# *DNR firefighter Albert Kassel receives Pacific Northwest Excellence in Dispatching Award for 2008*

**Local News**

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Posted on : March 17, 2009 at 12:02 pm

OLYMPIA - Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark announced today that Albert Kassel, manager of the Emergency Coordination Center of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been named to top honors by the Northwest Wildfire Coordination Center."To achieve such recognition after only two years in the position is a testament to Albert's leadership, dedication, and stellar performance at DNR, in the region, and nationally," said Goldmark, congratulating Kassel on behalf of the department.

Joe Shramek, currently Acting Resource Protection Division Manager, and Kassel's supervisor until January of this year, added his congratulations. "Albert is an outstanding example of everything I look for in a DNR firefighter. This award reflects commitment above and beyond; taking initiative to identify and resolve problems, to take care of staff and other DNR firefighters, and to work effectively with DNR's firefighting partner agencies."Kassel came to work for DNR as a seasonal firefighter in June of 1990, while still in high school. In 1998, he graduated from Washington State University with a degree in Natural Resources Sciences, and joined DNR as a Forester 1. "I am truly honored," said Kassel, noting the irony that he had nominated a colleague for the award.Gerry A. Day, Manager of the Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Center which includes Washington and Oregon, submitted the nomination, which will now be entered for the national award. The agencies of the center are: DNR, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Patrol, and Oregon Department of Forestry.Day cited professional excellence in technical performance, contribution to regional initiatives, and participation in the national efforts in Northern and Southern California during the past year. In addition, Day listed personal characteristics among Kassel's winning attributes, such as, positive attitude, customer service, persistence, determination, and follow-through. In the nomination letter, Day wrote: *"Albert sets himself apart from the pack by accepting challenges and making a personal commitment to seeing something through to completion. The staff at NWCC frequently remarked during the fire season that Albert was always available to solve a problem, answer a question or make a call to ensure a necessary action was executed. In one particular instance I phoned Albert and caught him with his kids in the car at the grocery store. It was a critical call with essential information that was needed by folks in northern California. He took the necessary action and later checked in to make sure the job was completed."*Kassel describes his job as "moving our resources and allocating them to the best of my ability to support our DNR regions and our partner agencies." He finds his work deeply satisfying, and credits the family atmosphere of teamwork and respect with the success for which he is being recognized.**DNR's wildfire mission**DNR is responsible for preventing and fighting wildfires on 12.7 million acres of private and state-owned forestland. DNR is the state's largest on-call fire department, with hundreds of people trained and available to be dispatched to fires when needed. During fire season, this includes several hundred DNR employees who have other permanent jobs with the agency, about 375 seasonal workers, and about 500 Department of Corrections' inmates who also participate in suppressing wildfires. DNR also participates in Washington's interagency approach to wildland firefighting and relies on private sector contractors for

certain firefighting resources. Peter Goldmark is the 13th Commissioner of Public Lands since statehood in 1889, and the first from Eastern Washington.