

# UNUSUAL HEROES

## Why America Is Losing The War On Wildfire

by Stephen M. Scanlon

(NAPSA)—Every year, uncontrollable wildfires ravage the American West, and every year armies of firefighters mobilize to save threatened wilderness and communities. NOVA and PBS air “Fire Wars,” a two-hour television special Tuesday, May 7, 2002 that looks at the science behind how wildfires are fought and at some of the men and women on the front lines.

“Fire Wars” follows the Arrowhead Hotshots—one of 65 elite fire-fighting crews in the U.S. who take on the most dangerous wildfire assignments—during the summer of 2000, one of the most destructive wildfire seasons on record. That summer an estimated 8.4 million acres were burned and 1.8 billion dollars were spent to fight those fires with untold lives and property lost.

The Hotshots and NOVA started the summer at the tragedy in Los Alamos, New Mexico, when a prescribed fire spread out of control. This fire forced the evacuation of 20,000 people, destroyed hundreds of homes, and threatened the nation’s premier nuclear lab. NOVA’s cameras were also there when the Hotshots worked on the biggest fire of the season in Clear Creek, California. This fire burned for almost two months and at one point destroyed 20,000 acres in just three hours. “Fire Wars” also includes scenes filmed by the Hotshots when they were trapped and surrounded by a crown fire that sent swirling tornadoes of flame into the California sky.

NOVA looks back on the war on wildfire from the devastating fire season of 1910, when millions of acres of the northern Rockies burned, entire towns were destroyed, and scores of firefighters died. Determined not to suffer another such tragedy, government



**Technology and manpower have provided improved weapons to battle wildfires.**

officials adopted a policy of 100-percent fire suppression.

In recent decades, land managers and ecologists have begun to recognize that fire suppression can also be a problem. Many of our most cherished landscapes—from the majestic sequoias to the marshy landscape of the Everglades—depend on fire to recycle nutrients and maintain healthy ecosystems.

Today, 80 percent of wildfires are ignited by humans, but the fires that destroy the most acreage are almost always caused by lightning storms.

To protect home and property from wildfire, The United States Forest Service offers these key tips:

- Clear roof surfaces and gutters regularly to avoid buildup of flammable materials.
- Store gasoline in an approved safety can, away from occupied buildings.
- Have fire tools handy, such as: ladder long enough to reach your roof, shovel, rake and a bucket or two for water.
- Make sure your family knows all emergency exits from your home.

To learn more, visit [www.pbs.org/nova/fire](http://www.pbs.org/nova/fire).