



Wildfires then, Wildfires now.

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Yes, It Really Has Been Ten Years Since the Schultz Fire!

The Inner Basin has provided clean, great-tasting water to Flagstaff since 1898, through a pipeline traveling down the San Francisco Peaks to the Reservoir Filtration Plant (RFP) at Elden Lookout and Schultz Pass road. Spring water from the Inner Basin is captured from infiltration galleries underground. Inner Basin Spring water can provide 20% of Flagstaff's peak day water supply during summer months, with seasonal flows totaling as much as 100 million gallons in a year. Ironically, one of the storage reservoirs at the RFP served as a critical water source to fight fire on the mountain where the springs originate, for both Schultz and more-recently, the Museum Fire in 2019 using helicopter bucket-drops.



A helicopter dips a brandy bucket into the 50 million-gallon North Reservoir to aid in Museum Fire relief efforts.

The Schultz Fire began on June 20, 2010, followed by an extreme monsoon storm, ultimately damaging the mountainside and pipeline.

These events changed the way officials manage fire and flood threats in Flagstaff. An amazing collaborative effort between City, County, US Forest Service, state and federal agencies resulted in a design-build plan completed in a little over two years. It was no easy task, rebuilding roads and pipelines in challenging terrain, moving portions of the pipeline out of designated wilderness area with support from Arizona Department of Emergency Management Agency (ADEMA) and its federal counterpart, FEMA. Read about the pipeline reconstruction and relocation [here](#).

Lessons Learned

The Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project was created and funded through a voter-approved bond, as a result of this heightened fire-threat awareness. While proactive forest-treatment measures were underway when the Museum and Newman Fires broke out in summer 2019, only 38% of the fire-affected areas had been treated. The newly-implemented Water Resource Protection Fee supports these efforts for years to come.

Protecting our water supply from threat of fire and subsequent flooding is one of ten priorities in the [Flagstaff Water Services Strategic Plan 2025](#). We know that fire will happen. Proactive steps can, and are, being taken to protect the watershed through forest thinning and drainage management. This ten-year anniversary of the Schultz Fire is a good time to look back on *lessons learned*. So history, in this case, does *not* repeat itself.