



International

FIRE

WARS

2 x 60



FIRE WARS

2 x 60

CONTACT

Tom Koch, Director
WGBH International
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134 USA

Tel 617-300-3893
Fax 617-300-1021
tom_koch@wgbh.org
www.wgbh.org/international

Every year, uncontrollable wildfires ravage the American West, and every year armies of firefighters mobilize to save threatened wilderness and communities. On *Fire Wars*, NOVA accompanies the men and women of the Arrowhead Hotshots who are on the front lines to keep America safe. NOVA pairs with the Hotshots during the summer of 2000, one of the most destructive wildfire seasons ever, during which more than six million acres burned.

The summer started with the tragedy in Los Alamos, New Mexico, when a prescribed burn designed to consume excess fuel spread out of control. Over the next weeks, the fire forced the evacuation of twenty thousand people, destroyed hundreds of homes, and threatened the nation's premier nuclear lab. But while policymakers and scientists were looking at what went wrong in Los Alamos, the fire season picked up considerable steam.

The Arrowhead Hotshots are one of sixty-five elite crews in the United States that take on the most dangerous wildfire assignments. "Hotshots end up going to the places where the terrain, fire behavior, or fuel make the fire very difficult to fight," says Arrowhead supervisor Brit Rosso.

The NOVA team filmed the Arrowheads, as they worked on the biggest fire of the season, the Clear Creek fire that burned for almost two months. On one unforgettable afternoon, this fire escaped and burned twenty thousand acres in just three hours.

The program looks back at a century of fire policy to explain how we got into this predicament. The war on wildfire dates from the devastating fire season of 1910 when millions of acres of the northern Rockies burned, entire towns were destroyed, and scores of firefighters died. Determined not to suffer another such tragedy, government officials adopted a policy of 100 percent fire suppression.

Technology and manpower provided improved weapons to battle the flames. But the fires continued, including the notorious Mann Gulch blaze in Montana in 1949, and the worst firefighting disaster in US history, the Storm King Mountain fire in Colorado in 1994, where fourteen elite firefighters died in only twenty minutes.

In recent decades, land managers and ecologists have begun to recognize that too little fire can also be a problem. Many of our most cherished landscapes—from the majestic groves of the giant sequoias to the marshy landscapes of the Everglades—depend on fire to recycle nutrients and maintain healthy ecosystems.

According to Stephen Pyne, one of America's foremost experts on fire, "The relationship with fire is much more subtle and sophisticated and we have to rethink it."

But there's not much time. Every year, more and more dried brush piles up on landscapes, creating the potential for more and more catastrophic fires.

"Believe me," says Neil Sampson of American Forests, the nation's oldest citizens' conservation organization, "in the next decade we're going to see many, many years like 2000—very possibly some that are quite worse."

02.02.129

NOVA®

CREDITS

Executive Producer: Paula S. Apsell

Writer and Producer: Judith Vecchione and Rushmore DeNooyer

Director: Kirk Wolfinger

A NOVA Production by Lone Wolf Pictures for WGBH/Boston.

Cover Photo Credit: ©Scott Sady



International