

# **Appropriate Management Response Summary for the Northern Rockies**

04\_2008 Update

## **Introduction**

All unplanned wildland fire ignitions require an Appropriate Management Response (AMR). The AMR, which can range from aggressively suppressing a wildland fire to managing an incident as a wildland fire use event, is guided by the strategies and objectives outlined in the unit Land and Resource Management Plan reflecting land and resource values, management goals and objectives. The unit fire management plan (FMP) outlines fire management activities and procedures to accomplish those objectives. The objective of a wildland fire use project is to obtain resource benefits, whereas a wildfire is to be extinguished at the most efficient cost.

The Appropriate Management Response is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, land and resource and fire management objectives, resource availability, the circumstances under which the fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, protection priorities, values to be protected, and cost effectiveness.

The following are guiding principles for Appropriate Management Response:

- Our response to wildfires in the Northern Rockies involves actions and expenditures that are commensurate with the values at risk and are consistent with agency policy, land management plans and fire management plan direction.
- Agency administrators will be prepared prior to fire season to make informed decisions on the appropriate management response.
- We will develop greater opportunities, through appropriate planning and by reducing barriers, for our agency administrators to accomplish resource objectives through wildland fire use.
- We will work closely with our partners and public in advance of fire season to build understanding of the expectations of appropriate management response.
- Long-term plans will be developed with partners. Document collaboration and communication with partners.
- Initial attack requires a planned, rapid and focused response with appropriate forces. AMR emphasize managing risk to provide firefighter and public safety.
- If initial attack is unsuccessful, we will ensure that the transition process to a more complex situation remains cohesive and forthright.
- Incident commanders will assess risk and hazards and communicate mitigation measures to firefighters and fire managers.
- Incident commanders and fire managers will be decisive in establishing clear and attainable objectives that are consistent with leader's intent and direction.

What is Appropriate Management Response?

AMR is any specific action suitable to meet fire management unit (FMU) objectives. The AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical operations. The AMR is developed by using fire management unit strategies and objectives identified in the fire management plan. AMR encompasses all the response actions necessary to manage a wildland fire or wildland fire use event for the duration of the event. Beginning with the initial response to any wildland fire, decisions will reflect the goal of using available firefighting resources to manage the fire for the most effective, most efficient and safest means available.

MANAGE WILDLAND FIRE			
APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			
Perimeter Control	Point Protection	Monitor	
Contain and control the edge of a fire for least possible acres burned	Protect individual high value areas adjacent to or within a fire perimeter	Reduce exposure to firefighters; keep cost commensurate to values at risk. Achieve resource benefits through wildland fire use	

What Appropriate Management Response is not.

- Not new—building on what we have successfully done
- Not “Let Burn”
- It’s not just a cost issue

Why the Appropriate Management Response?

The Appropriate Management Response does not replace, supercede, or give emphasis to any particular fire management strategy or tactic. Instead, AMR is intended to include all available strategies and tactics, encouraging consideration of a wider spectrum of management options from which to make a calculated response based on the circumstances of a particular fire at a particular time with particular characteristics. Use of this concept dispels the interpretation or belief that there is only one way to respond to each set of circumstances.

Not only is fire suppression very expensive, but once a commitment to a plan is made, it is often very difficult to change. Increasingly, a few very large or long duration fires that are likely to burn until weathered out are still being managed with a more or less conventional suppression objective emphasizing perimeter control. Those fires demand and get a sizeable part of the national fire suppression resource capability. A shortage of critical resources is a common occurrence today. That situation has a substantial and counterproductive effect on the ability to appropriately manage “the next fire”, whether it is a lost opportunity for successful initial attack or the ability to make the right commitment of resources to a higher priority incident occurring after “the last fire”.

## Implementing AMR

The Appropriate Management Response may be different in time, as well as place. Appropriate decisions will be made about a fire based on policy, land, resource, and fire management goals and objectives. A decision to manage a fire with a certain strategy today may not be the same decision that would have been made yesterday, or might be made tomorrow.

Wildland fire incident management decisions will be made in the context of what we are protecting or enhancing. Significant benefits are possible if managers consider the following guidance:

- Each unit should adapt current fire management units (FMU) described in FMPs to protection and response strategies (WUI identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans will be incorporated) similar to those suggested in the following example for Section III, Wildland Fire Management Strategies, of the Interagency Fire Management Plan. Those are described as:
  - AMR 1 – Highest Level Protection Response
  - AMR 2 – Response based on Values at Risk
  - AMR 3 – Wildland Fire Use Management Option

In following the intent of the first bullet we need to be careful not to go beyond the permissions allowed under current land and resource management plans with fire management direction documents in FMPs. A map of FMUs will be produced for the geographic area as information is identified. This map does not make any decisions, but currently displays fire management direction in existing resource management plans. That map will allow local units, agency administrators and the Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination Group to identify and prioritize protection priorities for initial response and provide a framework for the type of extended action that will occur on wildfires that escape initial action. The map will also help reference wildland fire use opportunities and decisions. It will further be used as a communication tool for both internal and external audiences to help change expectations for fire management and accept different outcomes. This is not a decision document; it is a tool to help prioritize work.

- Decisions for the initial response to a wildfire should have the goal of a decisive outcome to protect specific values in the fire environment. Initial actions in response to a wildfire should be as aggressive as possible, unless there is concern that those actions cannot mitigate issues about firefighter and public safety or are not cost effective.
- As currently provided for in approved land and resource management plans and unit fire management plans, each unit should begin or increase opportunities in the wildland fire use program, allowing agency administrators the choice to manage unplanned wildland ignitions for resource benefits when appropriate.

- All wildland fires that escape initial and extended action should develop a long term risk analysis and management strategy when appropriate. The plan should describe and identify the values to be protected and at risk, means to protect those values in a safe and cost effective manner, and hold the fire area to the boundary of the selected alternative in the WFSA. The long term plan does not replace the WFSA but provides a long term strategy of how to implement the selected alternative. When the Planning Needs assessment chart in the Wildland Fire Use Implementation Reference Guide indicates a Stage III should be completed, a long term plan should be considered. Other considerations should be resource availability and whether the strategy and tactics implemented to meet the initial objectives are working.
- On Forest Service fires, as the Stratified Cost Index (SCI) performance measure becomes available, evaluations will be completed on large fires (>300 acres) to provide real-time decision support to agency administrators and incident managers.
- On Forest Service fires, when Regional Forester representatives are required, support teams for long duration fires will provide that role. Letters of expectations from the Regional Forester to the unit line officer and support team leader will be completed. The Regional Forester will have the discretion to have additional representation if needed.

The geographic area will monitor periodic fire management costs and accomplishments for individual wildfires and fire use events and provide feedback to agency administrators. Monitoring will allow evaluation and understanding of the effectiveness of strategies and utilization of resources, and provide a basis for concurrence and adjustments to incident priorities.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A – Long Term Implementation Plan
- Appendix B – Mitigation Strategies for Smoke Impacts
- Appendix C – Communication Plan
- Appendix D – Cost Containment
- Appendix E – Support Team for Long-Duration Wildfire Plans

## **Appendix A**

### **Long Term Implementation Plan**

Use the appropriate WFSAs to identify values to protect, costs allowed, and the geographic area delineated in the selected alternative. To maintain flexibility, a suggested format to implement a long term plan should consider addressing the following items based upon the needs assessment of the specific event. The level of analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the event.

- Identify objectives of long term plan
- Assess risk on values to protect, hazards identified and probability of event occurring
- Weather conditions and long-term risk assessment
- Identification of values to protect
- Action to protect values
- Resources needed to manage the fire
- Contingency actions
- Information plan
- Estimated costs
- Wildland fire relative risk assessment
- Signatures of agency administrator and incident commander

## **Appendix B**

### **Specific Mitigation Strategies for the Appropriate Management Response to Mitigate the Impacts of Smoke from Wildland Fire**

The most important mitigation measure for smoke is establishing and maintaining effective communications and relationships with our state regulatory partners, and taking their inputs under consideration. State regulators receive numerous calls from the public during fire season, so by keeping them informed about fire occurrence, fire management priorities, and appropriate management responses, they will be better able to address the current fire situation as it pertains to public health and safety.

Specific steps to establish and maintain effective relations with state agencies include:

- Inclusion of state regulatory agencies on MAC conference calls.
- Provide on-scene briefings to state air quality agency personnel, which may include aerial observation of a fire and its smoke production and dispersion when appropriate.
- The placement of near real time smoke monitors in sensitive areas so state regulators can be better informed about actual smoke conditions.
- Make daily ICS-209 Incident Status Summary reports for large fires available through the Northern Rockies Geographic Area Morning Report (summarizing all fire activity) to state regulatory agencies to provide individual and cumulative fire activity and fire status information.

It is also essential to keep the public informed concerning current and projected smoke conditions. In pre-event communications with the public in which AMR is discussed, the potential for smoke production and mitigation planning and actions should be included.

When and where wildland fire use is the appropriate management response for a particular fire, existing procedures will be followed for providing information to state regulatory agencies in Idaho and Montana.

In Idaho, maps of areas where wildland fire use may be implemented are provided to DEQ in advance of fire season, and a contact person is identified for each national forest if more information is needed. For specific incidents, DEQ will monitor the 209 reports for any significant changes in fire growth or complexity, and have the ability to contact the appropriate local dispatch center for specific information. DEQ is also contacted directly when a Stage III analysis is completed for any wildland fire use event, and is also provided information on fire locations and the locations of potential smoke impacts.

In Montana, the major open burn permit requires Montana DEQ to be notified when the Stage II analysis is completed on any fire. Montana DEQ also has the option to request maps of areas where wildland fire use may be implemented as the appropriate

management response. Montana DEQ routinely monitors the 209 reports for changes in fire growth or complexity.

Wildland fire 209 information is automatically imported into Blue Sky Rains, which can be used by fire and air quality managers and state air quality regulatory agencies to predict smoke trajectories on an hourly basis.

The Exceptional Events Rule, promulgated by EPA in March 2007, allows states, at their discretion, to petition EPA to exclude PM or ozone monitoring data adversely affected by natural events, including wildfires and wildland fire use events. EPA, after reviewing data submitted by states, retains final discretionary authority to exclude affected data.

Fire management can assist states by addressing smoke impacts as part of the AMR process, and by providing states detailed information about the fire that they can use to justify their exceptional event request.

## Appendix C

### **Northern Rockies Communicating about Fire Management**

#### **Background:**

Fires are burning larger and larger areas in the Northern Rockies and costing more and more to suppress. We also have gone from viewing fire as an enemy and fighting fires at all costs, to a more complex view.

Fire can be a threat and a serious danger, it can be a tool we use to reduce danger from future fires, and it's a natural force often needed on the landscape. Over the decades, federal fire policy has changed as conditions and our understanding of fire have evolved.

The term Appropriate Management Response (and its acronym, AMR) became part of agency jargon over the last few years, while the idea of fighting fires efficiently and effectively has been around for a long time. During 2007, some critics singled-out AMR as shorthand for an insufficiently aggressive fire strategy – one overly tempered by safety and budget concerns. During this fire season, we hope to put the focus on the thoughtfulness and considerations implicit in the term AMR, not the term itself.

As managers, we respond to wildland fire based on conditions and circumstances, not acronyms and jargon. The question is always; “How will we manage fires?” and not “Will we manage fires?”

Many things affect our response to a particular fire. They include the following:

- Local terrain, fuel, and weather conditions,
- Local agency land-management plans and community fire plans,
- Risks posed by the fire to people and property,
- Our chances of success compared to the costs and risks of different tactics, and
- Quantity of firefighting resources available locally, statewide, and nationally.

We want to do what makes sense, what is efficient and effective. Our foremost concern is public and firefighter safety. We have been successful, even in extreme fire seasons, with initial attack strategies to keep 97 percent of all new fires in the Northern Rockies small.

Landowners near where forests and grasslands meet development – what we call the wildland-urban interface – have a responsibility to be prepared for fire. It's not a question of “if” there will be a fire, it's a question of “when” and “how will it burn?” Both public and private land management activities influence how fire will burn. We all have a role to play.

#### **Communications Strategy:**

Communicate with landowners, local and state government partners, community leaders, and reporters as fire season begins and is underway.



### **Communication Goals:**

- Build understanding, acceptance, and support for the actions taken by managers.
- Emphasize two-way communication about the concept, especially from September to June.
- Communicate that fire management includes all available strategies and tactics
- Communicate that we learn from past experience
- Build recognition that this is a Northern Rockies Coordinating Group (NRCG) strategy, not just the Forest Service

### **Key Messages:**

- Our approach to fire allows managers the ability to choose from a full spectrum of fire suppression actions.
- Choices are based on the conditions, circumstances and opportunities of each respective fire, including the following:
  - Land and resources, and fire management objectives;
  - Relative risk to firefighter and public safety, and other values to be protected – like homes, communities, and facilities and systems;
  - Complexity of the fire, including long-term potential;
  - Probability of success and consequences of failure of the management decision;
  - Availability of firefighting resources;
  - Political and social concerns; and
  - Costs.
- More people live in and near increasingly fire-prone forest and grasslands, adding to the values threatened by fire.
  - In some cases, we need to keep fire away from important, high-value areas, directing effort and resources to priority areas.
  - Protection decisions in these areas commonly come with increased cost and risk to firefighter and public safety
- Wildland fire workload is growing due to fuels accumulation, development in previously forest and range open space, and warming global climate trends.
- We learn through experience – lessons learned – and apply this to management activities.
- We manage all fires! Some we will suppress and some will burn in defined areas.
- We have a wide variety of tactical options to use on a fire, either as a whole or any part:
  - Perimeter control – contain and control the edge of the fire. If applied to the entire fire, this option tries to keep the fire as small as possible,
  - Point protection – protect high-value sites and areas,
  - Confine – take advantage of terrain and natural conditions to stop the fire safely, and
  - Monitor – where values or threats are low, keep track of the fire while limiting both costs and danger to firefighters.

## **Appendix D**

### **Cost Management**

As part of the Northern Rockies normal operating procedures, when an incident management team is assigned, the Incident Management Team (IMT) and agency administrators (AA) will integrate the following cost management factors into their decision making processes:

- Sufficient and Reliable Information
- Social factors
- Risk Management
- Strategic and Tactical Decisions

Per the Delegation of Authority, Incident Commanders will document decisions related to the cost management factors on the Northern Rockies IC Cost Management Daily Log template. It will be submitted to the host unit contact each day. Template components are listed below:

<b>Northern Rockies Cost Management Objectives</b>
<p><b>Objective:</b> Evaluate decisions and actions taken on this incident and analyze their direct or indirect affect on cost.</p>
<p><b><u>Sufficient and Reliable Information</u></b></p>
<p>1) What was the Agency Administrator's direction and objectives to the IMT in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Delegation of Authority</li><li>▪ Wildland Fire Decision Analysis</li><li>▪ IMT In-briefing</li><li>▪ IMT Transition Plan</li></ul>
<p>2) Do the Agency Administrator and Incident Command believe they have all the necessary information to make timely and prudent decisions? If not, why not?</p>
<p>3) Determine if the Delegations of Authority contains sufficient direction to provide clear cost management guidance to the IMT. Did cost direction include directions to the IMT on how to capture cost in I-suite and the potential need for specific maps to apportion costs based the identified cost share methodology?</p>
<p>4) Determine if the Delegations of Authority contains sufficient direction to provide clear structure protection guidance to the IMT. Were all protection agencies identified? Was the Northern Rockies Community Structure Protection Guidance provided to the IMT?</p>
<p>5) Was the decision analysis cost threshold stated in the Delegation of Authority?</p>
<p>6) Determine if the Land Management Plan and Fire Management Plan are linked and provide sufficient discussion/direction to inform wildfire suppression strategies including (1) fire history, (2) resource management and fire protection goals, (3) information on wildland urban intermix/interface zones, (4) guidance on appropriate response to wildfires, (5) information on wildfire fuels and (6) cost containment guidance.</p>
<p>7) Was the IMT provided fuels treated areas? If so, how was the information used to develop</p>

strategies and tactics?

- 8) Identify where fuels treatments were effective in reducing damage to improving suppression success. Also identify where they weren't effective and why.
- 9) Identify the difference in the cost of suppression where community protection was the objective vs. natural resource protection.

### **Social Factors**

- 1) What are the socio-political factors driving actions and, therefore, costs at this fire?
- 2) Can/were the socio-political factors satisfied? If so, how? If not, why?
- 3) Quantify any costs associated with mitigating these concerns.

### **Risk Management**

- 1) What were the values to be protected?
- 2) What did the IMT and AA consider to mitigate the threats to the values to be protected?
- 3) Describe how the risk was shared between the general public, local, state, and federal agencies.
- 4) Was a cost share agreement or decision document developed for this fire?

### **Strategic and Tactical Decisions**

- 1) Did the AA identify all protection agencies and the potential need for unified command, and clearly discuss setting priorities, protecting structures and communities, other property and improvements, and the expectations specific to working with cooperators?
- 2) What specific actions did the IMT and AA take to control costs in the three highest cost areas of personnel, contracts, and aircraft?
- 3) Specially, what effect did IMT actions have on overall fire costs? What actions were within their control and which were dictated by others (AA, politicians, etc.)?
- 4) Were any other decision support systems (WFDSS, RAVAR, SCI) used to develop strategies and tactics? If so, when were they used?
- 5) If a prior fire occurred in the same location, were the strategies and tactics different for this event? How and why?

## **Appendix E**

### **Support Team for Long Duration Plans**

Consider the following positions for the support team:

- Technical specialist that have skills in long duration wildland fires. For example, past or current experiences as agency administrator, incident commander, FUMA, operations section chief, long term analyst, incident information officer, etc.
- The Northern Rockies Coordinating Group will maintain a list of possible resources available to provide support for development of long duration wildfire plans. This is not intended to be an overhead team; it is support that will help the agency administrator make the AMR decision. Once the decision is made, then the appropriate management organization will be put in place for the situation.