Mountaintop camera network tracked 240 fires in 2017

By Mike Wolterbeek

Mountaintop cameras from UNR spotted or tracked 240 fires in Nevada and California in 2017. This helped to keep firefighters more situationally aware and able to mount appropriate responses more rapidly over tens of thousands of square miles of forests and rangelands, including rural communities.

This is a new and expanding tool for fire managers who oversee the wildland and wildland urban interface.

“The success of our system lies in our ability to deploy wireless, microwave technology to enable high-speed internet out in the wilderness,” Graham Kent, director of the Seismological Laboratory Lab in the College of Science, said. “We call it the internet of wild things or wilderness internet.”

The high-definition near-infrared night-capable fire cameras are part of the AlertWildfire network, conceived, developed and implemented at the Nevada Seismological Lab. The network has grown from the AlertTahoe system that began with a three-camera pilot project at Lake Tahoe in 2015 to four networks with more than 55 cameras. The cameras cover areas of Nevada and California’s Sierra Nevada, and includes San Diego County and Santa Barbara with an eye to Oregon and Idaho coming online soon, with several more states making inquiries.

The prototype AlertWildfire system uses the backbone of the Nevada Seismo Lab’s earthquake monitoring network, with its 200 seismograph stations in Nevada and eastern California,

leveraging technology for public safety with the high-tech mountaintop cameras linked into the network.

Fire managers can manually rotate, tilt, pan and zoom the cameras. YouTube channel, nvseismolab, has a library of videos captured from the network.

Mike Wolterbeek works for UNR.