



Hoosier National Forest Highlights

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Hoosier National Forest Assists with National Disasters



By Cory Henry, Engine Captain

Employees from the Hoosier National Forest assist in suppressing wildfires not only here in Indiana but across the entire country, from the well-known large wild fires in the western United States to lesser known wild fires in the east. What many people may not know is that these same personnel often respond to other natural and manmade disasters across the country, responding to these disasters through local requests, national requests and FEMA requests to assist local responders and municipalities.

Many of the trainings courses and qualifications required for wildfire suppression lend themselves to other disasters; this coupled with the ability to mobilize a large number of trained personnel in short order makes this resource perfectly suited for disaster relief.

Throughout my career with the Federal government I have responded to a number of different types of disasters ranging from the wildfires to the space shuttle Columbia recovery, the Gulf Oil Spill cleanup, Hurricane Katrina relief and numerous tornado cleanup efforts. Other disasters that forest personnel have responded to include the Twin Tower disaster in New York City and Super Storm Sandy relief. Forest Service personnel possess a wide variety of skills and expertise for these disaster relief efforts.

When mobilized for these disasters, I have worked in various capacities including a technical specialist at the Gulf Oil Spill disaster helping to identify affected areas and working with crews to ensure proper protocol was followed, training others on safe ATV use in urban areas and a liaison for local fire departments during tornado disaster relief efforts ensuring that the local responders had all the equipment they needed. Other forest personnel from the Hoosier have assisted in national disasters as law enforcement officers, archeologists, finance and logistical support, safety officers, environmental specialists and in many other capacities.

When personnel respond to these disasters they may be away from their families and work for up to three weeks, living and working in conditions that are far from ideal. Many times crews are camping with up to 2000 other people using outhouses and eating from catering trucks. Due to the nature of disasters many of the amenities that we are used to, such as drinking water and electricity, have been disrupted and are not available so all goods must be shipped in, for responders and residents, making logistics one of the most important aspects. That fact, coupled with attempting to help people and animals that have been displaced can lead to some very trying assignments. Families of these responders are left at home to cope with running households and bear the burden of their spouses being gone on assignments.

While on assignment, forest personnel offer up their expertise while working with the local responders who impart their local knowledge, making a great partnership. This, as well as working with other federal employees, are the best parts of the assignments. Hoosier personnel continue to respond to disasters throughout the country, leaving with short notice to help wherever needed on a multitude of natural disasters.

For more information on how the Hoosier responds to national incidents contact Cory Henry at 812-276-4721, or by email at coryrhenry@fs.fed.us.

Photo Captions:

Bob Stone, Hoosier NF Civil Engineering Technician (left), and another field observer monitor the World Trade Center recovery progress.



Interagency crew working on the Gulf Oil Spill.



Crews walk grids during the recovery operations for the Columbia space shuttle.

