

Administration

1769 E. Moody Blvd Bldg 2
Bunnell, FL 32110



www.flaglercounty.org

Phone: (386)313-4001

Fax: (386)313-4101

Julie Murphy
Flagler County
Public Information Officer
(386) 313-4039
Email jmurphy@flaglercounty.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FireFlight reconnaissance prevents devastating wildfires

July 23, 2019 – FireFlight crews used the helicopter's ability to travel anywhere within the county in 15 minutes with its 210-gallon water bucket to prevent a wildfire from getting out of control on July 16.

Helicopter Pilot Todd Whaley, who is also a Florida certified Wild-Land Firefighter, was called off a support mission to assist firefighters on the ground with two small brush fires in western Flagler County. As he left the area, he could see a column of smoke to the southeast, and found 3 acres burning near Plantation Bay.

As he approached, Whaley was surprised by the embers and ash hitting the copter's wind screen – atypical given the recent rainy, wet weather conditions. He immediately called the Florida Forest Service.

Often after lightning sparks a fire, Whaley will direct ground crews to the blaze – ready with the "Bambi Bucket" if the fire cannot easily be reached. In this case, he started dropping water on it right away.

Flagler County Engine 16 responded to the area, but couldn't reach the fire.

Whaley scooped and dropped 44 buckets of water – 9,500 gallons – on the fire in about an hour.

Though Florida Forest Service was delayed in its response because of the westside fires, Whaley and FireFlight were able to contain the fire to 9 acres.

"We took the life out of it," Whaley said.

Engine 16 crew Captain Richard Bennett credits Whaley and the copter with preventing the fire from spreading.

"It could have easily grown to 50 acres before ground crews could access it," he said.

Given its many functions – including patient transportation, search and rescue, and law enforcement assistance – people often ask why FireFlight was given its name.

It was purchased after the '98 wildfires – the first time in US history that an entire county was evacuated due to wildfire. During those fires 71 homes were destroyed, and another 175 homes were damaged.

Charles Ericksen, Jr.
District 1

Greg Hansen
District 2

David Sullivan
District 3

Joe Mullins
District 4

Donald O'Brien, Jr.
District 5

About 82,000 acres of timber – valued at \$4,000 per acre – burned. The timber loss alone was \$328 million. Flagler County spent about \$1.3 million in protective measures in 1998.

FireFlight was purchased in 2002 for \$1.55 million with Landfill Bond money designated for fire suppression. No General Fund money was used.

Countless wildfires have been quashed with the help of FireFlight, which is a great asset to Flagler County. More than 1.2 million gallons of water have been dropped on fires since 2002.

###