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CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
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WASHINGTON OFFICE
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OFFICE OF WILDLAND FIRE
COORDINATION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20240



USDA NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
P.O. BOX 2890
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013

OCT 06 2008

SUBJECT: Improving Communication about Wildland Fire Activities

TO: Conservation and Natural Resource Leaders from the:
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Foresters
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Forest Service
Department of the Interior

As conservation and natural resource leaders we are all very aware of the need to communicate effectively with citizens and communities, at the local level, about our programs and activities. We also know that our ability to communicate important information is often dependent on strong working relationships with the owners and managers of farms, forests, and ranches.

Communication with private landowners during emergency situations, such as the suppression of wildland fires, is a challenge faced every year by State and Federal agencies with wildland fire protection responsibilities. This communication challenge can be even more acute when out-of-state interagency incident management teams are rotated through local areas and called upon to plan and implement complex strategies to combat large, severe fires.

The purpose of this memorandum is to encourage you, at the regional, State, and local levels, to take coordinated actions to facilitate improved communication with private landowners and other interested citizens about wildland fire activities, including fire suppression, burned area emergency rehabilitation, and prescribed fire. All of our organizations are involved in one or more of these activities. Therefore, we should strive to support each other by both increasing our knowledge of each others programs and activities and then using that knowledge to inform landowners and other citizens, particularly those that are impacted during emergency situations.

We ask that the regional and State leaders of all our organizations utilize existing forums to meet and discuss what actions are most appropriate to take, given historic and expected wildland fire activities. At these forums we ask that you consider at least the following actions:

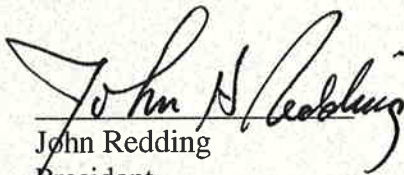
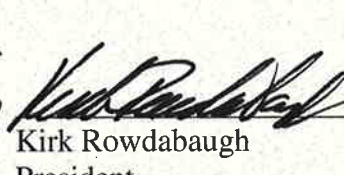
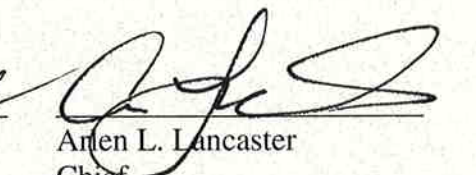
- Recommend that all supervisors complete the training course ICS-100 – Introduction to the Incident Command System (available online through Aglearn for USDA employees). Consider jointly sponsored training and invite all personnel to participate.

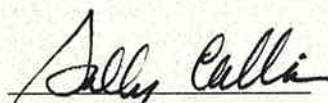

- Recommend that local wildland fire protection agencies meet at the local/field office level with NRCS and conservation districts to develop/improve understanding of local fire protection and prescribed fire procedures/protocols.
- Recommend that NRCS and conservation districts meet with wildland fire protection agencies to discuss ways to coordinate delivery of assistance to private landowners for post-fire recovery and restoration (e.g., Emergency Watershed Protection Program and Burned Area Emergency Response assessments).
- Recommend that NRCS and conservation districts increase their awareness and knowledge of wildland fire activities in their local areas and know where to direct the public to get timely information (e.g., fire websites, telephone hotlines, and post timely information in front offices).
- Recommend that NRCS and conservation districts, during wildland fire activities, be prepared to direct concerned landowners and citizens to the appropriate agency incident management team, preferably a local knowledgeable person that can help address their concerns.
- Recommend that NRCS and conservation districts consider making employees available as resource advisors or agency/landowner liaisons, particularly when private land is impacted and the situation requires extra attention to communication with private landowners.

Two resources that you may find useful are:

- *Montana Interagency Coordination Guide: Working with Communities and Private Landowners, Before, During, and After Wildfires*, which was cooperatively developed by the U.S. Forest Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc. The guide is available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1-r4/spf/coopfire/IG_Guide_FINAL1.pdf
- *Earning Bridges*, a toolbox designed to provide managers with an array of ideas, resources, and proven techniques – all focused on the task of preventing problems that can occur when a wildfire is threatening your partners and local publics. This resource was developed by the Bureau of Land Management and is available at: <http://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/viewresource.php?courseID=188>

During emergency situations such as wildland fire suppression, landowners and communities often do not care which agency is in charge of their mission/programs, etc. What matters most to citizens in these situations is timely, accurate information -- simply put a "service first" approach. With a "service first" approach in mind, we respectfully ask that you give due consideration to the recommended actions in this letter.

		
John Redding President National Association of Conservation Districts	Kirk Rowdabaugh President National Association of State Foresters	Arlen L. Lancaster Chief Natural Resources Conservation Service

	
Abigail Kambell Chief Forest Service	Ron Dunton Director Office of Wildland Fire Coordination Department of Interior

Attachment

FINAL:REVISED:NRCS:S&T:ECS:ANDYMASON:cdh:9-25-08:720-2308:LM-08-119
FINAL:NRCS:S&T:ECS:ANDYMASON:cdh:9-22-08:720-2308:LM-08-119
DRAFT:USDA:NRS:S&T:ECS:ANDYMASON:720-2308:ylp:1-29-08:Joint_let_Stateplns.doc