



## **DIRECTION TO LEADERS FEDERAL FIRE AND AVIATION PROGRAMS**

**2007**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This document provides the leader's intent to agency administration and senior fire program managers so they can communicate direction to organizations and staffs in the US Forest Service and the Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. This intent is fundamental in nature; specific and detailed direction exists in many agency and interagency policy documents. This document provides broad direction in five critical areas where superior performance is critical to successful wildland fire management.

- Leadership
- Fire and Aviation Operations
- Safety
- Cost Containment
- Current Policy Issues

The *2001 Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*, signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, is the key policy document for federal wildland fire management. It was followed by the *2003 Interagency Strategy for Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy*, which directed the development of common language and unified direction for all manuals, handbooks, and guidelines in order to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and safety of wildland fire operations. Although the agencies have the authority, responsibility, and autonomy to issue and implement agency specific policy (and use documents such as the *Forest Service Manual 5100* and the *Department of the Interior 620 DM* to do so), substantial progress has been made to develop common direction. Documents such as the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*, the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*, and the *Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide* attest to this. Fire policies and procedures between the five federal fire agencies need to be consistent to the highest degree possible. This document is part of that effort.

The convergence of several trends in recent years is having an increasingly cumulative and adverse impact on the nation's wildfire response capability and effectiveness.

Mitigating the effects of these trends and maintaining effectiveness into the future will require a focused collaborative effort at all levels.

### **Wildland Fire Trends**

- **Acres Burned:** A record 9.9 million acres burned for 2006, surpassing the previous record set in 2005. Since 1960, five of the 10 worst seasons for acres burned have occurred in the past seven years. Season outlooks are available at: <http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm>
- **Fuels Accumulations:** Although there have been aggressive fuels management efforts, and treatments repeatedly prove their effectiveness, the accumulation of fuels often outpaces the ability to reduce them and also periodically maintain those treatments to retain their effectiveness.
- **Wildland Urban Interface Expansion:** Recent studies show broad-scale expansion of wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas, and that 60 percent of new home construction in the past 10 years has occurred in the WUI.
- **Complexity:** As a result of trends in wildland-urban interface expansion, drought, bug infestations, and in fuels and weather that impact fire behavior, firefighting is an increasingly complex venture.
- **All-Hazard Response:** There is a growing reliance on the fire community to respond to all-hazard incidents such as hurricanes and other disasters.

Current trends related to wildland fire management are leading toward “perfect storm” conditions. Agency administrators, fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders must be prepared for the challenges that will be faced.

### **LEADERSHIP**

The most essential element for success in the wildland fire organization is competent leadership. The fire and all-hazard response environment is complex, dynamic, unpredictable, and often dangerous. The primary mission of the agency fire programs is preparedness for and response to wildland fires. Wildland fire management resources will be available for response to non-fire incidents under the National Response Plan (NRP) in accordance with Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture commitments in the NRP. Regardless of incident type, agency administrators, fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders make a commitment to protect life, property, and natural resources in our communities, states and nation. Their decisions may profoundly affect citizens, communities, and natural resources. Agency administrators and fire program leaders are expected to use their knowledge, skills, and abilities to make sound and timely decisions, and to take decisive and effective actions.

Specific authorities, responsibilities and requirements for resource and fire management leaders are located in various agency and interagency policy documents. Fire program leaders must be familiar with pertinent agency and interagency fire management policies, practices and processes.

Leadership of the Federal fire agencies is actively pursuing ways to reduce the liability threat to competent fireline leaders who are trying their best to perform their duty in a dangerous environment.

### Specific Actions for 2007

- Areas will frequently validate drawdown plans considering overall national capability.
- Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) will consider current and expected firefighting resource availability.
- Area and NIFC will establish robust decision support to assist with situational assessment, resource allocation assessment and execution.
- Successfully integrate National Incident Management Organizations (NIMO) into fire operations this year.
- The Forest Service has identified and will begin implementation of 47 specific Management Efficiencies. These actions are designed to improve operations effectiveness in a variety of wildland fire program areas and reduce cost.
- National shared resources will be managed to maximize their availability and flexibility for all assignments including all-hazard assignments. Manage fatigue in achieving this objective.
- Give high priority to achieving vegetation treatment throughout the entire year.

### **FIRE AND AVIATION OPERATIONS**

Agency administrators and fire management leaders will apply fire and aviation management policy in a sensible, effective and consistent manner. All preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

In many cases, aggressive initial attack is the single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the public, and to limit suppression cost. Planning, organizing, and implementing appropriate fire operations must always be focused on directly and economically achieving a defined objective. In other wildland fire operations such as prescribed fires, wildland fire use, and fuels management, the goal continues to be accomplishment of established management objectives in a safe, effective, and efficient manner. Regardless of the management objective, leaders must ensure that in all fire operations decisions are timely, action is decisive, and an aggressive approach to mission accomplishment is maintained.

### **SAFETY**

The primary means by which we achieve safety is through risk management. Risk management

is a process for measuring and assessing risk and developing strategies to manage it. This helps leaders make sound organizational and operational safety decisions in a logical manner.

Fire leaders at all levels should develop and cultivate high reliability organizations – organizations that operate under very trying conditions yet achieve extremely low error rates. In high reliability organizations, leaders place a high priority on safety and reliability. Significant levels of redundancy exists which permit backup capability to compensate for failure. Fire program leaders must seek continued improvement in all areas of organizational safety, both for themselves and for their subordinates.

### **COST CONTAINMENT**

Maximizing the cost effectiveness of fire and aviation operations is the responsibility of all involved; including those that authorize, direct, or implement those operations.

Agency Administrators and their delegates (including incident commanders) will be held accountable for exercising *direct* cost containment by ensuring that planned expenditures are sensible and that actual expenditures measurably affect intended outcomes.

Utilization of decision support tools and advice from mentors and advisors will assist in this practice. Multi-agency coordination groups will be help accountable for exercising *indirect* cost containment by ensuring that firefighting resource allocation is reasonable and prudent, and that allocated resources are efficiently and economically utilized to accomplish management objectives.

Continued increases in suppression expenditures correspond to direct reductions to preparedness and other base program allocations.

### **CURRENT POLICY ISSUES**

Agency administrators, fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders must be informed and track developments in the following current policy issues.

#### *Appropriate Management Response (AMR)*

Appropriate management response is the response to a wildland fire that most effectively, efficiently, and safely meets objectives identified in the approved fire management plan.

The response is determined by specific, pre-established criteria stated in the plan. The response may range across a spectrum of tactical operations, from monitoring to intensive management actions. Regardless of the type of response, leaders must ensure that decisions are timely and actions are decisive. In the near future the goal is to merge suppression and wildland fire use policy, standards, and procedures into a common approach that acknowledge a full range of management responses.