

# **Communications Plan**

## **Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Implementation**

### **February 15, 2005**

#### **Background:**

The Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review created in 1995 was the first single comprehensive federal fire policy for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. The review was initiated by the 1994 fire season with its 34 fatalities and growing recognition of fire problems caused by fuel accumulation. The resulting 1995 Federal Fire Policy recognized for the first time the essential role of fire in maintaining natural systems. Most of the policy was incorporated into the federal firefighting agencies' guiding documents for fire management.

In 2000, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior requested a review of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation. In its January 2001 report, the responsible working group validated the general recommendations of the 1995 policy, but noted that changes were needed to address issues of ecosystem sustainability, science, education, communication and program evaluation. They also noted that implementation of the 1995 policy was incomplete, particularly in the quality of planning, and that some operational differences still existed.

In June 2003, the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) approved the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy to fully implement the original strategy, address the recommendations for updates in the 2001 Report, and clarify operational issues. The National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB) delegated the Federal Fire Policy Directives Task Group to accomplish full implementation.

The task required to accomplish full implementation are:

- Develop a communications plan that will aid and assist in internal and external understanding of terminology and implementation process.
- Develop consistent interagency language that describes how to implement each of the wildland fire policy statements;
- Revise department and agency specific manuals, handbooks, guidebooks and other documentation as appropriate;
- Revise interagency fire management handbooks, guidebooks and other interagency documents as appropriate;
- Revise NWCG and federal wildland fire management agency fire and fuels management training courses;
- Revise federal wildland fire management agency and interagency national and field level agreements to reflect fire policy and implementation language changes;
- Develop an internal periodic review process that will identify how well the federal wildland fire management agencies are implementing the seventeen fire policy statements, objectives and management intent;

### **Communication Strategy Goals:**

- To enhance understanding of the implementation process
- To provide information on what guiding documents will be changing so that fire managers can fully comply with the policy

### **Communication Issues #1:**

- It is important to emphasize that the implementation efforts do not represent a new policy. The current efforts are designed to finalize those elements of the 2001 update of the 1995 interagency wildland fire policy that were either still in discussion among the agencies and states, or were not ripe for finalization.
  - The seventeen interagency policy statements need to be emphasized:
1. **Safety:** Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.
    - **Key message:** Firefighter and public safety is the first priority.
  2. **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.
    - **Key Message:** Fire management strategies will be selected based on ecological, economic and social factors.
  3. **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.
    - **Key Message:** Fire, as a critical natural process, should be incorporated into planning and management decision across broad scales where safety and values to be protected deem it appropriate.
  4. **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.
    - **Key Message:** The use of wildland fire will be applied is used to protect, maintain and enhance resources in its ecological role based on an approved fire management plan.

5. **Rehabilitation and Restoration:** Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.
  - **Key message:** same
  
6. **Protection Priorities:** The protection of human life is the single, overriding suppression priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be done 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.
  - **Key message:** Protection of human life is always the highest priority. Other priorities are ordered using values at risk and cost assessments.
  
7. **Wildland Urban Interface:** The operational roles of the agencies as partners in the wildland/urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of Tribal, State, and 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 Tribes, State and local governments with full structural protection.)
  - **Key Message:** In the wildland urban interface, the agencies as partners assist with wildland firefighting, fuels reduction, cooperative education and prevent and technical assistance. Other activities are determined by interagency agreements.
  
8. **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.
  - **Key Message:** Every acre of burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management plan based on the goals and objectives of the area's approved land management plan. Fire management plans must be complete in consideration of safety, strategies, values at risk, and sufficient in environmental and regulatory standards.
  
9. **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.

- **Key Message:** Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of sound science.

10. **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.

- **Key Message:** same

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

- **Key Message:** same

12. **Prevention:** Agencies will work together and with partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

- **Key Message:** same

13. **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.

- **Key message:** Interagency fire management planning, training and qualifications, values at risk assessments and outreach programs will be standardized.

14. **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.

- **Key Message:** In all areas of fire management and research, interagency cooperation is a key to success and consistency.

15. **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.

- **Key Message:** Interagency communication and education of fire management practices and outcomes for employees and the public with the latest in tools and techniques will be a priority at all levels.

16. **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.
  - **Key Message:** Agency administrators must take an active role in the oversight of training and certifying employees, and make employees available to participate in the wildland fire management program.
  
17. **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.
  - **Key Messages:** Agencies will monitor the effectiveness of wildland fire management projects based on the elements of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

## **Communication Issue #2:**

- Several operational differences existed among the federal wildland fire management agencies. Discussions have led to consensus among the five federal wildland fire management agencies with regard to the following clarification statements:
  - A. Only one management objective will be applied to a wildland fire. Wildland fires will either be managed for resource benefits or suppressed. A wildland fire cannot be managed for both objectives concurrently. If two wildland fires converge, they will be reassessed for the appropriate management response, including the option to manage for resource benefit, and managed as a single wildland fire with a single management objective.
  - B. Human caused wildfires will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.
  - C. Once a wildland fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives (except in the situation described in #1 above).
  - D. The Appropriate Management Response (AMR) is any specific action suitable to meet Fire Management Unit (FMU) objectives. Typically, the AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical options (from monitoring to intensive management actions). The AMR is developed by using FMU strategies and objectives identified in the Fire Management Plan.

- E. The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis process is used to determine and document the suppression strategy from the full range of responses available for suppression operations. Suppression strategies are designed to meet the policy objectives of suppression.
- F. Wildland fire use is the result of a natural event. The Land/Resource Management Plan, or the Fire Management Plan, will identify areas where the strategy of wildland fire use is suitable. The Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is the tool that examines the available response strategies to determine if a fire is being considered for wildland fire use.
- G. When a prescribed fire or a fire designated for wildland fire use is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed, the fire will be declared a wildfire. Once a wildfire, it cannot be returned to a prescribed fire or wildland fire use status.

**Audience Identification:**

- Agency line officers
- Agency Regional, State, and subunit Fire Management Officers, firefighters
- Incident Command Teams
- State and Tribal partners
- Fire Planners
- Land and Resource Management planners
- Safety Officers
- Incident Business Management specialists
- Line Officers
- Training specialists

**Tools**

Effectively communicating, and implementing the final policy elements and operational clarification guidelines requires a number of tools and methods. These are either under development or currently available and they include:

- Memos
- Handouts
- Briefing papers
- Talking points
- Speech and presentation materials (e.g. PowerPoint programs)
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Web site maintenance outlining the implementation team's charter and tasks, and provide updates to the page and proposed changes in interagency manuals and handbooks are drafted. Make briefing papers, handouts, Q&As, PowerPoint presentations available on the website.

- Provide articles for federal interagency, tribal and NASF newsletters outlining the publications (manuals, handbooks, etc) that have changed and the guidance in the operational clarification and where it is located (Red Book etc).
- Create a link on the NWCG web page to the Federal Fire Policy information page ([www.nifc.gov/fire\\_policy](http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy)).
- Create briefing papers with status updates for WFLC and NFAEB to reach line officers and Fire Directors.
- Present information at National and Regional Leadership Team meetings.

**Action Plan**

The attached action plan identifies audiences, messages, tools, and due dates.

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Messages</b>	<b>Tools</b>	<b>Due date</b>
<i>National</i>			
Wildland Fire Leadership Council, NFAEB, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination, NASF	Updates of policies finalized, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification, request letter.	Briefing papers/Fact Sheet PowerPoint or other presentations. Briefing Updates.	Ongoing
FS, BLM, FWS, NPS and BIA Line Officers at the National level; State Foresters	Information including background, implementation process and strategy, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification.	Presentations, Briefing papers/Fact Sheet, Manual and Handbook update notices	Ongoing
Forest Service and BLM, FWS, NPS, BIA Fire Directors and safety officers;	Information including background, implementation process and strategy, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification.	Presentations, Briefing papers/Fact Sheet, Manual and Handbook update notices	Ongoing
Smokejumpers, IHCs, IMTs, Incident Business	An overview of policies finalized, direction publications affected.		Spring meetings, letter from NFAEB

	Explanation of operational clarification and importance of sharing with firefighters, planners.		
<b>Regional</b>			
FS, FWS, NPS, BIA Regional Line Officers	Information including background, implementation process and strategy, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification.	Letter from NFAEB, briefing paper, Fact Sheet; Presentations to Management	
FS, FWS, NPS, BIA Regional fire and safety staffs	Information including background, implementation process and strategy, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification.	Letter from NFAEB, briefing paper PowerPoint or Presentations to management staff, and related conference/workshop groups.	
BLM State Directors	An overview of policies finalized, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification and importance of sharing with firefighters, planners.	Letter from NFAEB briefing papers/fact sheet Presentations to management staff memo	
BLM State FMOs and Fire Staff,	An overview of policies finalized, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification and importance of sharing with firefighters, planners.	Briefing paper PowerPoint or Presentations to management staff, and related conference/workshop groups.	



<i>Local</i>			
BLM District Managers Forest Supervisors NPS Park Superintendents, FWS and BIA managers Line managers	An overview of policies finalized, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification and importance of sharing with firefighters, planners.	Briefing paper PowerPoint or Presentations to management teams, and related conference/workshop groups.	Ongoing - Spring meetings and fire preparedness readiness reviews
District, Forest, Refuge, Agency, Tribal and Park fire management officers or other managers with fire responsibilities	An overview of policies finalized, direction publications affected. Explanation of operational clarification and importance of sharing with firefighters, planners.	Briefing paper PowerPoint or other presentations to management teams, and related conference/workshop groups. Fact Sheets Web site	Ongoing - Spring meetings and fire preparedness readiness reviews