for San Diego. The 2011 & 2012 fire season in San Diego County was fairly quiet with only 46 Border Fires reported for both years and all of the fires being put out before they became large wildfires.

Visits

BAFC members continue to invite guests to participate in the meetings and perhaps to become members of the organization.

International Fuel Break

Otay Mountain, a section of an international fuel break located at the border between the United States and Mexico in San Diego County, California, was completed in 2002 and receives annual maintenance work. This on-going project has several goals that include:

- protection of life and property in adjacent communities
- improved endangered species habitat
- enhances national security as a result of open areas
- Maintaining areas around the Border Fence (completed in 2009)

The ongoing work on the International Fuel Break is an excellent example of fire mitigation on an interagency basis that provides multiple benefits to the local communities in both the United States and Mexico. CAL FIRE, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Comisión Nacional Forestal (CONAFOR) and the private Mexican Conservancy Pronatura work in partnership, to protect citizens and habitat from fire. Agencies continue to rehabilitate the international fuel break to protect life and property by providing fire suppression control line opportunities.



Border Fence in Jacumba

Cold and Warm Weather Rescue Kits

Fire is not the only threat to human life in this area. Extreme temperatures in the rugged mountainous area of San Diego County in summer and winter have taken lives since the migration pattern changed over the years. During the winter, temperatures drop to well below freezing in the higher elevations. During the summer, temperatures can rise to around 100 degrees. The Border Patrol has placed emergency rescue kits in specially marked underground sites within the area. The kits contain blankets, basic medical supplies, food and water. Kits are checked and maintained annually by the Border Patrol. Agencies continue to provide rescue service to international travelers in distress.

Partnership with Mexico

Mexico's emergency response agencies have been valued cooperators from the beginning. In keeping with the Mutual Assistance Plan, U.S. and Mexican firefighters remain available to assist each other automatically for wildland emergencies. The U.S. and Mexican consulates also play key roles in the education information process. In addition, Mexican firefighters continue to receive wildland fire training from CAL FIRE and the U.S. Forest Service.

Mutual Assistance Plan with Mexico and the U.S.

The BAFC Operations Plan is the parent document that allows the details of the Mutual Assistance Plan to be developed and implemented. A steering committee made up of BAFC members, addresses future updates.

This unprecedented Mutual Assistance Plan has continued since 1998. The agreement between Mexico and the U.S. allows emergency responders, and ground resources only, to cross the border to protect lives and property. The Mexican Consulate, Mexican officials and U.S. fire officials review the document annually. This agreement continues to save valuable time in crossing boundary lines without delays and red tape. Emergency responders call immediately to the U.S. and Mexican authorities through their communications network. The response personnel may proceed directly to the scene for any necessary action without waiting for any approval process.

Air resources are still not allowed to cross the border; but BAFC is pursuing a future change through the U.S. and Mexican Consulates to allow aircraft to fly one (1) mile across the border in order to suppress fires in either country. It is a possibility that a new air operations protocol may be established between countries in the future.

Training With Mexican Firefighters

The Border Protection Wildfire Course training takes place in Mexico. The course was organized and instructed by CAL FIRE, and was based on S-130 and S-190 fire behavior courses. There are many participants from local community volunteers and officials from Tijuana, Tecate, and Mexicali, Baja California, who attended the training. Many of the volunteer firefighters that participated are ranchers who help each other when a fire breaks out.

They were trained on the proper use of hand tools, how to sharpen them and specialized equipment such as chainsaws. This training was the first time that many of them had used these tools. There were also exercises on the use of hose lays, fire shelter deployment, and helicopter safety so that participants will know what to avoid and what to expect.

The training typically lasts a week in and this training opportunity is allowed through the Mutual Assistance Plan between the U.S. and Mexico.

Recruitment

In 2012 BAFC held a Special Meeting for local, state and federal officials, former BAFC attendees, and agencies that have not participated in BAFC before. This meeting included a PowerPoint presentation with the intent to recruit new members. The PowerPoint covered BAFC's history and its Goals and Objectives.

Roads And Truck Trails

Agencies continues to maintain truck trails and smaller roads, improved through the efforts of the BAFC. These roads have made a huge difference in getting fire engines and other emergency response vehicles into this remote area. Partner agencies in the maintenance process also include the California National Guard and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Natural Resource Protection Guidebook

The Resource Protection Committee (a sub-committee of BAFC) worked on updating this guidebook. The guidebook is a valuable tool for response agencies that work in sensitive habitat within the BAFC boundaries. The goal of the guidebook is to empower responders to perform their duties and protect the environment at the same time. The guidebook contains an agency contact list with phone numbers matched to map quads, especially for fire fighters from outside of San Diego County.

BAFC Website

The website is posted as a link on the Cleveland National Forest site. This has been effective in reducing paper usage when distributing council annual reports. Access to the website is www.fs.usda.gov/cleveland.

BAFC MEMBER REPORTS



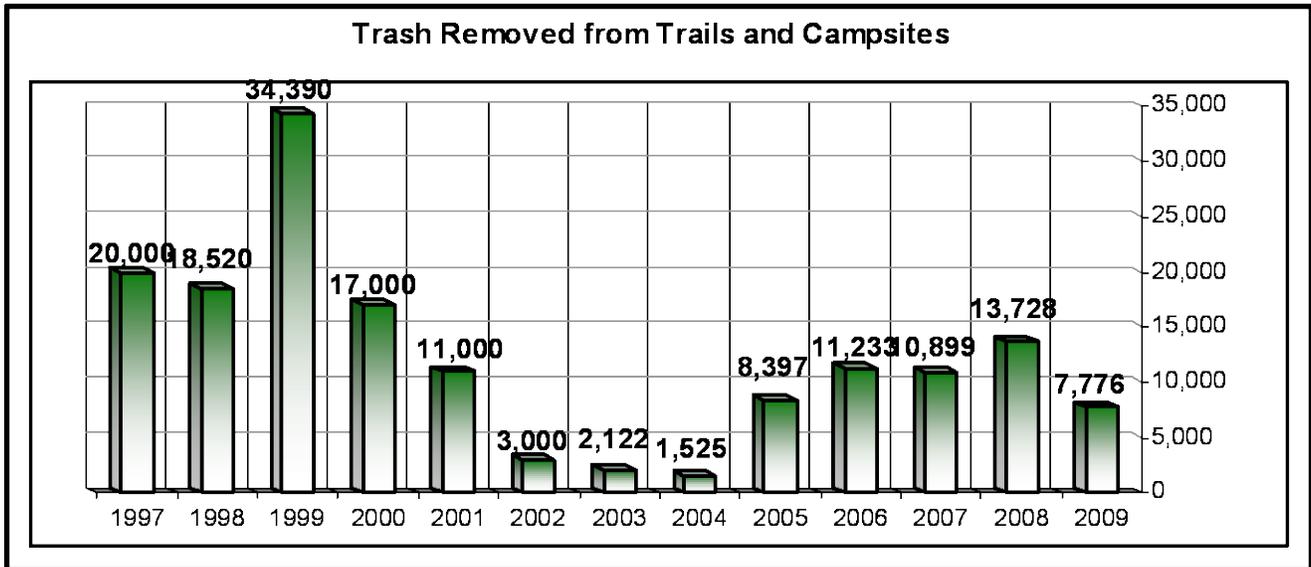
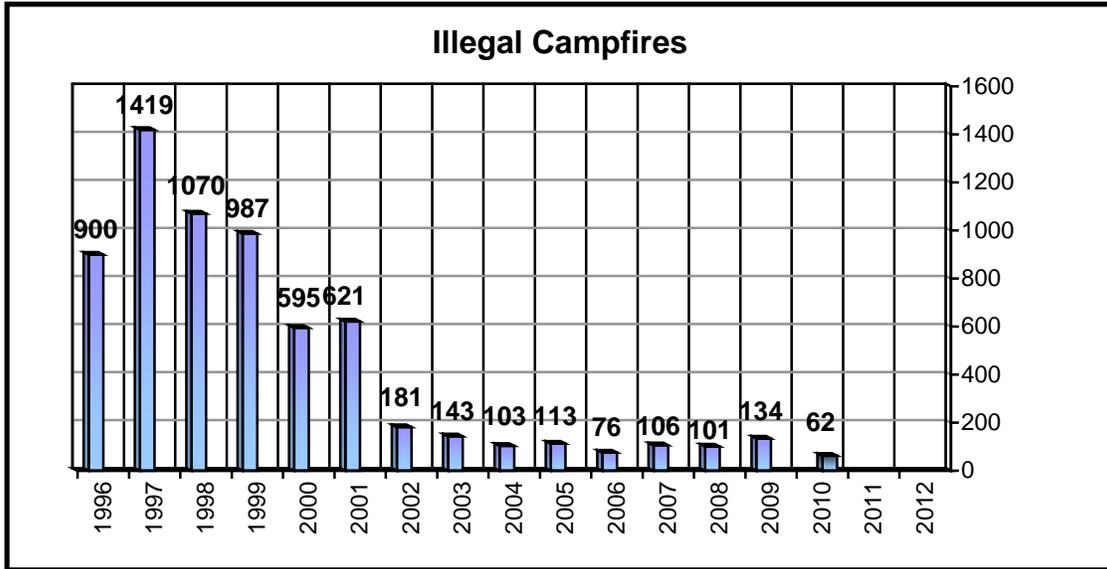
USDA Forest Service Cleveland National Forest

The Cleveland National Forest (CNF), located some five miles north of the international border with Mexico, is the southernmost of the national forests in California. Unauthorized travel, camping, and campfires in the southernmost portion of the Forest create significant resource impacts.

Border Fire Prevention and Resource Protection Crew - Until 2011, the CNF had staff that would hike daily on user created trails to pick up trash, extinguish abandoned campfires, and rehabilitate damage to the land. This crew was disbanded in 2011 due to a decrease in funding and a substantial decrease in activity related to border activities. Since 1997, more than 148,776 pounds of refuse has been collected and removed. In the past, the crew has also assisted the Bureau of Land Management with resource protection work in the Otay Mountain Wilderness Area. In the past two years there have been no campfires that have escaped and spread into the brush.

Safety Patrols - During stormy conditions, CNF personnel along with Border Patrol crews check the roads and trails in the Forest for people who might have been caught unprepared. These interagency efforts have significantly reduced the deaths of immigrants during winter storms in the mountains.

Cleveland National Forest Border Impact Statistics





California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

CAL FIRE protects over 1.5 million acres of land within San Diego County. To support emergency operation over this area CAL FIRE operates a Monte Vista Inter-Agency Communications Center with the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) - Cleveland National Forest. CAL FIRE maintains 18 fire stations housing 26 front line fire engines. CAL FIRE supervises and fields 19 Inmate firefighter hand crews in cooperation with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation based out of four Conservation Camps located strategically throughout the county. Aerial firefighting resources are based at the Ramona Air Attack base operated by CAL FIRE, home to two air tanker planes and one air attack coordination plane. Additionally CAL FIRE operates 4 bulldozer units within the county. CAL FIRE also, through a Cooperative Fire Agreement coordinates the activities and response of the San Diego County Fire Authority (SDCFA). The SDCFA provides emergency response from numerous fire stations utilizing a combination of paid, reserve and volunteer firefighting personnel who provide Emergency Medical Service response 24 hours a day. SDCFA have added the additional chief officers and key staff positions to recruit, train and supervise operations.

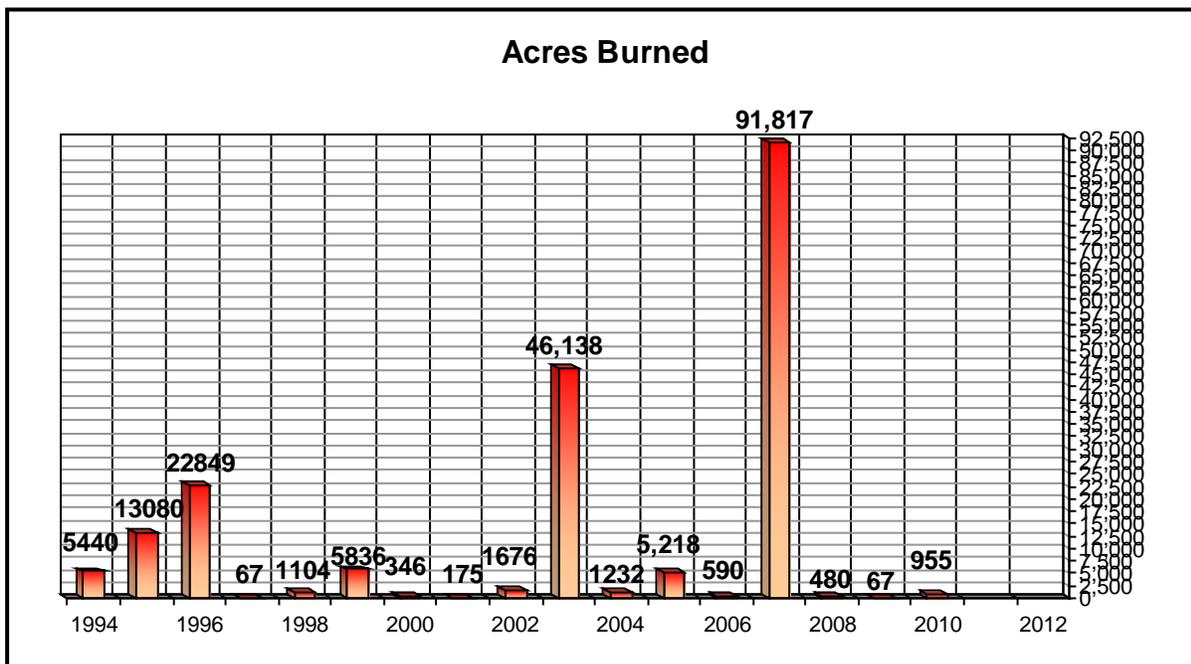
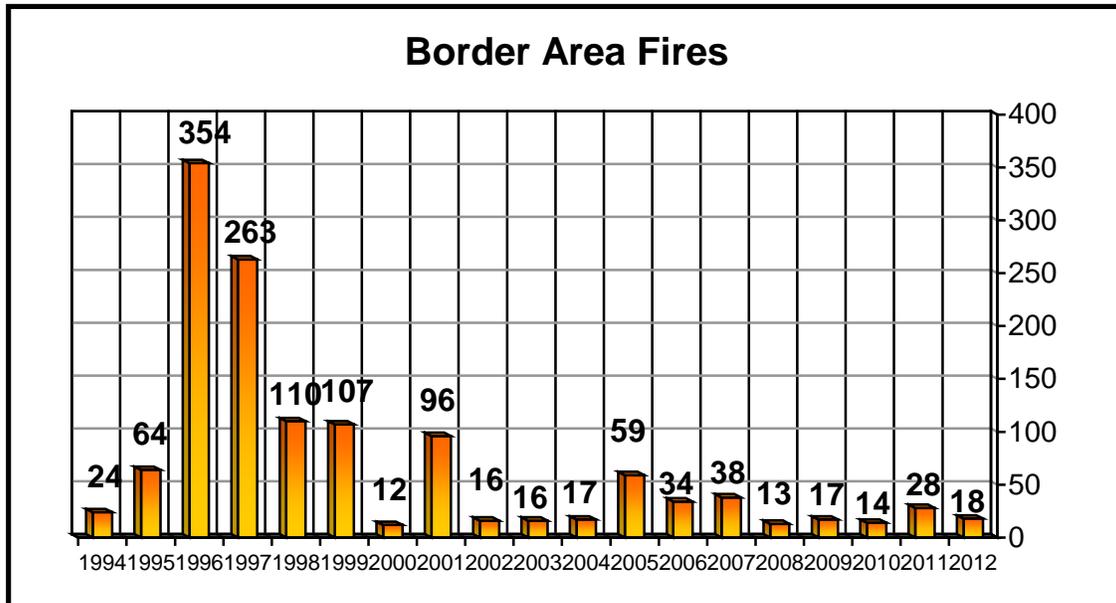
Fire Season 2011 & 2012 - Annual grasses coupled with strong public awareness of fire danger, resulted in two very mild fire seasons for San Diego.

Binational Cooperation and Training - CAL FIRE, in cooperation with other agencies from both sides of the border once again participated in the presentation of the annual five day Wildland Firefighter Training Academy in Mexico. Topics include wildland fire behavior and tactics, Incident Command System and emergency medical treatment.

Fuel Reduction and Community Protection - CAL FIRE continues to plan and implement fuel reduction projects, both individually and in cooperation with other agencies. These projects are locally designed to enhance community protection in an environmentally conscious process.

Environmental Sensitivity and Fire Fighting - Balancing the need to suppress wildland fires with the preservation of the environment has long been a challenge to firefighters. To facilitate this balance and assist fire managers with tactical decisions, the BAFC facilitated the creation of the Natural Resource Protection Guide Book. A copy of this book is maintained in every firefighting piece of equipment under the control of CAL FIRE and is utilized to insure sensitive areas are protected, to the extent possible, during wildland fire suppression efforts.

CAL FIRE Border Impact Statistics





California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Our state pioneered the employment of incarcerated individuals in wild land fire protection. Since its inception, the program has expanded into a highly mobile work force engaging in all forms of risk disaster mitigation, pre-fire fuel management, the development and maintenance of fire defense improvements and facilities; and the performance of conservation related projects for local, state, and federal agencies. This program provides convicted felons with the opportunity to give something back to California citizens while paying their debt to society.

In addition to the missions listed above, the Camp Program is an active participant in the Border Agency Fire Council (BAFC). There are three Conservation Camps located in San Diego County that act as first responders to border fire emergencies. These camps are:

- Puerta La Cruz (Female) Warner Springs 5 Crews
- La Cima (Male) Julian 4 Crews
- McCain Valley (Male) Boulevard 5 Crews

Combined, these camps have the ability to provide a total of fourteen hand crews in a very short time to isolate, contain, and mitigate wildland fires. Puerta La Cruz also houses a Mobile Kitchen Unit (MKU) that is dispatched to larger fires to provide full meal service to the participating agencies.

In 2011 & 2012, one or more of these Camps played a direct role in controlling wildfires that occurred on the border between the United States and Mexico. These efforts saved California taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars.





San Diego County Sheriff's Department

The San Diego County Sheriff's Department is proud to be one of the founding members of the Border Agency Fire Council. Working in partnerships with our communities as well as fellow members of BAFC, deputies assigned to the Rural Law Enforcement Division continue to provide quality service to the citizens of these areas.

Working with our partners in the fire service, we assist in numerous fires that occurred throughout the backcountry portion of San Diego County. These fire emergencies are truly a team requiring effort and partnership with our fire department colleagues in these critical incidents.

The Sheriff Departments' excellent working arrangement with the various fire and law enforcement agencies in the backcountry areas has proved very useful at both fire and disaster scenes. Deputies assigned to the Rural Law Enforcement Division of the Sheriff's Department carry fire turnout gear, extra water for rescue personnel and victims, as well as the ability to utilize common radio frequencies to talk to other agencies.

Adhering to our mission statement of ***"In partnership with our communities, we provide the highest quality public safety services"***, the Sheriff's Department continues to support the Border Agency Fire Council and participates in their various projects.



Copter 10's Helitender provides fuel for the helicopter



U.S.D.O.I. Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) border areas in California's San Diego County include both the El Centro Field Office, as well as the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office. Both offices suffer the impacts of Immigration and Smuggling activities associated with our border with Mexico.

BLM efforts changed in 2011 from one focused on fire defense systems and community preparedness to one significantly impacted by recreational shooting caused fires. As shooting opportunities were reduced on the Cleveland National Forest and more private lands were closed to these activities. Shooting enthusiasts moved to previously little used areas on BLM Lands. These activities were directly related to causing wildfires. These wildfires could have caught people in the wildlands. Significant efforts were made by BLM Fire Mitigation and BLM Rangers to educate the users of public lands in safe and responsible use of said lands.

BLM Fire Management has several National programs that enhance the abilities of local volunteer fire departments that respond in Initial Attack scenarios. BLM under the Ready Reserve Training Program paid the tuition and materials costs of 172 firefighters at Volunteer Fire stations in 2011. Under the Community Assistance Program, BLM participates with the FireSafe Councils to fund grants for FireSafe/FireWise communities and provides consultation, environmental review and archaeological review. Additionally, BLM located with CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire Authority two 5,000 gallon portable emergency water tanks to enhance the emergency water supply of firefighters attempting to keep fires from BLM Lands, or those on BLM lands spreading to private property.

As the immigration trends fall there continues to be fewer wildfire ignitions in the Border Area. It is through Interagency Cooperation and relationship building combined with essential fire prevention efforts, that BLM is pleased to be a part of the Border Agency Fire Council.



U.S.D.I. Fish & Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fire Management Program in Region 8 includes National Wildlife Refuges and Fish Hatcheries throughout California, Nevada, and Oregon's Klamath Basin. In San Diego and Orange Counties, FWS manages about 15,000 acres of wildlands on a complex of four National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) that provide 12 critical habitat areas that are home to 21 threatened or endangered species. FWS representatives attend the Border Agency Fire Council to facilitate communication and coordination for fire and law enforcement between all BAFC agencies.

The 2011 & 2012 fire seasons had little wildfire activity on refuge lands but a number of local and regional support efforts.

The zone supported a number of interagency fire training efforts including the San Diego County Wildland Fire Drill, Department of Interior Engine Academy, Southwestern College Wildland Firefighter Academy, and Swift Water Rescue training.

It was a busy year for the fuels program with over thousands of acres treated, primarily in the wildland urban interface. The largest part of the program is creating and maintaining fuel breaks and includes discing and mowing, roadside clearing, and invasive species removal at refuge boundaries. Continued projects under Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation plans from wildfires in 2007 at San Diego NWR and Hopper Mountain NWR (Ventura County) are remediating impacts to infrastructure and controlling invasive species in critical habitat.

The zone coordinated supported a number of interagency committees and teams including the Border Agency Fire Council, Forest Area Safety Taskforce, and Border Management Task Force. The zone continues to support numerous fire safe council activities and helps with development of different community wildfire protection plans.



United States Border Patrol

"To enforce the rule of law along the border, enhancing the quality of life of the people we proudly serve."

The San Diego Sector of the U.S. Border Patrol is responsible for 66 linear miles of the U.S./Mexico border, and nearly 7,000 square miles, roughly corresponding to the boundaries of the County of San Diego. Since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, illegal entries in San Diego County have steadily declined.

The success of Operation Gatekeeper has enabled the San Diego Sector to appropriate more resources to the development of search & rescue teams, anti-smuggling investigative units, public outreach programs, and border safety initiatives. The availability of personnel and resources has enabled the sector to become more proactive and the leader in innovative uses of new technology. San Diego Sector has evolved from the most neglected area of the southwest border to the flagship of the U.S. Border Patrol and a model of effective, efficient, and humane border control.

Border Safety Initiative - The Border Safety Initiative (BSI) began in San Diego in 1998 as an effort to make the international border safer for everyone. BSI addresses related concerns in the following areas: **Prevention** of illegal entries through potentially hazardous areas, **Search and Rescue** capabilities and commitments, and interactive support in situations requiring the **Identification** of deceased persons.

The San Diego Sector issues emergency response supplies to agents as one facet of the Border Safety Initiative. Backpacks were loaded with a variety of items appropriate for summer or winter emergency aid. Each bag is packed with enough supplies for more than one individual. Easily digestible food, such as special granola "trail mix," dried "tropical fruit mix" and carbohydrate energy gel replaces earlier food items. "Gatorade" is included along with water and electrolyte tablets. Basic medical response supplies as well as first aid guides are included. Additional instant "cold-packs" were added.



San Diego Gas & Electric



San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) is pleased to be a member of the BAFC and shares the council's commitment to work cooperatively with all agencies involved in protecting life, property, and native habitat in the border area of San Diego County. SDG&E has been an active participant since the council's beginning and became a formal member in June 2005.

The construction of the Sunrise Power Link (SRPL) hit full stride during 2011. The SRPL construction was conducted in compliance with a very thorough and comprehensive fire plan which includes input from all affected fire jurisdictions. A fulltime Fire Marshal is being used to coordinate and facilitate all wildland fire protection mitigation measures during the construction of the Sunrise Powerlink. The Fire Marshal provides guidance to contractors during the construction work and coordinates with fire departments responding to emergencies within the construction area. In addition, a type 1 heavy-lift helicopter, purchased by SDG&E for construction of Sunrise, was been made available to fire departments for fire suppression response, and the Sun Bird is available to county fire departments in when it is not committed to construction.

SDG&E completed and energized the Sunrise Power Link in spring of 2012. This is a 500 kV transmission line spanning from Arizona into the city of San Diego, with much of it traversing through the border area. SDG&E provided specialized electrical safety training to fire agencies, within the SRPL sphere of influence, specific to this transmission interconnect. SDG&E designed and purchased a fire suppression trailer equipped with 300 gallons of Class B Foam and 500# of Purple K Dry Chemical, a 500 gpm monitor w/foam capability, and a pressurized live reel for PKP application. The San Diego Rural Fire Protection District and SDG&E entered into an MOU to house the trailer at their Descanso Fire Station, proximate to the new Suncrest Substation and much of the Sunrise Power Link. SDRFPD has received specialized training and now has the equipment necessary to effectively suppress electrical equipment fires once they are made safe to do so. This partnership is mutually benefitting to the border area fire community and to SDG&E.

SDG&E is always looking for new ways to expand its coordination efforts with public safety agencies. Our goal is to provide for the safety of first responders and the public on both sides of the border, and to facilitate quick & aggressive suppression efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this dedicated and vital organization.



Comisión Nacional Forestal Gerencia Regional I Península de Baja California

The National Commission of Forestry (Comisión Nacional Forestal - CONAFOR) was created as a decentralized federal agency, under SEMARNAT (Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources) on April 4, 2001. Its mission is to inspire the participation from Mexican society to make the necessary changes to create new sustainable forestry development policies in Mexico. Its general goal is to develop productive activities and forest conservation and restoration.

According with the Mexico's General Law of Forestry Sustainable Development, CONAFOR is the federal agency responsible for the coordination of the wildfires prevention, detection and suppression in the country, with the assistance of other federal, state and county public administration agencies, including volunteer groups.



Mapy educates children learn about the environment



Tecate Fire Public Safety (Bomberos de Tecate)

Most wild fires in Tecate are started by ranchers burning vegetation on their property to clean it up. The ranchers become careless and lose control of the fire. Another problem is builders not taking the necessary precautions when building new structures. Another cause of wildfires in the area is careless campfires, when the weather gets very hot many people go to cooler areas and camp but do not properly extinguish their camp fires.

The biggest problem that Tecate faces is the lack of equipment. Many times fire personnel must use their own vehicles when responding to an emergency and many of these vehicles are sedans, pickup trucks and SUV's, not fire engines.

There is some education in the schools, but have found it is difficult to get the ranchers to attend meetings and there is no ranchers association of any kind as a way of getting information out. They try to use the tourism board to help get fire safety information out.

Tecate Fire does have a contract with a helicopter company for air assets but it is not used often and that the majority of the work is done with hand tools on the ground.

Firefighters are out for days or weeks at a time fighting a wildfire, so they have to rely on local ranchers for food and water. They do not have a system in place to feed and house firefighters when they are on a fire.



BAFC Membership

Thirty organizations and elected officials are active members of the Border Agency Fire Council. Each contributes staff and funds to this unique collaborative effort.

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations
California Department of Fish and Game
California Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection – CAL FIRE
California Highway Patrol
CONAFOR (Comisión Nacional Forestal), B.C., Mexico
D.H.S. Customs and Border Patrol
Direccion de Bomberos de Tijuana
Director de Proteccion Civil del Estado, B.C. Mexico (Baja OES)
Estatad de Forestal y Fauna Ensenada, Mexico (SEFOA)
FireSafe Council San Diego
Joint Task Force 6
Mexican Consul General San Diego (Associate Member)
Office of the Governor
Office of Supervisor Dianne Jacob
San Diego County Department of Health Services Agency
San Diego County Department of Planning and Land Use
San Diego County Office of Emergency Services
San Diego County Sheriff
San Diego Fire and Rescue Department
San Diego Gas and Electric
San Diego Trauma Hospital Administrators
San Miguel Fire Protection District
Southern California Watershed Fire Council
Tecate Fire Public Safety (Bomberos de Tecate)
U.S.D.A. Forest Service
U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Attorney’s Office
U.S. Consulate General Tijuana
U.S.D.I. Fish and Wildlife Service