

NFFE News



NFFE Forest Service Members Volunteer and Deploy to Help Australia Fight Wildland Fires

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Shortly after Christmas, U.S. Forest Service employee and NFFE Local 2086 member Brian Stearns received the call to deploy to Australia to assist overwhelmed firefighters who are fighting one of the worst wildland fires to ever hit the continent. Brian didn't have to go. He wanted to go.

A few days later, Brian forfeited the rest of his holiday season with his wife and two children and put himself on a plane that was heading half way around the globe. His deployment is part of an international agreement that the U.S. has with several other nations to provide assistance for large disasters, such as the devastating fires that are sweeping across Australia.



U.S. Forest Service firefighter and NFFE member Brian Stearns working on site in Australia with a new friend.

The U.S. is both recipient and donor to the agreement, this time providing expertise on the ground in the Australian continent. Brian takes his 20 years of experience as a heavy equipment operator to serve as a Task Force Leader commanding resources and other firefighters while literally in the heat of the action.

"I'm not surprised Brian accepted this assignment," stated Andy Vanderheuel, president of Local 2086. "Brian is a solid person with a great heart. He loves helping others. No doubt he is doing a great job for the Australians."

Brian is not alone on his deployment. NFFE Local 1650 president Jonathan Merager of San Fernando, CA is also serving somewhere on the Australian fire line, providing his expertise and leadership gained from a career as a U.S. Forest Service worker and firefighter.

"We are exceptionally proud of our NFFE colleagues who volunteer for these kinds of dangerous and physically taxing assignments to help others in another part of the world," stated NFFE National President Randy Erwin. "People like Brian and Jonathan represent the very best in all of us — as union members and as federal workers. Their selfless efforts should be applauded by us all. We pray that they stay safe and come home soon."

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