



U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management



Message from the Director

May 1, 2008

On April 29, 2008 the case USA v. Ellreese N. Daniels was legally settled with a plea agreement. Now we must personally resolve our own questions and issues related to the last seven years and the developments surrounding the Thirtymile Fire.

On July 10, 2001, four Forest Service wildland firefighters; Tom Craven, Karen FitzPatrick, Jessica Johnson and Devin Weaver died in the line of duty. To remember them always, we offer the highest form of respect that the Forest Service can pay to our fallen firefighters by embracing the painful lessons we learned from this tragedy and incorporating this learning into our every decision. By using the knowledge we gained, we better manage the risks and protect each other in the inherently dangerous world of wildland firefighting.

In 2006, the Chief of the Forest Service affirmed the foundational principles that are to guide all fire suppression efforts. The first principle describes our operational environment: “The Forest Service believes that no resource or facility is worth the loss of human life. We acknowledge that the wildland firefighting environment is dangerous because its complexity may make events and circumstances difficult or impossible to foresee. We will aggressively and continuously manage risks toward a goal of zero serious injuries or fatalities.”

All firefighters, especially leaders of firefighters, must be lifelong students of fire behavior and human behavior. In our dynamic, complex and hazardous environment, understanding both is critical to meeting our operational objectives safely. The Forest Service relies on the judgment of firefighters on-scene and we always will. Therefore, our focus must be on the training and development of our fireline leadership and continuous monitoring and critique of our actions. We recognize the weakness of ‘group think’ and encourage each other to use our individual reasoning along with our collective courage in every decision every day. We understand that true safety lies in embracing the lessons learned from our tragedies, near misses and success stories.

I want us, as unique individuals that comprise the whole firefighting community, to be personally resolved to offer the highest tribute we can pay to our fallen colleagues and friends by reading, learning, participating in, and teaching the lessons we have learned from our past.

Stay vigilant, watch over each other and be safe.

Tom Harbour, Director
Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management