



National Park Service

DIRECTOR'S ORDER #18: WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

Approved: /s/ Mary A. Bomar
Director

Effective Date: January 16, 2008

Sunset Date: This order will remain in effect until amended or rescinded

This Director's Order states the basic principles and strategic guidelines governing the management of wildland fire by the National Park Service (NPS). It is a renewal of the previously issued Wildland Fire Management Director's Order, which had a sunset date of December 31, 2006. It has been updated to implement the [Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy](#). The provisions of this Director's Order and [Reference Manual 18](#) provide further direction for Section 4.5 of [Management Policies 2006](#) and supersede all previous NPS instructions, requirements, and statements of policy relating to wildland fire management that may be in conflict.

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1. BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES, AND MISSION GOALS

1.1 Background

As an important part of fulfilling its mission, the National Park Service manages wildland fire to protect the public; park communities and infrastructure; conserve natural and cultural resources; and maintain and restore natural ecosystems and processes. The risks and expenses associated with planning and implementing fire management activities require exceptional skill and attention to detail. The highest priority under all circumstances is firefighter and public safety. All plans, project implementation, and responses to wildland fire must demonstrate this commitment.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this Director's Order is as follows:

- A. Emphasize firefighter and public safety as the first priority in every fire management activity.
- B. Establish a framework by which the NPS will institutionalize and implement principles, policies, organizational and operational relationships, and changes in law and reporting requirements.
- C. Provide a course of action for developing a cooperative, effective, and efficient approach for the preparation, response to, and recovery from wildfire incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity. This will include a core set of concepts, principles, terminology, and technologies covering the incident command system (ICS), multi-agency coordination systems, training, and the identification and management of resources.

1.3 Mission Goals

The Mission Goals for the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program are as follows:

- A. Protect Values Through Effective Risk Management: Protect life, communities and resources from adverse effects of wildland fire without compromising safety
- B. Restore and Maintain Fire-adapted Ecosystems: Maintain and restore fire adapted ecosystems using appropriate tools and techniques in a manner that will provide sustainable, environmental and social benefits.
- C. Science Based Management: General and park-specific science and research guides the wildland fire program.
- D. Integrate Wildland Fire With Other NPS Programs: Fire management programs are responsive to Service-wide and park priorities and are integrated with other NPS programs.
- E. External Audiences Understand and Support Wildland Fire Programs: NPS fire management will communicate and coordinate with interagency organizations and other stakeholders to pursue common goals, programs and projects.
- F. Build and Promote Organizational Effectiveness: Fire management programs achieve desired outcomes by building program capacity, leadership and effective management practices.

2. LEGAL AUTHORITY TO ISSUE THIS DIRECTIVE

This Director's Order is issued under authority of 16 U.S.C. § 1 through 4 and Delegations of Authority in Part 245 of the Departmental Manual. It is intended to improve the internal management of the NPS and is not intended to, and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by law, or equity, by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

3. FEDERAL FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICIES

All fires burning in natural or landscaped vegetation will be considered wildland fires. Wildland fire is defined as any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland.

All wildland fires will be effectively managed through application of the appropriate strategic and tactical management options. These options will be selected after comprehensive consideration of firefighter and public safety, the resource values to be protected and costs. Prescribed fires are those fires ignited by park managers to achieve resource management and fuel treatment objectives. Prescribed fire activities will include effective communication on prescribed fire activity in the park and local community and the monitoring programs that provide information on whether specific objectives are being met. In conformance with the park's fire management plan, a systematic decision-making process will be used to determine the most appropriate management strategies for wildland fires that are no longer meeting resource management objectives.

4. NPS MANAGEMENT POLICIES

4.1 NPS Management Policies

The NPS policy on fire is expressed in section 4.5 of [Management Policies 2006](#) and supplemented by this Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management. [Reference Manual 18](#) (RM-18) is issued by the Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, and is a technical expression of background information, standardized definitions, agency requirements, standards, and procedures for implementing Director's Order #18.

Each park with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan that will address the need for adequate funding and staffing to support its fire management program. Parks having an approved Fire Management Plan and accompanying National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance may utilize wildland fire to achieve resource benefits in predetermined fire management units. Parks lacking an approved Fire Management Plan may not use resource benefits as a primary consideration influencing the selection of a suppression strategy, but they must consider the resource impacts of suppression alternatives in their decisions.

4.2 Wilderness Policies

NPS policy on fire suppression conducted in wilderness, including the categories of designated, recommended, potential, proposed, and wilderness study areas, is expressed in section 6.3.9 of [Management Policies 2006](#). All suppression actions will be consistent with the “minimum requirement” concept in section 6.3.5 of those policies and the Wilderness Act of 1964 (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 1133 (c)). The minimum requirement concept, as expressed in the Wilderness Act, directs:

...[E]xcept as necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area... (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.

(Wilderness Act Section 4(c), 1964, 16 U.S. C. § 1133 (c))

Actions taken to manage wildland fire in wilderness using the appropriate minimum requirement concept will be conducted to protect life and safety and natural and cultural resources and to minimize the lasting impacts of the management actions and the fires themselves. The potential disruption of wilderness character and resources will be considered before, and given significantly more weight than, economic efficiency and convenience. If a compromise of wilderness resources or character is unavoidable, only those actions that preserve wilderness character and/or have localized, short-term adverse impacts will be acceptable, unless human life is threatened (see 5.1.F, below). Any delegation of authority to incident management teams will convey appropriate emphasis on the protection of wilderness resources.

5. OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

The NPS will act in accordance with the following operational principles, policies and procedures.

5.1 Interagency Principles for the Wildland Fire Policy

On April 18, 2005, the National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB), comprising the five Federal Wildland Fire Directors and the National Association of State Foresters, developed the following guiding principles for the implementation of the [Federal Wildland Fire Policy](#).

- A. Safety: Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.
- B. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability: The full range of fire management activities will be used to achieve ecosystem sustainability including its interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.
- C. Response to Wildland Fire: Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land,

Resource Management Plans and activities on a landscape scale, across bureau boundaries. Response to wildland fires 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 response to the fire.

- D. Use of Wildland Fire: Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance natural and cultural 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.
- E. Rehabilitation and Restoration: Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.
- F. Protection Priorities: The protection of human life is the single, overriding suppression priority. Setting priorities to protect human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be done based on human health and safety, the values to be protected, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.
- G. Wildland/Urban Interface: The operational roles of the agencies as partners in the wildland/urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, collaborative planning, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, State, and local governments. Federal wildland fire management 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 tribes, State and local governments with full structural protection.)
- H. 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 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.
- I. 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.

- J. Preparedness: Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land management plans and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment and management oversight.
- K. Suppression: Fires will be suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, and be consistent with resource objectives.
- L. Prevention: Agencies will work together with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
- M. 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.
- N. Interagency Cooperation: 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 all partners.
- O. 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.
- P. 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.
- Q. Evaluation: Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency priorities.

5.2 National Park Service Operational and Procedural Policies

In addition to the preceding guiding principles, the NPS has adopted the following operational and procedural policies.

- A. NPS fire management activities will be performed in accordance with [Part 620](#) of the *Departmental Manual*. Air Operations during wildland fire incidents will comply with the

provisions of [Director's Order/Reference Manual 60: Aviation Management](#) and [Parts 350-354](#) of the Departmental Manual.

- B. The Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, will prepare and issue [RM-18](#) to help NPS managers and field staffs understand and implement Departmental and NPS policies applicable to fire management. The reference manual will contain detailed procedures for the management of the fire program.
- C. The superintendent of each park having burnable vegetation will ensure that RM-18 is available to serve the needs of management staff within the park, and will ensure that management staff is adequately versed in the Departmental and NPS policies and procedures.
- D. The superintendent of each park will be responsible for complying with the Agency Administrator roles in the Agency Administrator and Management Performance Requirements for Fire Operations sections found in the current version of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#).
- E. The superintendent of each park will integrate fire management with all other aspects of park management, and will make employees available for fire assignments during periods of high regional or national fire activity, while providing for NPS mission priorities.

6. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

To further implement NPS Management Policies governing fire management activities, and to comply with the principles, policies, and recommendations of the [Interagency Strategy for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Policy, June 2003](#) and [Part 620](#) of the Departmental Manual, the NPS adopts the following program requirements:

6.1 Safety and Health

The safety of employees and visitors alike must be of prime concern during fires. Agency administrators at all levels need to stress that firefighter and public safety always take precedence over property and resource loss.

Per Departmental Manual Part 485 and the Code of Federal Regulations Title 29, all employees have the right to a safe assignment. Furthermore, all employees have the right to turn down unsafe assignments; they also have the responsibility to identify alternative methods of accomplishing the mission. All personnel are authorized and obligated to exercise emergency authority to stop and prevent unsafe acts.

Safety and Health Standards:

- A. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in all fire management activities.

- B. Fire personnel will meet appropriate qualifications for incident assignments and prescribed fire as described in the [Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide \(PMS 310-1\)](#), including medical requirements.
- C. Fire personnel will comply with National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and NPS fitness and personal protective equipment standards while assigned to fire incidents. Mutual aid cooperators, responding to NPS fires under Memoranda of Agreement, will meet their respective personal protective equipment and qualification standards during initial action operations. However, during extended operations, cooperators will meet NWCG equipment and qualification standards.
- D. Management of all wildland fire incidents will comply with the current version of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#).
- E. A job hazard analysis process will be used for potentially hazardous fire management activities, and for jobs that require employee use of out-of-the-ordinary personal protective equipment.

6.2 Interagency Coordination

- A. The superintendent of each park will comply with the current version of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#).
- B. The superintendent of each park will comply with the [National Interagency Mobilization Guide](#) in all applicable aspects for wildland fire management.
- C. The superintendent of each park will pursue mutual assistance agreements with nearby fire management units of Federal, state, local and tribal agencies.

6.3 Training, Qualifications, and Certification

- A. All NPS employees assigned dedicated fire program management responsibilities at the park, regional, or national level will meet established interagency and NPS competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) and concomitant qualifications.
- B. The departments of the Interior and Agriculture have implemented the [Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide](#) which established uniform qualification standards for key positions common to the five Federal wildland fire management agencies in which interagency qualifications directly or significantly affect employee safety.
- C. All NPS employees, including emergency firefighters, assigned to wildland fire management incidents will meet the training and qualification standards described in the current version of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#).
- D. All NPS employees involved in wildland fires will have their qualification records entered

into the database of record as described in the current version of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#). Employees cannot be dispatched through the resource ordering system until they are entered into this system.

- E. All wildland fires will be managed by an individual qualified and certified at the command level appropriate to the complexity level of the incident.
- F. All agency administrators or their delegates are responsible for verifying and certifying that their employees meet the identified position qualification standards.

6.4 Evaluation, Reviews, and Investigations

- A. After Action Reviews will be conducted on all wildland fires and fire-related incidents by the appropriate management level.
- B. All non-serious and serious wildland fire accidents, including human entrapments and shelter deployments, will be reported and investigated. All wildland fire-related serious accidents, including entrapments and deployments, will be investigated by an interagency investigation team. Per [Departmental Manual 485, Chapter 7](#), safety and health investigations are not to be used to fix blame or find fault for disciplinary purposes. Inquiries for the purpose of disciplinary proceedings will be conducted separately by another investigatory body. Only physical evidence or physical evidence documentation may be shared. Witness statements may not be shared.
- C. The following documents are key references for conducting wildland fire reviews, investigations, and serious accident investigations: [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#); [Investigating Wildland Fire Entrapments](#) (Missoula Technology and Development Center); [Fireline Handbook](#); [Incident Response Pocket Guide](#); [Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook Chapter 60 Accident Investigation and Reporting](#); [Director's Order #50B Section 5 and Reference Manual 50B, Occupational Safety and Health Program](#).
- D. Fire readiness or preparedness reviews, utilizing the [Interagency Fire Preparedness Review Guide](#) as adapted for park-specific needs, will be conducted annually by park fire management staff. Trained regional readiness review teams should be used to conduct more in-depth park preparedness reviews on a scheduled basis.

6.5 Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation

Wildland fires are a major component of the natural ecosystem and provide diversity and change to wildland communities. While there is a vulnerable stage to life, property, and infrastructure immediately after a wildfire, natural recovery should be encouraged wherever possible. If threats to values that need to be protected are identified, practical application of emergency stabilization treatments may be appropriate to protect life and property. Non-emergency rehabilitation and restoration treatments and activities may be appropriate given specific circumstances of the wildfire where there is a strong scientific basis to justify treatments and

activities.

6.6 Fire Communication and Education

Fire communication and education is a key component of the NPS Fire Management Program. A comprehensive, well-planned, and interdisciplinary communication and education program will be developed and implemented to enhance understanding of, and public support for, the entire scope of wildland fire management activities, particularly the role of fire in ecosystems.

-----End of Director's Order-----