International Association of Wildland Fire

Early Career Award in Fire Operations

2017 Recipient
Dr. Sara Brown, US Forest Service

Dr. Sara Brown earned a B.S. and M.S. in Environmental Science and earned a Ph.D. in 2011 in Ecology with a specialty in fire ecology. She worked in operational fire management as a smokejumper, Hot Shot and Type 2 firefighting crew member, and Helitack crew member in suppression, large scale prescribed burning, fire monitoring, and implementation of managing fires for resource benefits.

After completing her Ph.D., she served as an Assistant Professor and Student Advisor at New Mexico Highlands University, and as a Co-Principal Investigator, Southwest Fire Consortium. Her most recent position is with the US Forest Service Office of Innovation and Organizational Learning where she assists in improving understanding of how risk perceptions can be leveraged into increased margin for firefighters as they negotiate a complex work environment.

Sara is a promising young early-career professional who is demonstrating outstanding ability and dedication in wildland fire management. Her work experience, involvement, and accomplishments to date cross the entire breadth of wildland fire management, from seasonal firefighting, earning a Ph.D., serving as a teacher and researcher, conducting outreach, to working in a ground-breaking program to provide direct support to field operations. This work will improve the way organizations learn, and how learning can improve conditions for firefighters in complex wildfire adaptive systems.

She influences people, outcomes, and is changing the face of wildland fire management. Her work is setting a foundation for meaningful, and hopefully life-saving learning from successes and failures in the firefighting system.

Sara has accomplished much in her career to date. She is a leader and strong role model for women in wildland fire management. She has successfully served in an area where few women are found. She completed 87 successful jumps as a smokejumper. She received the prestigious National Smokejumper Courage Award, given by the National Smokejumper Association for her work as a smokejumper. The award is a major honor among smokejumpers, the equivalent of a purple heart, and a decoration by leaders and peers in the wildland fire management discipline.

Other notable accomplishments include:
- Assisted in the development of a wildland fire management concentration program of study at New Mexico Highlands University, including teaching (10 classes), academic and research advising (over 30 students), committee participation, and publishing relevant publications (12).
- Received academic award recognition 12 times,
- Completed a two year National Science Foundation program in pedagogy where she gained knowledge and experience in how people learn, how to facilitate learning, backward course design, and how to facilitate active learning, and
- Instructed eight federal government incident command system fire management training courses.
- Assisted in the preparation and communication for wildland fire lessons learned reviews, including the Twisp River Final Learning Review Narrative and Twisp River Operational and Organizational Learning Report.

Sara will be presented with her award at the IAWF Awards Dinner in Boise, ID in October.

2018 Recipient
Forest Schaffer, Forester, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District

Forest Schaffer professional experience includes:
- Fire District Forester 2008-Present: Developed and implemented WUI fire mitigation plans; Obtained and managed grant funds to implement plans; Coordinated WUI education programs, defensible space inspections and interagency fuel reduction activities.
- Fuel Management Specialist 2007-2008: Created and established the district's prescribed fire effectiveness monitoring plan; Assisted in prescribed fire planning and operations; Developed Geographic Information System (GIS) database to track the fire district's fuel management treatments.
- Squad Leader/Wildland Firefighter 2003-2006: Served as a firefighter on a Type 2-1A hand crew; Managed a team of wildland firefighters in fire suppression operations and fuel reduction projects.

Forest's professional accomplishments include:
- Elected by his peers and currently serving as Incident Commander of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, an organization which coordinates fuel reduction, fire prevention

and community engagement for 18 local, state and federal entities in the Lake Tahoe Basin (See: http://tahoe.livingwithfire.info/tahoe-fire-fuels-team/).

- Appointed Project Manager and Lead Editor of the Lake Tahoe Basin Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The scale of this project was immense involving the coordination of seven fire protection districts, Nevada Division of Forestry, CAL FIRE, US Forest Service and other entities. (See: http://tahoe.livingwithfire.info/tahoe-fire-fuels-team/)
- Appointed and serving as Chair of the Nevada Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy – Fire Adapted Community Sub-committee and authored the group's goals and objectives document.
- Manages financial and programmatic elements of federal and non-federal grants from multiple sources.
- Fulfills a critical role as a Certified Archaeological Surveyor (i.e., necessary for environmental clearances for certain fuel treatment projects).
- Conducts fuel treatment project environmental analysis and obtains all permits required for implementation.
- Serves as GIS Specialist for the Sierra Front Type 3 Incident Management Team.
- Appointed Network Leader for the Tahoe hub of the national Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network.
- Spearheaded procurement of $30 million for "Projects to Reduce Wildfires in the Reno/Tahoe Area" via funding from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act for 2017 through 2021.
- Coordinated GIS data collection for project accomplishments for the Lake Tahoe Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy.
- Participated in the development of the 2013 Northern Nevada amendments to the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code.
- Managed data collection, conducted analyses, and compiled maps and reports for the fire district's ISO Public Protection Classification review.

Elwood Miller, Ph. D. and Coordinator of the Nevada Network of Fire Adapted Communities, described Forest's worthiness to receive the Early Career for Fire Operations Award by stating "In my fifty plus years as a forester, educator and administrator I have encountered many individuals that self-identify as a professional. These people divide into three groups; those that set the bar low and perform accordingly, those that set the bar high and deserve the respect accorded to professional performance, and finally those rare individuals who excel and establish a standard of excellence that defines the true meaning of the word professional. Forest Schafer is a member of the third group in every aspect of his service and extraordinarily productive career. The respect any award garners is directly related to the caliber of the recipients who receive it. Presenting this award to Forest Schafer would not only maintain but elevate the standard by which this honor is evaluated. I urge those individuals reviewing candidate nominations to seriously consider Forest Shafer as this year's award recipient."

2019 Recipient
Kelsy Gibos

IAWF is proud to announce that the 2019 recipient of the IAWF Early Career in Fire Operations Award is Kelsy Gibos. Kelsy started her fire career with ENSIS in New Zealand working as a fire behaviour researcher with a focus on fuel inventory and experimental burning. She then returned to Canada, working in Alberta on operational research topics such as technical evaluation of equipment and suppression methods, and experimental burning and fuel measurement. During this time she completed a Masters of Science in Forestry (emphasis on Fire Behaviour) and worked on a pre-formed incident management team as a fire behaviour analyst. Her FBAN work has been highly praised by her peers.

She then went to Australia and spent four years working with the Victorian DSE and CFA where she was involved with research on Black Saturday fire behaviour, as well as firefighter and fire behaviour analyst operational response work. After that, she returned to Alberta working as a Wildfire Management Specialist. Recently Kelsy served as a training specialist at the Hinton Training Centre (Canada).

Her mix of operational and research experience has given Kelsy unique tools to drive her high impact work. She made significant contributions toward developing an innovative Bushfire Predictive Services strategy for the state of Victoria (Australia). Key to the success of this work was how Kelsy was able to successfully liaise with a wide range of wildfire-related personnel and find ways to embed the best science into decision making.

She has also been actively developing and sharing her knowledge through fire behaviour research. She's authored or co-authored of a number of peer-reviewed papers focusing on rotary-wing thermal infrared service delivery, protecting wildland firefighters from smoke exposure, exploratory research into the existence of "humidity domes" created by wildfire sprinklers, reconstructing the spread and behaviour of the February 2009 Victorian Fires, and relationships between severe landscape dryness and large destructive fires in Victoria. Kelsy continually shares information and helps people make and maintain connections. She has been a strong supporter of the IAWF Students of Fire concept, regularly promoting the concept and providing information for her peers. She's also participated in conferences and workshops around the world, including helping organise the IAWF Fire Behaviour and Fuels conference in Portland, and IAWF Safety Summit / Human Dimensions Conference North Carolina.

Kelsy is a highly productive and respected young specialist in wildland fire management throughout numerous countries. She's made outstanding contributions and demonstrated leadership in the community and is incredibly deserving of recognition by IAWF with the Early Career Award in Fire Operations.