

1 - Overview & Program Directives

Introduction

Scope

These standards apply to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They are designed to ensure safe and efficient wildland fire and aviation operations. This document is reviewed annually and updated as needed.(FWS USFS)

Purpose

This document provides a reference for current operational policies, procedures, and guidelines for managing wildland fire and aviation operations.

Overview

In addition to a thorough understanding of policies, procedures, and guidelines, safe and efficient wildland fire and aviation operations require a personal commitment to excellence.

Policy

The following policies are accepted and endorsed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior. They provide consistent and compatible fire management practices among federal wildland fire management agencies, and guide BLM wildland fire operations.(USFS)

Safety

- Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans (FMPs) and activities must reflect this commitment.
- All fire personnel will meet appropriate training, experience, and qualification requirements for incident assignments. (See NWCG 310-1 and DOI Incident Qualification and Certification System.)
- All fire personnel will be equipped with approved personal protective equipment (PPE).
- All BLM personnel assigned to fireline duties will complete annual refresher training.
- All wildland fire entrapments and fatalities will be reported using the current National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) initial entrapment/fatality report form.
- All wildland fire serious accidents will be investigated using the BLM serious accident investigation procedures and interagency agreements as appropriate.

- Follow all safety policies, standards and guidelines identified within the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH)*, *Fireline Handbook*, and the *BLM Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations*.
(FWS)

Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability

The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve ecosystem sustainability, including its interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.

Response to Wildland Fire

Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate management response to the fire.

Use of Wildland Fire

Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.

Rehabilitation and Restoration

Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, and safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.

Protection Priorities

The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be based on the values to be protected, human health and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

Wildland Urban Interface

The operational roles of federal agencies as partners in the Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is

the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural protection activities under formal Fire Protection Agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer, and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with full structural protection.)

Planning

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's approved land management plan. Fire Management Plans must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations. **(FWS)**

- Until a FMP is approved, BLM units must take an aggressive suppression action on all wildland fires consistent with firefighter and public safety and resources to be protected.
- Without an approved FMP, resource benefits cannot be a primary consideration influencing selection of a management strategy, although resource impacts of suppression alternatives can be considered in the decision.

Science

Fire Management Plans and programs will be based on a foundation of sound science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of land management plans, Fire Management Plans, and implementation plans.

Preparedness

Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

- Preparedness planning must be accomplished annually at all organizational levels.

- When conditions exceed those of the normal fire year, severity planning must be developed to consider BLM and interagency needs on local, geographic, and national bases.
- Annual operating plans and unit operating procedures will be updated annually.
- Preparedness reviews will be conducted annually to determine the level of preparedness.

Suppression

Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, consistent with resource objectives.

- Fire management will use the full range of strategic and tactical options as described in an approved FMP. Without an approved NEPA compliant plan, suppression action must be taken.
- All BLM units will utilize a decision making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against selected environmental, social, political, and economic criteria. **(FWS)**

Prevention

The BLM will work together and with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

Standardization

The BLM will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-be-protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.

Interagency Coordination

Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and partners.

Communication and Education

The BLM will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.

BLM Administrator and Employee Roles

BLM administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as necessary. BLM administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for not making employees available.

Evaluation

The BLM will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and BLM priorities.

Economic Efficiency

Fire management programs and activities will be based on economic analyses that incorporate commodity, non-commodity, and social values.

Fire Cause Determination and Cost Recovery

BLM policy requires all wildland fires to be investigated to determine cause, origin, and responsibility. The BLM must pursue cost recovery, or document why cost recovery is not initiated, for all human-caused fires on public and/or other lands under protection agreement.

Employee Responsibility

All employees, cooperators, contractors, and volunteers who participate in wildland fire operations have the duty to treat one another with respect and to maintain a work environment free of harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

Hazing is also considered a form of harassment. Hazing is defined as any action taken, or situation created intentionally, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, or ridicule. Hazing has also led to injuries and accidents.

There is zero tolerance of misconduct, whether it is harassment, hazing, or any other inappropriate behavior. We must all take responsibility for creating and ensuring a healthy and safe work environment

Every individual has a responsibility to report harassment or to take positive action to mitigate its effects.

Fire Management Objectives

The objectives of the wildland fire management program are to:

- Protect human life and property and natural/cultural resources both within and adjacent to BLM-administered lands.
- Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within the framework of land use objectives and resource management plans.
- Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent as expressed in the annual appropriations acts, and comply with applicable departmental manual and BLM policies and procedures.
- Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are consistent with values to be protected and management objectives.
- Prevent unplanned human-caused ignitions.
- Restore and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged by fire or suppression activities.
- Minimize, and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire activities.
- Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- Organize and maintain a fire management capability which consistently applies the highest standards of professional and technical expertise.
- Encourage research to advance understanding of fire behavior, effects, ecology, and management.
- Integrate fire and management through all levels of the planning process.
- Investigate all human-caused fires.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Agency Specific Directions

Page 1-1 **Scope**

Many of these standards denote application to a specific agency. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to interagency consistent standard development and application. The Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations is designed to be a ready reference for field use. Specific direction is contained in the US Fish and Wildlife manuals and current handbooks.

Page 1-2 **Safety**

FWS requires an annual firefighter safety course, covering 10 Standard Fire Orders, 18 Watch Out Situations, and fire shelter training, for all personnel with wildland and/or prescribed fire management duties, including refuge managers/project leaders and other regular refuge staff (Service Manual 232 FW 6.4D.)

Page 1-2 **Safety**

Follow all safety standards and guidelines identified within the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH)*, *Fireline Handbook*, and the *FWS Fire Management Handbook*.

Page 1-3 **Planning**

If an approved Fire Management Plan (meeting NEPA compliance) is not present for a particular refuge, then the only available option is suppression of the wildland fire and appropriate action will be taken immediately. Common sense must be used in suppression actions considering firefighter and public safety, values to be protected, least cost, and resource damage caused by the suppression action. If the initial attack is unsuccessful, a WFSA will be prepared to determine the next set of management responses. (*FWS Fire Management Handbook*).

Refuges cannot conduct prescribed operations without an approved fire management plan. (Service Manual 621 FW2.3B.)

Human-caused fires will be managed through a suppression response both in the presence and absence of an approved Fire Management Plan. Management responses or actions are not developed to gain resource benefits. There are no options other than cost-effective suppression actions. (*FWS Fire Management Handbook*).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Agency Specific Directions (Cond.)

Page 1-4 Suppression

The Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Fire Service, under the provisions of the Department Manual (620 DM 2) is delegated authority to provide safe, cost-effective emergency wildland fire suppression services in support of land, natural, and culture resource management plans on Department of the Interior administered land in Alaska. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service retains management responsibility and accountability for those suppression service activities occurring on land Service jurisdiction. (FWS Fire management Handbook)

U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

Agency Specific Directions

Page 1-1 **Scope**

Many of these standards denote application to a specific agency. The Forest Service is committed to consistent interagency standard development and application. The *Standards For Fire and Aviation Operations* is designed to be a ready reference for field use. Specific direction is contained in Forest Service Manuals and current Handbooks.

Page 1-1 **Purpose**

Firefighter and public safety shall remain our first priority in every fire management decision; This concept must be established beginning with the planning phase of programs and projects. We will not adopt a program or pursue a project which leaves a question about unmitigated risk to either. We will describe responsibilities and consequences of all decisions.

Employees engaged in fire management activities will follow all safety standards and guidelines in the *Forest Service Health and Safety Code Handbook* (FSH 6709.11).

In addition, all employees engaged in fire suppression activities will carry, adhere to standards, consider guidelines, and mitigate risks defined in the *Incident Response Pocket Guide* PMS #461, NFES #1077.