



Cottonwood Fire Protection District receives \$14,000 through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rural Fire Assistance Program

In 2005, fire and management staff from the Coleman National Fish Hatchery Complex, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and California Nevada Operations Office provided Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) funding to the Cottonwood Fire Protection District (FPD), located 20 miles south of Redding, CA. The Cottonwood FPD received \$14,000 to purchase wildland firefighting equipment such as new fire shelters and other personal protective equipment. "This funding will go a long way toward helping our department obtain this necessary safety equipment we desperately need" said Cottonwood FPD Fire Chief Randall Armstrong. In June of 2005, the Cottonwood FPD was instrumental in preventing a wildfire from creating significant resource damage to both Fish and Wildlife Service and nearby BLM lands. "The Cottonwood FPD contributes a great deal to our community, it's great that we can give something in return", said Coleman NFHC Project Leader Scott Hamelberg.



The RFA program is one of the most celebrated Department of the Interior (DOI) programs, driven by the National Fire Plan. Each year, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), and other DOI agencies, receive an appropriated budget for the RFA grant program, all of which goes directly to the applicants- no administrative costs deducted. The RFA program was funded for the whole of DOI at \$10 million per year from 2001 – 2005. The FWS receives about 12 percent of the total program funding, which is further split to the various regions. The program and regional budgets can vary each year.

The RFA program has been focused at providing grant funding to neighboring rural volunteer fire departments to enhance their wildfire preparedness. The maximum award to any one fire department is \$20,000, but with a small budget for the region, money has most often been disbursed in smaller amounts. RFA funds are used to purchase equipment, including personal protective equipment (PPE), communications equipment, firefighting tools, and water hauling equipment. Funds are also used by rural fire departments (RFD's) for training and prevention programs.



This funding will enable the Cottonwood FPD to purchase much needed safety equipment and will enhance its protection capabilities for the surrounding communities at risk to catastrophic wildfires. The Cottonwood FPD is within the wildland urban interface where fire management is a major concern for the Coleman NFH and other local agencies and partners.

RFA funding and grant selections are coordinated between DOI agencies and similar state programs to better meet the needs of RFD's and communities throughout the region. In California, the RFA grant application for the FWS, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service was combined and advertised through the California Fire Alliance, California Fire Safe Councils, California Fire Chief's Association and locally through individual wildlife refuges, offices, and field stations. See the California Fire Alliance for application information <http://www.cafirealliance.org/>.

Along with RFD's, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has benefited greatly from this program. The majority of FWS land units do not have dedicated wildland fire staff, and so depend on RFD's to assist with wildland fire protection. The RFA program has allowed the FWS to assist RFD's in increasing the level of preparedness and safety, improving fire protection on both FWS lands and surrounding communities.

For more information about the RFA program please visit <http://www.nifc.gov/rfa/>