



Innovation summary:

In 2006, Gila County purchased water dip tanks, pumpkin tanks, and military bladders for wildfire suppression within the “Rim Country”. The innovation was to locate water tanks and bladders around the 298,000 acres of the US Tonto Forest for helicopter and emergency fire truck usage. This is an on going project and was utilized in 2007 and the County is ready for the 2008 fire season.

Program description:

Gila County’s innovative program addresses the need for new approaches to wildfire protection as a result of the nine years of drought. The lack of rainfall led to a bark beetle infestation which devastated the ponderosa pine forest and further underscored the necessity for a serious revamping of the conventional methods of dry land forest management.

In Gila County, there are 88 defined communities and 30,000 residents within 9 fire districts, all of which rank as significantly threatened by the accumulated fuels in the surrounding forest. Not only are human communities at risk, but the futures of the wildlife, watersheds and the forests themselves lie in the balance. This geographical area within Gila County is know as the “Rim County”, and is bounded by the 25,000 acre Dude Fire of 1990, the 467,000 acre Rodeo-

Chediski Fire of 2002, the 119,500 acre Willow Fire of 2004, and the 243,950 acre Care Creek Complex Fire of 2005.

The devastation of the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire, in Navajo County, caused Gila County officials to quickly realize that 70% of the entire County's assessed valuation is in imminent fire danger and something innovative had to be done to prevent a tragedy from happening here also.

In 2006, the 4,200 acre February Fire spurred Gila County to facilitate a series of meetings with local fire chiefs and everyone who could be impacted by a catastrophic wildfire. Various agencies started talking to each other and started to understand each other's point of view. A level of cooperation that never existed before became evident when:

- Gaps in radio communications were revealed and rectified to allow communications between the County and Firefighters.
- Non-fire personnel were given basic training,
- Adaptors were purchased to allow County tankers to quickly connect with fire trucks to be ready to move water.
- Sites for water sources (tanks and bladders) were identified for quick set up to fill fire trucks and other tankers.

The innovation of this program is the ability to provide water sites for helicopters and emergency fire trucks, where none would normally be available. The dip tanks hold approximately 5,000 gallons and bladders (pillow tanks) are approximately 20,000 gallons. A type 1 helicopter can carry up to 2000 gallons/load, a type 2 helicopter can carry up to 400 gallons/load, and a type 3 helicopter can carry up to 180 gallons/load.

Thirty (30) Heli-dip sites have been established. On seven of the thirty (30) sites where no water sources existed to supply these dip tanks, surplus military bladders (pillow tanks), were purchased, installed, and filled by Gila County.

The County purchased and relocated a 300,000 gallon water tank to the Buckhead Mesa Landfill so that a slurry batch plant could be placed and operated there when needed.

The County also purchased four (4) portable 6,000 gallon pumpkin tanks, which can be set up even closer to the fire scene to extend firefighting operations. The helicopter can dip into these pumpkin tanks and execute a quick aerial attack on any fire.

Evidence of the most significant achievements of the program or initiative:

At the beginning of the 2006 fire season, Gila County was rated one of the most, if not **the most**, at risk areas for "catastrophic wildfire" within the western United States. Gila County experienced over 100 fire-starts in the 2006 fire season, eighteen of which were classified as "catastrophic potential" by the United States Forest Service.

On May 26, 2006 the dip sites were tested for the first time. A wildfire started and numerous units were dispatched, including Helicopter 323. The helicopter crew has just familiarized itself with the dip sites locations a few days earlier. They headed to the dip site immediately and made four (4) trips back and forth to the fire, knocking down the blaze allowing ground crews to control it at .3 of an acre, preventing a catastrophic wildfire.

Due to the innovative achievements of this program only one fire burned 150 acres while the remaining fire-starts were held at 8 acres or less. Providing water dip sites for helicopters and emergency fire trucks, where there would normally be none, has made Gila County “Rim Country” profoundly more fire-proof going into the 2007 fire season.

Per Mr. Don Nunley, Fuels Specialists for the Payson Ranger District, during the 2007 fire season, the dip tanks were used by helicopters to help fight wildfires during the extreme part of the fire season. The fire fighters were successful in initial attack on these fires due to the close proximity of the tanks to the locations of the fires.



