



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Minister of Conservation Kate Wilkinson talks to task marker, Tony Teeling of the Department of Conservation, at the Canterbury and West Coast Regional Rural Fire Exercise.

Ashburton Guardian

Challenging time for firefighters

By Susan Sandys

Just one rural firefighting team from Mid Canterbury made it to the Canterbury and West Coast Regional Rural Fire Exercise at Castle Hill which finished on Saturday.

The three-day exercise saw 35 teams in total enter, undertaking a series of challenges.

Spokesperson Don Geddes said generally there were usually up to three teams each year from the district, but for various reasons the event this year did not suit many. The fact it co-incided with school holidays had probably meant some could not attend.

"If we can field one crew that's great, if we can field more that's even better," Mr Geddes said.

The Mt Somers rural firefighting

unit was the one to enter, and Kevin Fewes, Chris Murphy and Heath Heaven were its team members. They competed on Saturday, coming sixth out of the nine teams on the day.

Their best performance was in the hazard management exercise, where they scored maximum points, which no other team during the three days managed to do.

Mr Fewes said this exercise had involved climbing steep, thickly-vegetated and slippery terrain to rescue a victim from a marijuana plantation, which presented all sorts of booby traps such as hooks on fishing line and electric wires.

"You had to stop and think about what you had to do," Mr Fewes said.

He said each team was supposed to have four people, but one had pulled out of the Mt Somers team before

going and they had been unable to replace them. So to have achieved what they did with just three members had been good. There had been not many points between them and third place.

"It was a good close competition."

Mr Geddes said as well as competing, the teams picked up new skills, and met other rural firefighters from around the country.

"It's also a learning activity, if any of the crews want any training or instruction they are given that as well."

Mid Canterbury has nine rural firefighting forces in the district, and about 135 volunteer within those.

In the past five years the event has doubled its capacity to accommodate more crews who come from all over New Zealand to be part of the challenge.