

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.

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.

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 interagency wildland fire serious accident investigation procedures.
- Follow all safety standards and guidelines identified within the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook (IIBMH)*, *Fireline Handbook*, and the *BLM Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations*.

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.

- 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 agency 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.

Prevention

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

Standardization

Agencies 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 Cooperation and 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

Agencies 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.

Agency Administrator and Employee Roles

Agency 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. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

Evaluation

Agencies 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 agency 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. Harassment in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Additionally, every individual has a responsibility to report harassment or to take positive action to mitigate its effects.

Fire Policy Terminology

1995 Federal Fire Policy—1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1995 Report—1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review

2001 Federal Fire Policy—2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

Agencies—Federal agencies that have direct fire management or land management responsibilities or that have programs and activities that support fire management activities.

Agency Administrator—The official responsible for the management of a geographic unit or functional area.

Appropriate Management Response —the response to a wildland fire is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, the circumstances under which the fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, natural and cultural resource management objectives, protection priorities, and values to be protected. The evaluation must also include an analysis of the context of the specific fire within the overall local, geographic area, or national wildland fire situation.

Burned Area Rehabilitation—the full range of post-fire activities to rehabilitate and restore fire damaged lands, including protection of public health and safety.

Cooperators—Federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that participate in planning and conducting fire management projects and activities.

Ecosystem Sustainability—the capacity to maintain ecosystem health, productivity, diversity, and overall integrity, in the long run, in the context of human activity and use.

Fire Management Activities—include fire planning, fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives, prevention; preparedness, education, and addresses the role of mitigation, post-fire rehabilitation, fuels reduction, and restoration activities in fire management

Fire Management Plan—strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland fires based on an area's approved land management plan. Fire Management Plans must address a full range of fire management activities that support ecosystem sustainability, values to be protected, protection of firefighter and public safety, public health and environmental issues, and must be consistent with resource management objectives and activities of the area.

Full range of fire management activities—see Fire Management Activities.

Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC)—interagency regional operational centers for fire resource coordination and mobilization.

Geographic Area Coordinating Group (GACG)—interagency regional fire management bodies.

Initial Attack—the aggressive response to a wildland fire based on values to be protected, benefits of response, and reasonable cost of response.

Interagency—coordination, collaboration, communication among cooperating agencies.

Intergovernmental—coordination, collaboration, communication between federal agencies, Indian tribes, and foreign governments.

MAC Group—Multi-Agency Coordinating Group; national, regional, or local management groups for interagency, intergovernmental planning coordination, and operations leadership.

NWCG—National Wildfire Coordinating Group; the NWCG is an interagency, intergovernmental body that establishes operational fire management standards and procedures such as qualification and certification protocols, allocation or resources protocols, equipment standards, training programs.

Partners—all agencies and organizations that engage in joint decision making with federal agencies in planning and conducting fire management projects and activities.

Prescribed Fire—any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. Prescribed fires are conducted in accordance with prescribed fire plans.

Prescribed Fire Plan—a plan for each prescribed fire. Plans are documents prepared by qualified personnel, approved by the agency administrator, and include criteria for the conditions under which the fire will be conducted (a prescription).

Prescription—measurable criteria that define the conditions under which a prescribed fire will be ignited, guide selection of appropriate management responses, and indicate other required actions. Prescription criteria may include safety, economic, public health, and environmental, geographic, administrative, social, or legal considerations.

Report to the President—Glickman, Dan, and Bruce Babbitt. 2000. Managing the impact of wildfires on communities and the environment. A Report to the

President in response to the wildfires of 2000. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of the Interior.

Review and Update—Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

Values to be Protected—Include property, structures, physical improvements, natural and culture resources, community infrastructure, and economic, environmental, and social values.

Wildland Fire—any non-structural fire that occurs on wildland.

Wildland Urban Interface—defined as the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

Fire Management Objectives

The objectives of the wildland fire management program are to:

- 1) Protect human life and property and natural/cultural resources both within and adjacent to BLM-administered lands.
- 2) Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within the framework of land use objectives and resource management plans.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Prevent unplanned human-caused ignitions.
- 7) Restore and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged by fire or suppression activities.
- 8) Minimize, and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire activities.

- 9) Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- 10) Organize and maintain a fire management capability which consistently applies the highest standards of professional and technical expertise.
- 11) Encourage research to advance understanding of fire behavior, effects, ecology, and management.
- 12) Integrate fire and management through all levels of the planning process.
- 13) Investigate all human-caused fires.

