



Modification of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Guidance

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy being modified?

The policy is not being modified, but rather implementation of the policy is being made more flexible, to allow a wider range of responses to wildfire in some test areas. This is because the USDA Office of the Inspector General found in 2006 that the U.S. Forest Service could improve cost-effectiveness without sacrificing safety by increasing the use of fire to reduce overgrown vegetation that could fuel future fires. The modifications being tested will allow a range of responses to a fire, from aggressive suppression to passive management depending on the current and predicted risk, values to be protected, and land management objectives.

2. What is the goal of making these changes?

The ultimate goal for modifying the way federal wildland fire policy is understood and implemented is to allow for a full spectrum of management response to any wildland fire on federal lands based on the considerations of public and firefighter safety, the current and predicted risk, values to be protected, and land management objectives. By allowing more flexibility, fire managers can strengthen the effectiveness of agency firefighting resources without sacrificing public and firefighter safety.

3. What are the changes being tested?

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), which determines how fire policy is implemented in the United States, approved the following changes in the 2003 Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy for selected pilot areas during the 2008 fire season.

- (1) There may be one or more goals when responding to a wildfire, depending on the Land and Resource Management Plan and Fire Management Plan for that area.
- (2) When two or more fires burn together, they will be treated them as one fire with one of more goals as stated above.
- (3 & 4) Every wildfire will be assessed using the same decision support process that examines the full range of responses. The system currently being tested for this purpose is called the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS).
- (5) Once a prescribed fire is no longer meeting goals stated in the prescribed fire plan or project-level NEPA, it will be declared a wildfire and assessed like any other wildfire, as stated above.

4. What about the remainder of the 2003 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy?

The WFLC decided to retain these statements:

(1) 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.

(2) Human caused wildland fires will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.

5. What is the implementation timeframe?

The WFLC decision will be implemented during the 2008 fire season on selected pilot field units. Three to five pilot units per agency will test changes should a naturally caused wildfire occur.

6. How will this affect fire suppression response this summer?

There will be no effect to fire suppression or wildland fire use response this summer on units that are not designated as pilots for this test. If this summer's test is successful, further national guidance will be issued in 2009 for all naturally caused fires on federal lands.

7. What pilot areas will test the modifications this summer?

There is a cross representation of areas among the five federal land management agencies primarily within the western United States. A complete list is attached.

8. How do the modifications affect Cost Containment and Accountable Cost Management Strategies?

Both Cost Containment and Accountable Cost Management focus on the financial crisis resulting from the phenomenal escalation of fire suppression cost over the last several years. The planned response to these cost issues target three areas; 1) improved decisions, 2) improved management actions, and 3) strengthened management controls. The modifications to implementation of fire policy fit in the "improved management actions" by expanding available strategies and tactics for consideration by allowing multiple objectives on a fire.

9. How will conflicts between the modifications and existing Interagency and Agency specific policy and guidance be handled?

During the development of the modifications the task group identified numerous issues and barriers in existing policies and guidance that prevent field units being able to full spectrum of response actions necessary to manage a wildfire or wildland fire use event for the duration of the event. These issues and barriers will be documented and responses written as interim guidance for the pilot and shared as part of the adaptive learning process during the test period.