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Chapter 05

USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire and Aviation Program Organization and Responsibilities

Introduction

This handbook is intended to be a program reference guide that documents the standards for operational procedures and practices for the USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management program. The standards provided in this handbook are based on current agency and interagency wildland fire management policy, and is intended to provide fire and aviation program guidance and to ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective fire and aviation operations. This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

Foundational Doctrine

The following collection of principles and beliefs form the foundational doctrine for fire suppression in the U.S. Forest Service. These principles and beliefs operate at multiple organizational levels, including:

- Forest Service Wide (i.e., apply to all employees and activities)
- Fire and Aviation Management (i.e., are specific to the fire and aviation management program)
- Fire Suppression (i.e., are specific to fire fighting activities).

The Operational Environment

Fire Suppression

No resource or facility is worth the loss of human life, however the wildland fire suppression environment is complex and possesses inherent hazards that can--- even with reasonable mitigation---result in harm to fire fighters engaged in fire suppression operations. In recognition of this fact, we are committed to the aggressive management of risk.

Mission

Forest Service Wide

The Forest Service is prepared and organized to support national and international emergencies with trained personnel and other assets when requested.

Forest Service Wide

Agency employees respond when they come across situations where human life is immediately at risk or there is a clear emergency, and they are capable of assisting without undue risk to themselves or others.

Forest Service Wide

In responding to emergencies, we will bring the same professionalism and passion for safety as we do to non-emergency situations.

1 **Forest Service Wide**

2 Support for local fire emergencies takes priority over accomplishment of local
3 resource targets. Support of non-local fire emergencies will be at the discretion
4 of the local line officer, as bounded by agency agreements and Regional or
5 National direction.

6

7 **Forest Service Wide**

8 A cooperative relationship between the Forest Service and other agencies is
9 essential. The Forest Service is committed to honor its part of the joint
10 responsibility to develop and maintain effective working relationships with its
11 intergovernmental cooperators.

12

13 **Fire & Aviation Management**

14 Fire management is central to meeting the Forest Service mission – conserving
15 natural resources, restoring ecological health, and protecting communities.

16

17 **Fire Suppression**

18 Successful fire suppression is essential to support the Forest Service mission.

19

20 **Fire Suppression**

21 The intent of wildfire suppression is to protect human life, property, and at risk
22 lands and resources.

23

24 **Leadership and Accountability**

25 **Forest Service Wide**

26 The hallmarks of Forest Service leadership are action, attitude, and
27 accountability.

28

29 **Forest Service Wide**

30 Leaders express clear and concise intent to ensure assignments are managed
31 safely, effectively, and efficiently.

32

33 **Forest Service Wide**

34 Leaders regularly monitor operations for effectiveness, and take action when
35 there is recognition of exceptional or problematic employee performance.

36

37 **Forest Service Wide**

38 Both positive reinforcement and discipline will be based on individual behavior
39 as measured by: adherence to the rules; appropriate application of doctrine,
40 principles and guidelines; execution of responsibilities commensurate with role;
41 and appropriate use of available information.

42

43 **Fire Suppression**

44 Demonstrated fitness for command is a requirement for leadership positions
45 associated with fire fighting.

46

1 **Roles and Relationships**

2

3 **Forest Service Wide**

4 Commitment to duty, respect for others, and personal integrity are expected.

5 Every employee fosters a work environment that is enjoyable, rewarding,

6 recognizes the value of diversity, and is free of harassment.

7

8 **Fire Suppression**

9 Every Forest Service employee has a responsibility to support fire suppression

10 emergencies in a manner that meets identified needs, and is within their

11 qualifications and capabilities.

12

13 **Fire & Aviation Management**

14 Contracted resources will meet identified standards for qualifications, training,

15 productivity, and efficiency necessary to meet emergency response needs.

16

17 **Fire & Aviation Management**

18 It is the Forest Service responsibility to initiate and participate in public

19 education efforts to promote support for necessary fire management activities.

20

21 **Forest Service Wide**

22 Line officers with fire management responsibilities will have knowledge and

23 understanding of fire program management.

24

25 **Operations**

26

27 **Forest Service Wide**

28 Employees are expected and empowered to be creative and decisive, to exercise

29 initiative and accept responsibility, and to use their training, experience, and

30 judgment in decision-making to carry out their leader's intent.

31

32 **Forest Service Wide**

33 Employees are expected and empowered to make reasonable and prudent

34 decisions to accomplish the agency mission while minimizing exposure to

35 hazards.

36

37 **Forest Service Wide**

38 Clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders maximize effectiveness and

39 minimize confusion.

40

41 **Fire Suppression**

42 When it is time to fight fire, we do so in a manner that maximizes effectiveness

43 of effort, has highest regard for firefighter and public safety, and controls costs.

44

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1 **Fire Suppression**

2 Every fire suppression operation is directed toward clearly-defined, decisive,
3 and obtainable objectives.

4

5 **Fire Suppression**

6 Command and control must be decentralized to cope with the unpredictable
7 nature of fire. To achieve their leader's intent and accomplish operational
8 objectives, subordinate commanders are required to make decisions on their own
9 initiative, and to coordinate their efforts.

10

11 **Fire Suppression**

12 Unity of effort is maintained and suppression actions are coordinated at all
13 times.

14

15 **Fire Suppression**

16 Using principles requires judgment in application, while adherence to rules does
17 not. In combination principles and rules guide our fundamental wildland fire
18 suppression practices and behaviors, and are mutually understood at every level
19 of command.

20

21 **Fire Suppression**

22 Rapid deployment and concentration of fire suppression resources at the
23 decisive time and place is essential to successful fire suppression actions.

24

25 **Fire Suppression**

26 Maintaining high capability for initial attack is essential to public and fire fighter
27 safety, accomplishment of management objectives, and cost containment.

28

29 **Risk Management**

30

31 **Fire Suppression**

32 We practice risk management to minimize the exposure and affects of the
33 inherent hazards in fire suppression while maximizing the opportunities to
34 achieve leader intent.

1 Agency Administrator Positions

2 The Forest Service Director of Fire and Aviation Management, the Director of
3 Human Resources and the Forest Service Line Officer Team have developed
4 core fire management competencies for inclusion into the position descriptions
5 and in selection criteria for agency administrators. They are presented here for
6 reference.

8 Evaluation Criterion

9 Knowledge of fire program management including ability to integrate fire and
10 fuels management across all program areas and functions; ability to implement
11 fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns into
12 collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies;
13 knowledge to oversee a fire management program including budget,
14 preparedness, prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction; ability to
15 serve as an agency administrator during an incident on an assigned unit; and
16 ability to provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diversified firefighting
17 workforce that exists in a "safety first" and "readiness" environment.

19 Training and Core Competencies

- 20 • Attend a regional or national "*Fire Management Leadership for Agency*
21 *Administrators*" training session.
- 22 • Require a shadow assignment with a fully qualified agency administrator.
- 23 • Receive training or experience in the Wildfire Situation Analysis (WFSA)
24 and Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP).
- 25 • Provide a Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders.

27 Performance Standards

28 Add the following standards to the existing performance standards for Forest
29 Supervisors and District Rangers under Performance Standard #4, Leadership,
30 Coaching, and Supervising:

- 31 • Integrate fire and fuels management across all functional areas.
- 32 • Implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource
33 concerns into collaborative community protection and ecosystem
34 restoration strategies on the unit.
- 35 • Manage a budget that includes fire preparedness, prevention, suppression,
36 and hazardous fuels in an annual program of work for the unit.
- 37 • Perform duties of agency administrator and maintain those qualifications.
- 38 • Provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diverse workforce in a "safety
39 first" environment.

40
41 These standards are based on current policy and provide program guidance to
42 ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective Fire and Aviation Operations.
43 This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

44

1 **Specific Agency Administrator Performance Standards for Fire and**
2 **Aviation at the Field Level**

3

4 **Preparedness**

- 5 • Take all necessary and prudent actions to ensure firefighter and public
6 safety.
- 7 • Ensure sufficient qualified fire and non-fire personnel are available to
8 support fire operations at a level commensurate with the local and national
9 fire situation.
- 10 • Ensure accurate position descriptions are developed and reflect the
11 complexity of the unit. Individual Development Plan promote and enhance
12 FMO currency and development.
- 13 • Provide a written Delegation of Authority to FMOs that provides an
14 adequate level of operational authority at the unit level. Include Multi-
15 Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group authority, as appropriate.
- 16 • Identify resource management objectives to maintain a current Fire
17 Management Plan (FMP) that identifies an accurate level of funding for
18 personnel and equipment.
- 19 • Develop preparedness and fire use standards that are in compliance with
20 agency fire policies.
- 21 • Management teams meet once a year to review fire and aviation policies,
22 roles, responsibilities, and delegations of authority. Specifically address
23 oversight and management controls, critical safety issues, and high-risk
24 situations such as transfers of incident command, periods of multiple fire
25 activity, and Red Flag Warnings.
- 26 • Ensure fire and aviation preparedness reviews are conducted each year.
- 27 • Meet annually with major cooperators and review interagency agreements
28 to ensure their continued effectiveness and efficiency.
- 29 • Convene and participate in annual conferences and fire reviews.

30

31 **Suppression**

- 32 • Ensure use of fire funds is in compliance with Agency policies.
- 33 • Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) is completed and approved on
34 all fires that escape initial attack. Alternative evaluation and certification
35 requirements are followed.
- 36 • WFSA's that are expected to exceed \$10,000,000.00 in suppression costs
37 are forwarded to the Regional Office for review and approval.
- 38 • Management reviews are conducted on all fires that require a WFSA.
39 Personally attend reviews on Type 1 and Type 2 fires.
- 40 • Provide incident management objectives, written delegations of authority,
41 and a complete agency administrator Briefing to Incident Management
42 Teams.
- 43 • Evaluate the need for resource advisors for all fires, and assign as
44 appropriate.

- 1 • For all unplanned human-caused fires where responsibility can be
2 determined, ensure actions are initiated to recover cost of suppression
3 activities, land rehabilitation, damages to the resource, and improvements.
4

5 **Safety**

- 6 • Review safety policies, procedures, and concerns with field fire and
7 aviation personnel.
8 • Ensure timely follow-up actions to program reviews, fire preparedness
9 reviews, fire and aviation safety reviews, and management reviews.
10 • Monitor the fire situation and provide oversight during periods of critical
11 fire activity and situations of high risk.
12 • Ensure there is adequate direction in fire management plans to maintain
13 fire danger awareness.
14 • Take appropriate actions with escalating fire potential.
15 • Ensure appropriate investigations are conducted for incidents, entrapments,
16 and serious accidents.
17

18 **Fire Use**

- 19 • Ensure an approved burn plan is followed for each prescribed fire project,
20 including follow-up monitoring and documentation to ensure management
21 objectives are met.
22 • Ensure that a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is completed and
23 implemented for all fires managed for resource benefits.
24 • Provide management oversight by personally visiting wildland and
25 prescribed fire activities each year.
26 • Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction
27 for prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and
28 inspections of the prescribed fire program are completed.
29 • Approve Prescribed Fire Plans. Authority may be delegated to the agency
30 administrators as provided under specific directions.
31 • Review Prescribed Fire Plans and recommend or approve the plans
32 depending upon the delegated authority. Ensure that the Prescribed Fire
33 Plan has been reviewed and recommended by a qualified technical
34 reviewer who was not involved in the plan preparation.
35

36 **Fire Management Positions**

37 The following lists show the minimum operational experience recommended for
38 fire management positions. The *Interagency Fire Program Management*
39 *Qualifications Standards* will be used as guidelines in conjunction with specific
40 agency requirements when filling vacant fire program positions, and as an aid in
41 developing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for employees.
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1 **Specific Fire Management Staff Performance Standards for Fire**
2 **Operations at the Field Level**

3

4 **Preparedness**

- 5 • Maintain “safety first” as the foundation for all aspects of fire and aviation
6 management.
- 7 • Ensure that only trained and qualified personnel are assigned to fire and
8 aviation duties.
- 9 • Develop, implement, evaluate, and document fire and aviation training
10 program to meet current and anticipated needs.
- 11 • Establish an effective process to gather, evaluate, and communicate
12 information to managers, supervisors, and employees. Ensure clear
13 concise communications are maintained at all levels.
- 14 • Ensure fire and aviation management staffs understand their roles,
15 responsibilities, authority, and accountability.
- 16 • Develop and maintain an open line of communication with public and
17 cooperators.
- 18 • Regardless of funding level, provide a safe, effective, and efficient fire
19 preparedness and fire use program.
- 20 • Organize, train, equip, and direct a qualified work force. An Individual
21 Development Plan (IDP) must be provided for incumbents who do not
22 meet new standards. Establish qualification review process.
- 23 • Take appropriate action when performance is exceptional or deficient.
- 24 • Ensure fire and aviation policies are understood, followed, and coordinated
25 with other agencies as appropriate.
- 26 • Ensure that adequate resources are available to implement fire management
27 operations.
- 28 • Provide fire personnel with adequate guidance, training, and decision-
29 making authority to ensure timely decisions.
- 30 • Develop and maintain agreements, annual operating plans, and contracts on
31 an interagency basis to increase effectiveness and efficiencies.
- 32 • Develop, maintain, and annually evaluate the FMP to ensure accuracy and
33 validity.
- 34 • Ensure budget requests and allocations reflect preparedness requirements
35 in the FMP.
- 36 • Develop and maintain current operational plans. (e.g., dispatch, pre-attack,
37 prevention).
- 38 • Ensure that reports and records are properly completed and maintained.
- 39 • Ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability in planning and
40 expenditures.
- 41 • Assess, identify, and implement program actions that effectively reduce
42 unwanted wildland fire ignitions and mitigate risks to life, property, and
43 resources.
- 44 • Work with cooperators to identify processes and procedures for providing
45 fire safe communities within the wildland urban interface.

1 Suppression

- 2 • Ensure completion of a job hazard analysis (JHA) for fire and fire aviation
- 3 activities, and implement applicable risk mitigation measures.
- 4 • Provide for and personally participate in periodic site visits to individual
- 5 incidents and projects.
- 6 • Utilize the incident complexity analysis to ensure the proper level of
- 7 management is assigned to all incidents.
- 8 • Ensure incoming personnel and crews are briefed prior to fire and aviation
- 9 assignments.
- 10 • Coordinate the development of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis
- 11 (WFSA) with local unit staff specialists for all fires that escape initial
- 12 attack.
- 13 • Ensure effective transfer of command of incident management occurs and
- 14 safety is considered in all functional areas.
- 15 • Monitor fire activity to anticipate and recognize when complexity levels
- 16 exceed program capabilities. Increase managerial and operational
- 17 resources to meet needs.
- 18 • Complete cost recovery actions when unplanned human-caused fires occur.

19

20 Safety

- 21 • Ensure work/rest and R&R guidelines are followed during all fire and
- 22 aviation activities. Deviations are approved and documented.
- 23 • Initiate, conduct, and/or participate in fire management related reviews and
- 24 investigations.
- 25 • Monitor fire season severity predictions, fire behavior, and fire activity
- 26 levels. Take appropriate actions to ensure safe, efficient, and effective
- 27 operations.

28

29 Fire Use

- 30 • Ensure a written, approved burn plan exists for each prescribed fire project.
- 31 • Ensure all escaped prescribed fires receive a review at the proper level.
- 32 • Provide the expertise and skills to fully integrate fire and aviation
- 33 management into interdisciplinary planning efforts.
- 34 • Effectively communicate the “natural role” of wildland fire to internal and
- 35 external agency audiences.
- 36 • Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction
- 37 for prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and
- 38 inspections of the prescribed fire program are completed.