

INSTRUCTOR: Don Artley/Jim Hubbard
LESSON: Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy
UNIT: I-C
COURSE: Local and National Fire Management Leadership

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the role of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) in determining the policies that drive interagency cooperation in the national mobilization of wildland fire resources.
2. Understand the implications of the updated, 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.
3. Recognize that successful implementation requires interagency partnerships among federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies.

NARRATIVE:

I. THE WILDLAND FIRE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL (WFLC)

- A. Chartered in April 2002.
- B. Driven by National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report.
- C. Purpose: Ensure policy coordination, accountability, and effective implementation of the National Fire Plan and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.
- D. Membership
 - USDA Under Secretary
 - USDI Assistant Secretary
 - FS Chief
 - Bureau Directors for NPS, BLM, BIA & FWS
 - Western Governor
 - Southern Governor
 - Inter-tribal Timber Council (ITTC)
 - National Association of State Foresters (NASF)

- National Association of Counties (NACo)
- U.S. Fire Administration (FEMA)

II. THE NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP (NWCG)

- Chartered in 1976 by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to coordinate the fire programs of the two departments in order to avoid wasteful duplication and to provide a means of constructively working together.
- Current membership.
- Mission and vision.

III. FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE POLICY (Revised January 2001)

- The 1995 policy was driven by the 1994 fire season and the deaths of 34 wildland fire fighters. Signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior in December 1995.
- A review of the policy was completed in January 2001. The review and subsequent update was driven by the events of the 2000 fire season.
- Added 7 additional federal agencies under the Fire Policy: BOR, DOE, DOD, FWS, NWS, FEMA & USGS.
- The “Interagency Strategy for Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy”, which was approved by the Secretaries of USDA and DOI in April of 2004, guides the Federal Wildland Fire Management Agencies in the implementation of the 2001 updated policy.
- Implementation is dependent upon cooperation and participation of federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies and organizations.
- Planning, implementation, and monitoring will be done on an interagency basis with the involvement of all partners.

IV. REPORT CONTENTS

- Principal conclusions
 - The 1995 Federal Fire Policy is still generally sound and appropriate.
 - As a result of fire exclusion, the condition of fire-adapted ecosystems continues to deteriorate; the fire hazard situation in these areas is worse than previously understood.
 - The fire hazard in the Wildland/Urban Interface is more complex and

extensive that was understood in 1995.

- Changes and additions to the 1995 Federal Fire Policy are needed to address communication, and to provide for adequate program evaluation.
- Implementation of the 1995 Policy has been incomplete, particularly in the quality of planning and in interagency and interdisciplinary matters.
- Emphasis on program management, implementation, oversight, leadership, and evaluation at senior levels of all federal agencies is critical for successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

B. Guiding principals (9)

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use and desired future condition of the various public lands.
3. Fire Management Plans, programs, and activities support land and resource management plans and their implementation.
4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities. Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.
5. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and reorganizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process, investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set short- and long-term priorities, and clarify management accountability.
6. Fire Management Plans and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge and experience are developed among all federal wildland fire management agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire managers.
7. Fire Management Plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.
8. Federal, State, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full collaboration among federal wildland fire management agencies and between the federal wildland fire management agencies and international, State, tribal, and local governments and private entities result in a mobile fire management work force available for the

full range of public needs.

9. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal wildland fire management agencies is an ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the fundamental platform upon which federal wildland fire management agencies can cooperate, integrate fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for cooperation with State, tribal, and local fire management organizations.

C. Policy statements (17). Five statements were added to those from 1995 and one was dropped. Several other policies were revised.

- Interagency cooperation and definition of “partner”.
- Protection priorities.
- Wildland urban interface.
 - Structural fire protection / suppression
 - Differences between Federal role and state and local roles
 - Multi-jurisdictional situations
 - Agency Administrator (Line Officer) responsibilities

Policy Statements:

1. Safety

Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.

2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability

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

3. 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 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 fire.

4. 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.

5. Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation

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

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.

7. Wildland Urban Interface

The operational roles of the federal agencies as a partner in the Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazard 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 fire 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 structural protection.)

8. Planning

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved fire management plan. Fire Management Plan's 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.

9. Science

Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of the best available 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.

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.

11. Suppression

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

12. Prevention

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

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.

14. 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.

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.

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

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.

- D. Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The Secretaries of Departments of Agriculture and the Interior approved this implementation plan in April of 2004. In addition to providing direction for the implementation of the 17 policy statements, the plan also establishes seven statements for operational clarification in the implementation of the federal wildland fire management policy.
1. 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 managed as a single wildland fire.
 2. Human caused wildfires will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.
 3. Once a wildland fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives.
 4. 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.
 5. 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.
 6. 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.
 7. 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.

V. NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

- A. On August 8, 2000, then President Clinton asked the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop a plan to respond the severe fire season, reduce the impacts of wildland fires on rural communities, and ensure sufficient firefighting resources in the future.
- B. The Secretaries responded by directing the federal agencies, in cooperation with states, tribes, and local communities, to:

- Rehabilitate burned areas.
 - Reduce hazardous fuels in the vicinity of communities in the wildland urban interface.
 - Ensure that fire management personnel and equipment are prepared for extreme fire conditions in the future.
- C. The Western Governors’ Association (WGA) took the lead in developing a “Comprehensive 10-Year Strategy: A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment.”
- D. In May 2002, the two Secretaries and the WGA signed the Implementation Plan for the Comprehensive Strategy.
- E. In 2004 Congress passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act which has significant policy implications.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

- A. National commitment required for success.
- B. Partnerships: Shared leadership requires Agency Line Officers to:
- Engage in fire management programs.
 - Commit to fulfilling the Line Officer Role.
 - Lead their home units.