

The American West Is Burning Without NAWAPA XXI

by Marcia Merry Baker

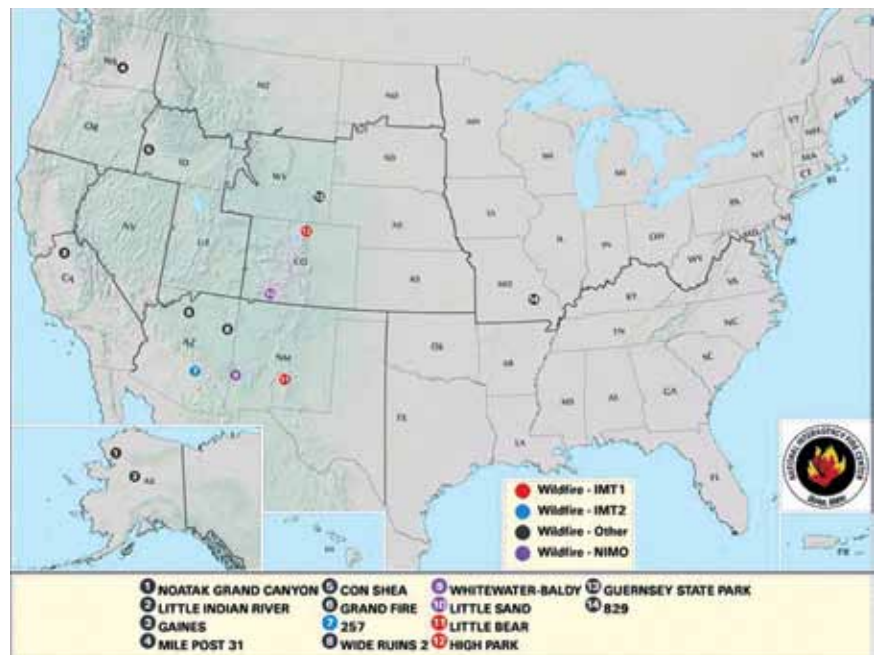
June 15—There are currently 22 large wildfires burning in nine U.S. states, with New Mexico and Colorado especially hard hit. This year, so far, some 1,459 square miles have burned nationwide—less than the same period in 2011, when 6,327 sq. mi. had burned by this time, but the significance is the mounting scale of devastation, year-on-year. Colorado reported its first fatality June 11; a woman was incinerated as her cabin burned down. In May, Gov. John Hickenlooper declared a state of emergency in Colorado.

By definition, worst hit for vulnerability to fires, from lack of humidity, are the western drylands and deserts—the very area which would be transformed by the new waters of NAWAPA XXI—the North American Water and Power Alliance updated for the 21st Century.

Figure 1 shows the states, locations, severity, and status of response to the fires. A “large” incident is defined as a wildland fire of 100 acres or more, occurring in forest; or a wildland fire of 300 acres or more, occurring in grass/sage. **Figure 2** shows the NAWAPA XXI routes of new and expanded waterways, lakes, and reservoirs. The necessity of NAWAPA XXI stands out.

In New Mexico, wildfire no. 15, the Whitewater-Baldy, is the largest on record in the state. In Colorado, wildfire no. 20, High Park, is one of the worst in the state’s history.

FIGURE 1
Current Large Wildfire Incidents
June 15, 2012



Source: National Interagency Wildfire Center, Boise, Idaho

Definition of Map Terms:

Large Incident: A wildfire of 100 acres or more occurring in timber, or a wildfire of 300 acres or more occurring in grass/sage.

Wildfire IMT1: Type 1 wildland fire, Incident Management Team Assigned;

Wildfire IMT2: Type 2 wildland fire, Incident Management Team Assigned;

Wildfire Other: Other Incident Management Team Assigned, besides Type 1 or 2.

The LaRouche Political Action Committee, on its website page for [NAWAPA XXI](#), specifically takes up the point, that the conditions giving rise to these fires can be ended. A May 30 posting, titled, “Largest New Mexico Wildfire Unavoidable?” presents Google Earth images with the addition of the NAWAPA XXI reservoirs planned for the western part of the New Mexico, in the lower Colorado River Basin, in which the mon-

FIGURE 2
NAWAPA XXI



Source: NAWAPA XXI, LaRouchePAC Special Report, March 2012

ster fire in the Gila National Forest is still raging (435 sq. mi. of forest burned to date). The record-size fire was only 50% contained as of June 13, according to Federal officials. This fire, “already the largest wildfire in the state’s history, would have been a mere spark, if the NAWAPA XXI project, as proposed today, were already built,” states LPAC.

In the *NAWAPA XXI* LaRouchePAC Special Report (March 2012), the list of new or expanded reservoirs for the Southwestern six states is given, with specifications for elevation and storage capacity. “A total of 32 reservoirs will be created throughout the Southwest, creating a total of 233 MAF [million acre feet]

of storage capacity. The open bodies of water will add sufficient moisture to their surrounding vegetation to alter evapotranspiration, and in combination with land cover changes, will change local climate, and initiate new precipitation trends or accelerate existing ones.”

The list of states, and number of reservoirs given: Colorado (2), New Mexico (5), Utah (6), Nevada (2), Arizona (14), California (3).

Obama: Go-Slow to Firefighting

In opposition to the NAWAPA XXI biosphere-shaping perspective, the Obama Administration is lying, and even insisting that it has sufficient resources to deal with the current emergency; it also asserts that, in any case, today’s problem stems from—besides vagaries of weather—decades of fighting forest fires, rather than letting the fires burn and run their course freely!

Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, as of June 11, said that his agency will use its authority to transfer funds from other accounts to meet the escalating

firefighting costs—an impossible shell game, since every worthwhile agency is underfunded.

The National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, has been under de facto orders to go slow and follow the letter-of-the-law, not to call in full military firefighting force, until it is first demonstrated that its own national fleet and resources are fully deployed.

States and localities are scrambling. Arizona has sent 15 fire-trucks and two water-tenders to New Mexico. One C-130 military transport plane is in use.

Colorado’s Congressional delegation appealed in a letter to Obama this Spring, that he sign legislation to

contract to lease more air tankers for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. There should be seven additional large air tankers leased fast, according to Sen. Mark Udall (D-Colo.). One crashed recently in Utah.

The Forest Service has only 11 tankers, plus two on loan from Canada, for only 13 nationwide. Ten years ago, the Forest Service had 44 air tankers!

On June 11, Forest Service officials announced that they would contract for more aerial force, including likely four more air tankers from Canada and one from Alaska. Finally, on June 13, Obama signed a bill to add seven large tanker planes. But the earliest any of these are expected is mid-August.

Obama Administration officials in charge held a nationwide conference call April 26, on this year's wildfire prospects, admitting the worsening situation, but downplaying the lack of resources. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack acknowledged at the time that the Forest Service air tanker fleet is "aged and few."

Calling the fleet "Korea War-era" aircraft, a reporter from the *Missoulian* (Missoula, Mont.) asked why this inadequacy continues. Chief Tidwell defensively responded that he has put out requests for proposals to contractors, to bid on supplying newer craft. There is an intent to acquire ten additional craft next year. And pilots are being given refresher training in the Air National Guard and Air National Reserves to be ready.

Now there are emergency situations at multiple points, with the season still young. Veteran firefighters say that the U.S. should have a national fleet of 50 modern aircraft, large and small. Air tankers need to respond within half an hour to new fires, to slow them down, while on-the-ground forces can put them out. This capability no longer exists, at a time when the fire-prone conditions are extensive and severe.

Warnings, Lack of Resources

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Weather Service, and other agencies forecast the continued likelihood of fire-prone conditions this year. On March 15, NOAA released its annual "Spring Outlook" for 2012 expected weather patterns, in which the incidence of extremes—drought and high temperatures—raised concerns about problem impacts.

This year's unusually warm Winter was a main fea-

ture of attention at the mid-March phone-forum. The snowpack in the Rocky Mountains was much reduced, which averted a repeat of the huge flooding in the Missouri Basin, but the reduced snowmelt has hurt the Colorado Basin.

Drought of "historic magnitude" was the description offered for West Texas and New Mexico, which in March saw their 52nd consecutive week of what is categorized as "severe, extreme or exceptional" aridity. The year 2011 was the worst one-year drought in Texas' history. In New Mexico, 66% of the state was in extreme water shortage this Spring. Arizona likewise. The reservoir levels are below the danger level.

The context for understanding these patterns, lies in the conditions in the Solar System and galaxy, inclusive of apparently proximate factors, such as the shifts in the Arctic Oscillation.

The inference to be drawn, is that greatly enhanced resources are in order for NOAA and sister agencies at NASA, for the Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Geological Survey, et al., to have the means to carry out tasks of satellite and other monitoring, and protective action. For example, an Active Fire Mapping program is carried out by the Remote Sensing Applications Center (RSAC), run by the Forest Service, in Salt Lake City, Utah. The RSAC conducts near real-time detection and characterization of wildland fire conditions throughout the United States, including Hawaii, and Canada.

However, under the Obama/Republican reign, resources are being gutted, not expanded. The National Weather Service is proposed to have a 6.2% budget cut for FY 2013, down to \$872 million; NOAA is to have a 1.31% increase to \$5.18 billion, but not enough to maintain weather satellite programs as required; and the Army Corps of Engineers (which works with the National Weather Service) is cut down to \$4.73 billion for FY 2013, down from the paltry \$5.002 billion in 2012.

The Obama Administration has cut the Wildland Fire Management budget itself, from \$2.168 billion enacted for FY 2011, down to \$1.975 billion enacted for FY 2012, down to \$1.972 billion proposed by the White House for FY 2013.

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