

# HIGHLANDS FIRE DRAGON

## FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!

BY KYLE ANTICEVICH, CAPTAIN, PIO

With the prolonged drought and gusty spring winds, the fire season took on an unprecedented early start this year. On the afternoon of April 17th, the Tunnel Fire broke out North of Flagstaff. Due to the Automatic Aid Agreement in place, multiple units from around the region were dispatched to this fast-moving fire. Highlands Fire dispatched one Type 1 Engine, Bear Jaw Type 2 IA Crew and a Battalion Chief. Crews on scene encountered extreme fire behavior with flames being fanned by 40 mph winds. Bear Jaw was able to corral the fire around the backside of 12 structures on Camino De Los Ventos, ultimately saving 35 structures. They also held a critical piece of line protecting the historic O'Leary Lookout tower. The heroic actions of the crews on scene help to save multiple structures. Highlands Fire then sent a Type 3 wildland engine to staff the fire, working night shift to patrol and monitor for hot spots. While patrolling a neighborhood, a resident stopped the engine to talk and stated that the actions Bear Jaw took behind his house saved it from burning. We train all year, not only at Highlands but as a region for situations just like this. This training and regional coordination

allowed us to quickly mobilize engines and personnel to this fire.

On the morning of June 12, the Pipeline Fire erupted north of Flagstaff. Resources from the region were quickly mobilized to provide structure protection. Highlands Fire sent a Type 1 Engine and a Water Tender. This fire was showing extreme fire behavior and being driven by gusty winds. Crews immediately went to work and provided structure protection in an around homes and livestock enclosures. These actions significantly minimized the loss of structures.

We would like to recognize and thank the other responding agencies to these fires during initial attack: Coconino County Sheriff, Coconino County Public Works, Coconino County Search and Rescue, ADOT, AZ Game and Fish, National Park Service, Coconino National Forest, Forest Service Law Enforcement, AZ Department of Public Safety, Flagstaff Police, Flagstaff Fire, Ponderosa Fire, Highlands Fire, Summit Fire, Guardian Medical Transport.

Even though we are seeing the welcome monsoon rain; we encourage you to clear all brush and debris away from your home to keep it fire wise. We also ask that you sign up to receive emergency alerts.

**Emergency Notifications**  
**Coconino.az.gov/ready**





## A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE BOARD

BY TOM HANECAR  
BOARD CHAIR

Welcome to the 2022 Fire Dragon Newsletter and the annual Pancake Breakfast. It has been a couple of years since the District has been able to have this event – we are excited to have the opportunity to host the community once again. Please make an effort to come and visit with District staff and Board members.

There have been many changes within the District, including retirements, staff promotions, and new Board members. We have appointed Todd Miller, a long-time Highlands Fire District (HFD) employee, as the new Fire Chief following the retirement of Chief Dirch Foreman. This has also provided the opportunity of many additional staff to promote into higher level positions aligning with one of our long-standing strategic goals of training and promoting District staff. As mentioned, Chief Foreman retired from the District this past year after many years of service with HFD. However, we did not allow him to go far – he is one of the Board's newest members. In addition to Dirch, we have been fortunate enough to have Jay Smith and Carl Nelson join the team as additional dedicated Board members. Brad Bippus, our current Clerk, continues to serve and is currently our

longest standing Board member. HFD would also like to thank former Board Chairperson Pete Kloeber for his two decades of dedication and service to the District.

Your fire district has accomplished much over the last decade as described in the annual strategic plan in addition to previous newsletters. Through the leadership of former Chief Foreman, former Chairperson Kloeber, District staff, and support from residents HFD has been able complete large capital projects that provides for efficient and effective delivery of fire services in our community. Another large accomplishment was to refinance the unfunded liability associated with the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS). This will save the District nearly \$6M over the next 25 years. These major accomplishments, in addition to many others, has set the District up for long-term sustainability, both organizationally and financially.

We are excited for the opportunity to discuss the great work Highlands Fire does for you and the rest of the community. Come on by and say hi to the firefighters. They are here for you, your family, and our community. Experience for yourself their professionalism, pride, dedication, capability, friendliness, and genuine caring and can-do attitude.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE CHIEF

*"The Highlands Fire District has a long tradition of commitment to service and community. We are driven by the Mission, guided by our Values, and strive to exceed your expectations every time you need us."*



BY  
TODD MILLER  
FIRE CHIEF

Good Day!

I want you all to know how excited I am to be selected as your next Fire Chief. I would like to introduce myself and provide a little bit of my personal background. I was born and raised in Flagstaff. I attended Thomas Elementary, East Flagstaff Junior High, and Coconino High School. My mom and dad moved here from Indiana in 1973. My dad, Bob Miller, worked for Ralston Purina before retiring. My mom, Marcie Barnes, was a homemaker, worked for FUSD, and NAU before retiring. I have one brother, Ty, who works for NAU. I have two (adult) children, boy and girl twins, who both graduated from Flag High. Levi and his wife Steffi are both teachers at Pine Forest Charter School in Flagstaff.

By the time of this article being published, they will have welcomed their son into the world, and I will be a grandpa! Elizabeth resides in Tucson and just completed her Master's Degree in the Science of Healthcare Delivery through ASU. She works as a program assistant for a non-profit organization and has a side business as a baker, as well. After being re-married in October of 2020, I also have a step-daughter, Keira, who is attending NAU and working as a server and cook in a local restaurant. I am married to Isabelle who works as a Battalion Chief for Guardian Medical Transport. She grew up in Tucson and moved to Flagstaff in 1995 to attend NAU and has been here since. We have two "children" together, four-legged furbaby's Falcor and Moose. In my free time I enjoy spending time with family and friends, woodworking and home improvement projects, as well as weightlifting. Isabelle and I enjoy getting outside in this beautiful place we live in by hiking, trail running, and mountain biking as well.

Now for the professional side. Over my career I've been afforded the opportunity to progressively develop my knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. I have held multiple positions and spearheaded multiple projects as I was promoted through the ranks. Including some experience outside of the organization, I have been in supervisory/leadership roles for 24 years. Additionally, I owned and operated my own business for 7 years.

Throughout the history of this organization, there have been outstanding Chief Officers. My goal is to honor those that came before me and continue that tradition, while bringing a fresh perspective and new ideas. As an organization we have changed, developed, and advanced in many positive ways and I am proud to have been a part of these changes over the last 20 years.

One of the things I love about HFD is the community-oriented focus we have; you can bet that this will continue to be a priority for us. I look forward to leading Highlands Fire District into the future and being able to continue to serve and protect our communities in this new role.

Thank you for the opportunity.

## PROMOTIONS: MOVING UP THE LADDER



MITCH LOPEZ  
BATTALION CHIEF



KYLE ANTICEVICH  
CAPTAIN



BRYAN MONREAL  
ENGINEER



CLAY AHRENDT  
ENGINEER

*Congratulations!*



# MEET THE HIGHLANDS FIRE BOARD



**TOM HANECAK**  
BOARD CHAIR

Tom has served on the Fire Board since December 2020, and he serves as the Fire Board Chairperson.

He is excited to help support the amazing service the District provides to the residents of our communities. We are lucky to have such skilled and dedicated staff ensuring the safety of all of us that call this area home.

Tom was born and raised in a small town in Northwestern Connecticut and spent most of my free time playing in the woods with my two older brothers. He received a B.S. in Biology from Saint Michael's College, VT. Upon completing my college studies,

he headed off to Gabon, Africa for 2 ½ years to serve as an Environmental Education volunteer for the United States Peace Corps.

Shortly after my return to the US, he relocated to Flagstaff AZ to work for Coconino County (holding different positions over the past 14 years). He currently serves as the Assistant Director of the Facilities Management Department.

He enjoys everything related to outdoor recreation but spends the majority of my time observing/filming wildlife and perusing game animals with a bow in hand. He fills the rest of his free time in the company of friends, in the garden, and with woodworking projects.



**BRAD BIPPUS**  
CLERK

Brad has served on the Fire Board since January 2014. Brad and his family have lived in Mountainaire since 1998. He built, with his own hands, a straw bale house. Designed to be fire proof, maintenance, and bill free.

Brad loves hanging out with his wife and book-worm kids. Forcing them to engage with the real world just outside the window. Creating a loving environment for them to be themselves. Fully supporting their interests of reading and diving.

Another of his passions is his love of mountain biking. You will find

him throughout the country riding his mountain bike and enjoying the great outdoors.

He is the owner of AZ Irrigation & Maintenance since 2012. Serving his employees and Northern Arizona as a contractor focusing on landscape irrigation services.

Last but not least is his love for travel. He enjoys to travel overseas and stretch out his time when he is in a foreign land. For him, the period of a week is never enough and not worth the effort. Many of his excursions can last a minimum of three weeks and it's been known for him to leave for 6 months at a time.



**JAY SMITH**  
DIRECTOR

Jay was appointed to the Fire Board in June 2021.

He graduated from Northern

Arizona University in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry. He has worked in the forest industry for the past 23 years, running logging operations, sawmills, and providing forest management on private and federal lands in Tennessee and Arizona. For 12 of those years, he was a member of the Tennessee Forestry Association Board of Directors and served as President of that Association in 2008. Jay returned to Northern Arizona in 2013, where he lived in Mountainaire, and currently lives in Kachina Village. In 2018, Jay was selected by the Coconino County Board of Supervisors to be the first director of the newly developed Forest Restoration Department.

In his spare time, Jay, and his wife Kate, enjoy hunting, fishing, camping and hiking all over the Western United States. Jay and Kate are also very active at Mountain View Church, where they teach a college class together. Kate's mother lived in Kachina Village since 1995 until her recent passing and they are now carrying on her love for the area. Jay is excited to serve his community by being a part of the Highlands Fire District Board and hopes to continue the high standards that the District is well known for.



**DIRCH FOREMAN**  
DIRECTOR

Dirch was appointed to the Fire Board in December 2021. It is his

passion to continue

serving the community after retiring as our Fire Chief in September 2021. Dirch and his family have been residents of Mountainaire since 1987 as well as a resident of the Flagstaff area since 1975. He graduated from Coconino High School and Northern Arizona University. Dirch brings a wide range of knowledge and experience in fire district management and operations to the Fire Board. Throughout his career, he has served on many Boards, Committees, and Advisory Groups. He continues to serve on the Board of the Arizona Fire Districts Association, he is a Board Member for the Eric Marsh Foundation for Wildland Firefighters, and most recently as a member of the HFD Fire Board. Dirch is also a member of the Northern Arizona Type 3 Incident Management Team, serving as the Team's Safety Officer, and most recently deployed to the Tunnel Fire. When not attending to board business or consulting with other local fire districts, Dirch enjoys outdoor sports, hiking, skiing, and working in his shop. He and his wife, Susan, travel frequently to Utah to visit family, especially their first Grandson.



**CARL NELSON**  
DIRECTOR

Carl was appointed to the Fire Board in December 2021. He

is very excited

to have the opportunity to serve the community and Highlands Fire District. Carl has lived in Mountainaire since 2012 with his wife and son. He was a wildland firefighter for around 15 seasons including five years as an employee of Pinewood Fire District. There he served as the Assistant Superintendent of Bear Jaw. For the past 5 years Carl has worked for American Conservation Experience (ACE), a national conservation corps, as their National Forestry Specialist. In his free time he likes to spend time mountain biking, hiking, and camping with his family.



# COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP

Bear Jaw, with the assistance of Coconino County Public Works, completed the collection and haul portion of the 2022 Bear Jaw Community Cleanup program as part of the NFPA Wildfire Community Preparedness Day. This included the design and implementation of an Incident Action Plan and use of the Incident Command System (ICS). The intent was to remove as much material from the home ignition zone to reduce the hazard to our citizens and first responders alike in the event of a catastrophic wildland fire. The dates are designed to capture the time before the annual fire season when the Bear Jaw Crew is at full staffing but before they are assigned to wildfires throughout the region.

This project would not be possible without the assistance of Arizona Public Service in the form of a \$5,000 Wildfire Preparedness Day Grant. Coconino County made available the use free of charge for the Willard Springs Transfer Station, supplied and set up notification boards, and mailed fliers. Both Highlands Fire District and Pinewood Fire District supplied additional personnel to assist in receiving bags.

Starting on April 25, 2022 and continuing through May 5, 2022, 20 personnel from Bear Jaw collected bags of pine needles and slash piles to haul to Willard Springs Transfer Station. This coordinated effort included the use of 5 separate vehicles and 5 trailers.

Over the course of the two weeks, the crew collected the following:

- 1,700 - Individual Parcels in Collection Area
- 1,514 - Total Acreage Area
- 17,100 - Individual Bags Removed
- 585 - Cubic Yards of Slash Removed
- 15,000 - Bags Distributed Free of Charge

The use of GPS data allowed the acquisition of precise location and amount of material in order to improve the program in the future while keeping costs at an absolute minimum.

This program is designed to reduce hazard in the Wildland Urban Interface in the most difficult fuels to mitigate. Due directly to the joint effort of our public and private partners we were able to create a safer community and reduce the risk to private property in the event of a catastrophic wildland fire in the Mountaineer and Kachina Village Subdivisions. We hope to seek further sponsorship and volunteers to support our program in the future as it expands.

This program recognized the need to remove as many bags on the street even though there was a 15-bag limit. The vast majority of residents abided by the rules set out for the protection of our employees. However, there were those that abused the program by adding dog waste, household trash, and rocks. This limits the effectiveness of the crew and puts the program at future risk. In addition to the Bear Jaw Community Cleanup program, Coconino County continues to accept green waste at Willard Springs free of charge on Fridays and Saturdays.

Our Special Thanks and Appreciation to Ron Hollaman, Coconino County Public Works; Janet Dean, Arizona Public Service; Lisa Frazier, Pinewood Sanitary District; Pinewood Property Owners Association; Agee's Bar-B-Que Market; Kota's Coffee House, and you.

*Thank you for making  
our community safer!*

## ANOTHER SEVERE FIRE SEASON

BY SHELBY ERICKSON  
CREW SUPERINTENDENT

Actions taken by property owners can reduce the risk they face from fire. Removal of smaller trees and raking of needle cast away from structures, has a big impact to survival. If you have questions about what you can do on your property to reduce your hazardous fuel loading, please call the Bear Jaw Interagency Fire and Fuels crew employed by Highlands Fire District and Pinewood Fire District at (928) 525-1717 to schedule a free Firewise assessment.

The Southwest Coordination Center Predictive Services has identified some notable points about our current situation: 1) The southwest region is experiencing "extreme" drought with areas of "exceptional" drought; and 2) The current drought is impacting heavier fuels region wide, which will impact new fires resistance to control.

Our drought conditioned fuel loading is concerning, however there has been hope with current monsoonal development. NOAA has indicated that our monsoons may be "Average to Above Average" which may start the southwest area towards a wetter trend and allow our new fires to be controlled easier than the conditions we have seen again this year.



Contact us at (928) 525-1717 to learn more about the specific actions you can take to reduce your risk. Find homeowner resources about wildfire safety and preparedness including videos, checklists, toolkits and more at [www.Firewise.org](http://www.Firewise.org) and [www.NFPA.org/wildfire](http://www.NFPA.org/wildfire).



## Highlands Fire District Residents,

Here to wish everyone a wonderful 4th of July.

Thank goodness that we can celebrate it.

Many of your firefighters here in Highlands have been out on the recent fires - Tunnel, Pipeline and Haywire - either defending structures or on the wildland side. They know how these fires behave and that is why they preach to you about making your properties Firewise. There is still a lot of work to do in your communities and it starts with you on your own property. Your Highlands Fire District can advise you on best practices. It is important to follow this advice as it will help you retain insurance for your home. Insurance companies are starting to reject coverage for homes that are not Firewise.

It has always been my hope that we continue to work on developing a program of urban forestry, now called "Resilient Communities." This approach is combining the efforts of our Fire Districts with the County and other agencies working together with private property owners to make their properties Firewise. We continue to work together with Highlands Fire District on developing this concept. I am a firm believer in incrementalism, and we have a good start. We must stay with this effort and continue to build on our successes.

The County will continue to work together with Highlands Fire District to keep your communities clean and Firewise, but we can't do it without you. The County will continue to keep Willard Springs open as a green waste site. We need you to bag your green waste and bring it to Willard Springs. We will continue the voucher program where once a year Mountaineer and Kachina Village residents can access the Cinder Lake Landfill to dump bulk items. We need you to use your voucher and haul off your bulk waste items. The County will continue to support the work of the Bear Jaw Fuels Reduction Crew and their Annual Spring Clean Up. They did a fantastic job back in April picking up many bags of pine needles and many piles of green waste throughout Mountaineer and Kachina Village.

The opportunity is here. Let's all work together to be proactive to protect our beautiful communities.

Have a Happy & Safe 4th of July... and thank your Highlands Fire District Crews for all they do!

Sincerely,

Matt Ryan, Coconino County Supervisor, District 3



Happy  
4th  
of July