



# 2015 Fire Line Officer Team Award Nomination



**\*\*This nomination cover form is required for all 2015 LOT Award Nominations. All fields on the form must be completed for the nomination application to be considered. Nominations are due by **March 24, 2016.****

**Award Category:** *Please check the box that corresponds to the award category for which this nomination is being submitted. Please check ONE box only; if you wish to nominate the individual/group for more than one category, a separate nomination packet must be submitted for each category.*

- Excellence in Line Officer Commitment to Firefighter & Public Safety
- Excellence in Line Officer Commitment to Restoration of Fire Adapted Ecosystems
- Excellence in Line Officer Commitment to Partnership Efforts in Fire Management
- Excellence in Line Officer Commitment to Building a Workforce for the Future

**Nominee Information:** *Please fill out the information below for the individual/group being nominated.*

Type of nomination:  Group  Individual

Nominee Name/Group Name: Michael Munoz, District Ranger, Rocky Mountain Ranger District \_\_\_\_\_

Address: 1102 Main Street NW \_\_\_\_\_

City: Choteau \_\_\_\_\_ State: MT \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: 59422 \_\_\_\_\_

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Nominee's Supervisor: William Avey \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor Phone: 406-495-3712 \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor's Signature:** *William Avey* **Date:** 3/16/16

District Ranger Michael A. Munoz (Mike) has demonstrated prolonged courage in his steadfast commitment to both restore the health of fire-adapted ecosystems and prioritize safety in all of his risk management decisions. During his 16 year tenure as the Rocky Mountain District Ranger, Mike has been instrumental in managing fire appropriately on the district. The Rocky Mountain Ranger District is composed largely of the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wildernesses, as well as significant portions of other pristine backcountry areas, like the tribally significant Badger-Two Medicine Area.

Mike has championed early, in spite of great local resistance, appropriately managing fire in the wilderness and, when possible, in some additional adjacent areas. Through his personal commitment and stalwart support, today, much of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District has reached an ecological condition where fires are largely self-limiting as to size and intensity. In addition, due to his personal efforts at community engagement and courageous decisions, today the surrounding communities and forest constituencies support managing fire on the landscape.

In 2013 the Rocky Mountain Ranger District successfully managed the long-term Red Shale Fire, which was the first “second-entry” fire within the 1988 footprint of large fires in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. This fire performed exactly the way all the research indicated it would, with a 25-40 year re-entry of beneficial second fires to finish the ecological work accomplished by the first entry. Along with those ecological benefits, the Red Shale Fire successfully cleaned up much of the “bones” of the 1988 Gates Park Fire, and made the area much more accessible for wilderness users and hunters. Ultimately, Mike capitalized on the success of the Red Shale fire management by using it as a “teachable moment” to build integrated support from forest users, like outfitters/guides, on the managed-fire strategy.

But perhaps the largest indication of success in Mike’s commitment to the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems occurred during the 2015 fire season. The Rocky Mountain Ranger District balanced a considerable number and wide spectrum of fire management strategies, ranging from direct perimeter control on the Benchmark fire that was adjacent to many values at risk, to the Moose Creek and Sheep Mountain fires’ long-term wilderness management strategies. The public support for the multiple fire management strategies was predicated both on Mike’s history of successful fire management leadership as well as his advocating for the fuels reduction/wildlife habitat improvement project in the heavily-developed Benchmark drainage. This project, which includes mechanical harvest and thinning around summer homes, campgrounds and lodges, was successful because Mike built a diverse constituency to support it, including both the timber industry and the Montana Wilderness Association. Through Mike’s consistent guidance and open communication, supporters recognized the integrated connectivity of this project and the need to restore the Benchmark drainage to a more resilient ecological state in order to successfully manage fire in the adjacent wilderness.

However, the most complex fire situation managed by Mike during the 2015 fire season was the 55,000 acre Family Peak Complex. This fire was managed in the non-wilderness Badger Two Medicine area, and was the first large fire managed in this area. The coordination with the Blackfeet Nation, the USDI BIA, the Montana DNRC and Glacier, Pondera and Teton Counties was simply outstanding. All of these entities supported the decision and the strategy developed to manage this fire on the landscape, and all supported the need for ecological change as well as ensuring that firefighters were not placed in harms’ way. The Blackfeet Nation, in particular, was strongly supportive of the fire strategy even when the fire left the National Forest and entered upon the Blackfeet Reservation. This type of support by a neighbor, which in the past has not always been supportive of managed fire, is the ultimate measure of Mike’s success in restoring fire’s natural role, and the acceptance of its’ role on this landscape. Because of this, District Ranger Mike Munoz deserves the 2016 Fire Line Officer Team Award for Commitment to Restoration of a Fire Adapted Ecosystem.