In 2018 California's wildfires demonstrated some of the fastest moving fire behavior and destructive capability ever seen. This year, Travis AFB took another step to securing the installation and surrounding communities from the threat of wildland fire by partnering with the Air Force Wildland Fire Branch (AFWFB) to complete critical hazardous fuels reduction—this time using prescribed fire to mitigate the threat of a wildfire.

Last month the AFWFB worked with Travis AFB Fire and Emergency Services (FES), state and local government agencies to approve and complete a prescribed burn on Travis AFB to protect critical infrastructure that is vulnerable to wildfire. While the burns achieved multiple objectives, the top objective was ensuring the protection of an on-installation radar facility near the fence line in an area that is commonly at risk for wildfires.

Travis AFB is vulnerable to wildfires on the installation due to the grass and shrub fuel types on and surrounding the installation. These fuel types, when combined with the area's naturally occurring strong wind events as well as hot and dry periods common to northern California can produce fast moving, intense wildland fires that have potential to damage infrastructure and interrupt the installation's mission. As recent as last year, during California's historically active wildland fire season, a large wildland fire burned across the installation and surrounding private property.

The prescribed burn was a new beginning for Travis AFB who is now working with AFWFB staff to complete hazardous fuel reduction using prescribed fire as a risk mitigation tool. This burn was only possible due to the proactive relationships built with state and local regulatory agencies and districts. Travis AFB FES Chief spokesman said that “the combined coordination efforts of the Vandenberg and Beale Teams were key to a successful burn. The friendship extended by the Vandenberg Team under Mark Nunez to the Travis FES and Suisun District firefighters made it a most memorable experience and some of the best wildland fire training we've had this year.”

Through the process to complete this burn, a prescribed fire burn and smoke management plan were prepared, reviewed and approved. Smoke management is the most regulated part of this process and the California Air Resources Board reviewed and approved the plan through the California Prescribed Fire Incident reporting System. Additional coordination between the Travis FES Chief and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District allowed for utilization of local knowledge in the smoke management and prescribed fire plans.

The prescribed burn eliminated hazardous fuels directly adjacent to the radar facility site, across natural areas to the fence and downwind in the prevailing wind direction to a distance that eliminates any potential threat from wildfire.
AFWFB Organization

Headquartered at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), the AFWFB oversees three regions across the continental U.S. and Alaska. Each region is led by a Regional Fire Management Officer (RFMO) and Assistant Fire Management Officer (AFMO). Installations in the regions are grouped into areas of responsibility (AOR) and each AOR is served by a Wildland Support Module (WSM) under the direction of a WSM Lead who works with installations in their AOR to identify requirements and execute projects.

Fire Operations Support

The AFWFB provides support to Air Force installations for planning and execution of prescribed fires and mechanical fuel reduction projects. The AFWFB collaborates with installation natural resources and environmental staff on the development of Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs), Wildland Fire Management Plans (WFMPs), and individual projects including prescribed fire burn plans.

The highly qualified staff is also available to support wildfire suppression efforts in conjunction with installation FES and mutual aid partners.

Training and Certification

The AFWFB has adopted National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards to facilitate effective collaboration with partner agencies. The AFWFB partners with the U.S. Army to provide classroom training and field instruction in planning and conducting prescribed fire and wildland fire suppression operations.

Certifications are tracked in the National Interagency Fire Center’s Incident Qualifications and Certification System.

Partnerships

Interagency partnerships provide the AFWFB with the highest level of expertise in the wildland fire field, and are key to its success. Currently, partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Colorado State University (CSU), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and University of Montana (UM).

Fire Reporting and Analysis

The AFWFB collects and analyzes data on wildland fires to adopt and deploy the best fire management practices and to prioritize fire management actions through the Fire Decision Support System (FireDSS). FireDSS accepts and records data from multiple contributors on wildfires, prescribed burns, and mechanical fuel treatments and supports trend analysis.

For More Information visit the program’s eDash page at https://cs2.eis.af.mil/sites/10622/WFMWS/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/

AFWFB REGIONS AND WILDLAND SUPPORT MODULES