

NFFE News



Commemorating the Mann Gulch Fire 75 Years Later

August 5, 2024

Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) commemorates the 75th anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire, a catastrophe which drastically altered how the U.S. Forest Service handles wildfire suppression.

On August 5, 1949 dry lightning and high temperatures created a forest fire in the Gates of the Mountains Wild Area on the Helena National Forest in Montana. 15 smokejumpers and one fire guard who responded to the fire were overtaken by the flames, unaware of wind shifts and fuel changes below them, forcing them to flee uphill. A firestorm ensued, burning thousands of acres in minutes, taking the lives of 13 of the men. It remains the single deadliest event in smokejumper history.

The Mann Gulch Fire served as a catalyst for wildfire safety and research. The Forest Service implemented new fire trainings and safety measures, most notably the Ten Standard Firefighting Orders. Fire research also became a priority with the creation of the Northern Forest Fire Laboratory, now called the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory, that opened in Missoula in 1960.

“75 years after this tragic event, our union honors the 13 men who perished in the Mann Gulch Fire,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “Their legacies live on through all the brave men and women who serve our country as smokejumpers and wildland firefighters. The Mann Gulch Fire is a reminder of the fatal risks that wildland firefighters face in the line of duty while protecting our communities from forest fires. We commemorate the sacrifice of those who lost their lives that day, and we recognize the service of every wildland firefighter, past and present.”

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