



**File Code:** 5130/1100

**Date:** January 26, 2006

**Route To:**

**Subject:** Fire Suppression Foundational Doctrine

**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, and WO Staff

Over the last several months, we have been discussing a philosophy of managing fire suppression called “doctrine,” which focuses on the foundational principles that will guide our fire suppression activities. Our discussions have revealed much about who we are as an agency and what we are about. To one degree or another, we have all struggled with the concept of principles-driven decision-making; our values as an agency have been challenged. However, our discussions have provided an opportunity that we cannot afford to ignore.

I am accepting the principles enclosed with this letter as forming the foundational doctrine for fire suppression in the Forest Service. Externally, we are reaching out to our partners and others affected by this decision to explain the doctrine and its meaning. Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) will also start work with our partners to develop an Interagency Operational Doctrine designed to guide application of the foundational principles on the fireline. Internally, FAM will begin review and modification of fire management policies to meet the intent of the foundational principles. FAM will also begin work with other staff areas to modify policies associated with these principles that affect service-wide operations. Furthermore, FAM will embark on a review of current training to create new approaches to developing our firefighters and fire leadership and will seek to establish innovative processes to review and measure their performance.

Many of the doctrinal principles go beyond fire suppression; they are relevant to everything we do. In making this decision, I am therefore committing us to move toward a point where we anchor our actions and decisions to a well-understood doctrine. Implementing this approach to our work will take time; it will be an ongoing process. We are not abandoning our current policies, procedures, and measures of success. They will not be changed until FAM has completed the review and the Forest Service manual is revised. In the meantime, we can seek to understand what this doctrinal approach means and begin to behave accordingly.

Those who have wrestled with the implementation and use of doctrine have discovered three key areas that are necessary for adopting it.

The first area is *understanding* the doctrine—the concept as a whole as well as the pieces of doctrine we will develop over time. Understanding begins with Forest Service leadership, and I plan to bring our leaders together to develop our understanding and arrive at a consensus as to what doctrine is and what it is supposed to do. We will then engage the entire workforce in serious study and tough debate as part of a healthy living doctrinal environment.



The second area is *validating* the doctrine and anchoring it to our mission and our work. We need a doctrine that is sufficiently flexible yet wholly applicable to everything we do, and we should constantly reassess its relevance in view of advances in knowledge and technology, changes in national objectives, and innovative thinking. Through the way we are organized, we can keep our doctrine fresh and legitimate.

The third area is *implementing* the doctrine. Without implementation, it is wholly worthless. The general direction provided by doctrine should be converted into specific directives and translated into concrete action. We need to develop the means to synthesize the many elements of doctrine into something that works. We need to provide centralized direction for the implementation processes to ensure that the procedures themselves reflect our doctrinal principles, that they agree, that they embrace our cooperative relationships, and that they address the full spectrum of our work—both for today and for what we anticipate for tomorrow. We need new approaches to training that emphasize the things that will make our workforce capable of accepting the responsibility of discretionary decision-making. We need to amend our view of accountability and measures of success to reflect not only outcomes, but also the appropriateness of the decisions and behaviors leading to them.

Operating within this system requires that leaders at all levels provide clear, unambiguous intent and that we then release a trained and capable workforce to exercise their judgment in meeting that intent. This will not lead to anarchy. There will still be rules that, in tandem with guiding principles, frame the foundation of judgment and limits of discretion.

I know that this effort is unprecedented and that many of the risks are unknown. But I am convinced it is the correct path. It is an exciting journey, and I am entirely confident the Forest Service is up to the task.

*/s/ Dale N. Bosworth*  
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Chief

Enclosure