

# Message from President Cook and Ryan Melin

November 26, 2024

Hello, everybody.

I'm here in Bismarck today at the fire hall with Ryan Melin, who's the fire management officer for the North Dakota Forest Service. We're going to discuss all the great work that you and your team have been doing to fight fires and wildfires across our state this last year.

But before we do that, tell me a little bit about yourself.

I'm Ryan Melin. Born and raised in North Dakota. Started with North Dakota Forest Service in 2007 as a seasonal wildland fire fighter, worked my way through the ranks. And then now fortunate to lead the wildland fire program for the state.

Wonderful. Thank you.

And so, what is the relationship between the North Dakota Forest Service and NDSU?

So, North Dakota Forest Service was founded in 1906 as a part of the School of Forestry in Bottineau and we were administratively aligned with NDSU in 1968, to support the land grant mission.

Okay.

And so, tell us a little bit about the wildfire situation in the state of North Dakota and how it impacted communities across the state.

Yeah.

So, you know, when we look at the numbers, we had about 700 fires reported so far this year for about 170,000 acres. And we average about 450 fires for about 18,000 acres.

So, a busy, busy year.

The thing that, that made it really busy is we burned about 120,000 of those acres in one day, so really, as we kind of move through September with record high temperatures, we started moving into a drought. October, we got into a fairly active weather pattern. And then I said October 5th came and some really some historic fire growth. So that was in October.

Here we are, you know, late November. It's going to be December. And fires are still burning.

And yeah, we so we still have some potential. You know, it's white out here in Bismarck and most of the north, it's white.

As we move east, it's white. But there's pockets still in the southwest North Dakota that didn't get a lot of snow. So, the one thing, you know, one misconception that a lot of people have is "just because it's cold, we can't have a wildfire".

Well, once we get that killing frost over and our grass goes dormant in the fall. There's no life dew moisture, so it's really readily to consume. So as long as that's standing above snow, it will burn. And, when you get a windy day like this, it'll burn quick.

Wow.

So how many of your teammates and colleagues there were out fighting fires this fall?

So, all of the full-time staff, so eight of our full-time staff were all engaged. And then we have one of our seasonals still on, for the year. So, we had nine firefighters out there. We had some firefighters up from the state of New Mexico, through an agreement that we have with New Mexico.

And then we had firefighters from the state of Washington that were over here. Also, they helped us. So, you know, at any given time, you know, the state was bringing, roughly, probably 35 or 40 individuals to each one of these fires and divvy them out as we could.

Yeah.

So, we sincerely, I mean this, we've had true heroes. You guys are heroes out there at the frontline doing this amazing work that we know is treacherous, very scary. And we thank you for what you're doing and what you've always been doing out here.

And so, it's really amazing. And I love the fact that we got Bison on the frontline doing this hard work.

So, tell me more about the different state agencies and the different agencies that you work with.

Yeah.

So, you know, North Dakota is all about partnerships, cooperation. That's the cool thing about our state. You know, our agency is one of the lead agencies when it comes to wildland fires. So when the state Emergency Operations Plan opens up, you know, us, the advocate general and Department of Emergency Services kind of form a unified command. And we start trying to get our arms around this and coordinate a response side of it.

And then a lot of the other agencies, North Dakota Game and Fish, North Dakota Parks and Rec, Civil Air Patrol, highway patrol, all these agencies start to come in and augment our staff and our equipment

You know, we flew with the Highway Patrol this year to do a lot of mapping of our fires. You know, we fly with Civil Air Patrol. The National Guard had helicopters out there. They had ground resources out there.

You know, we do a lot of prevention messaging. And then on the backside, you know, we talk a lot about response and response gets kind of, everyone likes wants to talk to the firefighters, but, a lot of the other state agencies that really come in Department of Ag like we talked about, our agency is really back on the backside of the recovery, which is which is probably more important sometimes.

And just getting your arms around is, is the technical and financial assistance for local landowners, businesses. They're taking probably some of these strategies.

Sincerely we appreciate what you guys do. Thank you for keeping our, our state safe.

You guys do it when nobody else is around paying any attention. What did you say? Two in the morning?

Yeah. What is it? The initial call came in about 1:30, but we're out by 2.

The fire doesn't care what time of day it is, but you guys are out there day in, day out. Year round.

We really appreciate it. Appreciate what you do. Certainly, appreciate how you're representing NDSU, but it's much bigger than that. And just appreciate what I said earlier. You guys are heroes. You really are.

Thank you for keeping North Dakota safe.

Thank you, and you're welcome.

All right.

We got to end like this. One, two, three.

Go, Bison. Go, bison!