

Chapter 01

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Guidance Overview

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Scope

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook. This handbook attempts to quote verbatim, rather than to paraphrase, policy that is stated elsewhere. It also attempts to limit duplication of source policy when a reference will suffice. *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* is intended to comply with and support the *2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* and other existing federal policy.

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Purpose

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* provides fire and fire aviation program management direction for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will continue to comply with all agency specific health and safety policy documents, and with fire operations standards stated in the *NWGC Incident Response Pocket Guide (PMS 461, NFES 1077)* and the *NWCG Fireline Handbook PMS 410-1, NFES 0065*.

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2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

The *2001 Federal Fire Policy* comprises the following guiding principles and discreet policies. As a whole these principles and policy statements guide the philosophy, direction, and implementation of fire management planning, activities, and projects on federal lands.

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Guiding Principles of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use and desired future condition of the various public lands.
3. Fire Management Plans (FMP)s, programs, and activities support land and resource management plans and their implementation.
4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities. Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.

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- 1 **5.** Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based
2 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management
3 objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and reorganizing
4 programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process,
5 investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other
6 agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set
7 short and long term priorities and clarify management accountability.
- 8 **6.** FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge
9 and experience are developed among all wildland fire management
10 agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency
11 collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire
12 managers.
- 13 **7.** FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality
14 considerations.
- 15 **8.** Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and
16 cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require
17 that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with
18 the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full
19 collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies and
20 international, state, tribal, and local governments and private entities results
21 in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of
22 public needs.
- 23 **9.** Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an
24 ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the
25 fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate
26 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for
27 cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.
28 *(2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 21-22)*

30 **Elements of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

31 **1. Safety**

32 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All FMPs and activities
33 must reflect this commitment.

35 **2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**

36 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve
37 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and
38 social components.

40 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**

41 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource
42 management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency
43 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social and
44 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire
45 occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare,

1 the natural and cultural resources, and the values to be protected dictate the
2 appropriate response to fire.

3

4 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**

5 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain and enhance resources and,
6 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.
7 Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific
8 prescriptions contained in operational plans.

9

10 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**

11 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and
12 sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect
13 infrastructure.

14

15 **6. Protection Priorities**

16 The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority.
17 Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community
18 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural
19 resources will be done based on the values to be protected, human health
20 and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to
21 an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be
22 protected.

23

24 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**

25 The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland
26 urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative
27 prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire
28 suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state or local governments.
29 Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities
30 under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual
31 responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies
32 have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they
33 administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and
34 local governments with structural protection.)

35

36 **8. Planning**

37 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs
38 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed
39 fires based on the area's approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs
40 must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management
41 strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and
42 public health issues; and be consistent with resource management
43 objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.

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1 **9. Science**

2 Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of the
3 best available science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase
4 our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors.
5 Information needed to support fire management will be developed through
6 an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be
7 made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the
8 development of LMPs, fire management plans, and implementation plans.
9

10 **10. Preparedness**

11 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire
12 management programs in support of land and resource management plans
13 through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and
14 management oversight.
15

16 **11. Suppression**

17 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public
18 safety, benefits, and all values to be protected; consistent with resource
19 objectives.
20

21 **12. Prevention**

22 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and
23 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
24

25 **13. Standardization**

26 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,
27 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-
28 protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire
29 management activities.
30

31 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

32 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use,
33 restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be
34 conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and
35 partners.
36

37 **15. Communication and Education**

38 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
39 management policies and practices through internal and external
40 communication and education programs. These programs will be
41 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
42 information among all affected agencies and organizations.
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1 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

2 Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified
3 and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally,
4 regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with
5 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire
6 programs as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be
7 held accountable for making employees available.
8

9 **17. Evaluation**

10 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to
11 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the *2001*
12 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*. The evaluation will assure
13 accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify
14 resource shortages and agency priorities.
15 (*2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 22-24*)
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17 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

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19 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

20 Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of fire
21 operations. Doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire
22 operations. It provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire operations, a
23 mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire operations doctrine
24 does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific situations so much as it
25 sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application.
26

27 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

28 Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire
29 operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes
30 management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as aircraft,
31 vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the magnitude and
32 complexity of the fire itself and of the human response to it will vary, the fact
33 that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never change. A firefighter
34 utilizing the best available science, equipment, and training, and working within
35 the scope of agency doctrine and policy, can still suffer serious injury or death.
36

37 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

38 The primary means by which we prevent accidents in wildland fire operations is
39 through aggressive risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that
40 while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard free work environment is not
41 a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized,
42 comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we will determine the
43 acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for safety yet still achieve fire
44 operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of
45 injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.
46

1 Fire Preparedness

2 Fire preparedness is the state of being prepared to provide an appropriate
3 response to wildland fires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the
4 result of activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions.
5 Preparedness requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and
6 implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness
7 requires a continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting
8 infrastructure, predicting fire activity, identifying values to be protected, hiring,
9 training, equipping, pre-positioning and deploying firefighters and equipment,
10 evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving operations. All
11 preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations
12 capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

14 Fire Operations Command Philosophy

15 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire
16 operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in
17 fire operations and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commanders'
18 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly
19 articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on
20 their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander's intent. A
21 competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may
22 understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance
23 removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to
24 take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational
25 objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or
26 that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and
27 cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective.
28 Unified, coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the
29 fireline or between the highest command level and the most subordinate
30 firefighter, is critical to successful fire operations.

32 Fire Leadership

33 Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most
34 essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership.
35 Good leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for wildland
36 firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful
37 circumstances. Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no
38 simple, clear-cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use
39 their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make
40 decisions and to take or direct action - in short, to provide leadership. All
41 firefighters, regardless of position, must provide leadership.

43 Fire Suppression

44 The purpose of fire suppression is to put the fire out in a safe, effective, and
45 efficient manner. Fires are easier and less expensive to suppress when they are
46 small. When the management goal is full suppression, aggressive attack is the

1 single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the public,
2 and to limit suppression costs. Aggressive attack provides the Incident
3 Commander maximum flexibility in suppression operations. Successful attack
4 relies on speed and appropriate force. All aspects of fire suppression benefit
5 from this philosophy. Planning, organizing, and implementing fire suppression
6 operations should always meet the objective of directly, quickly, and
7 economically contributing to the suppression effort. Every firefighter, whether
8 in a management, command, support, or direct suppression role, should be
9 committed to maximizing the speed and efficiency with which the most capable
10 firefighters can engage in suppression action. When the management goal is
11 other than full suppression, or when conditions dictate a limited suppression
12 response, decisiveness is still essential, and an aggressive approach toward
13 accomplishment of objectives is still critical.

14

15 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

16 The primary means by which we implement command decisions and maintain
17 unity of action is through the use of common principles of suppression
18 operations. These principles guide our fundamental fire suppression practices,
19 behaviors, and customs, and are mutually understood at every level of
20 command. They include Risk Management, Standard Firefighting Orders and
21 Watch Out Situations, LCES and the Downhill Line Construction Checklist.
22 These principles are fundamental to how we perform fire suppression
23 operations, and are intended to improve decision making and firefighter safety.
24 They are not absolute rules. They require judgment in application.

25

26 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

27 The principles of fire suppression action provide a framework for developing
28 fire suppression strategy and for conducting fire suppression operations. Again,
29 these are not absolute, immutable rules. These five principles give us a
30 consistent set of considerations with which to evaluate decisions, plans and
31 actions in different situations.

32

33 **1. Objective**

34 The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression operation
35 toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective. The purpose of
36 fire suppression operations is to achieve the suppression objectives that
37 support the overall management goals for the fire.

38

39 **2. Speed and Focus**

40 Speed is rapidity of action. Focus is the convergence of appropriate
41 resources at the desired position to initiate action. The principle of speed
42 and focus maintains that rapidly deploying and concentrating firefighting
43 resources, in a calculated fashion, at the decisive time and place increases
44 the likelihood of successful suppression actions.

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1 3. Positioning

2 The principle of positioning maintains that rapid, flexible and opportunistic
3 movement increases the effectiveness of fire suppression resources.
4 Positioning ranges from single resource offensive or defensive reactions to
5 dynamic fire conditions, to pre-positioning of multiple resources based on
6 predicted activity and values at risk. Positioning should always be
7 undertaken with speed and focus in mind, and with sufficient time for
8 positioning to occur before operations begin.

9 4. Simplicity

10 The principle of simplicity is that clear, uncomplicated plans and concise
11 orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion. Simplicity
12 contributes to successful actions.

13 5. Safety

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15 The principle of safety maintains that ensuring the safety of firefighters and
16 other persons affected by fire operations is fundamental to successful
17 suppression action. Safety not only contributes to successful actions, it is
18 indispensable to them.

19 20 Cost Effective Fire Operations

21 Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of
22 all involved; including those that authorize, direct or implement those
23 operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression
24 resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire
25 operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole
26 purpose of "cost savings." Care will be taken to ensure that suppression
27 expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding
28 that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social,
29 political, economic, and biophysical environments.

30 31 Fire Management Objectives

32 Federal agency fire management programs should help resource managers
33 protect, maintain, and enhance federal lands in a cost effective manner.

34 Wildland fire management objectives are:

- 35 • Protect human life, property, and natural/cultural resources both within and
36 adjacent to agency administered lands.
- 37 • Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within
38 the framework of land use objectives and Resource Management Plans.
- 39 • Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent
40 as expressed in the annual appropriations act and enabling legislation, and
41 comply with applicable departmental manual and agency policies and
42 procedures.
- 43 • Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
44

- 1 • Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and
2 public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are consistent with
3 values to be protected and management objectives.
- 4 • Stabilize and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged by
5 fire or suppression activities.
- 6 • Minimize, and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to
7 resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire
8 activities.
- 9 • Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- 10 • Organize a fire staff that can apply the highest standards of professional and
11 technical expertise.
- 12 • Encourage research to advance the understanding of fire behavior, effects,
13 ecology, and management.
- 14 • Integrate fire management through all levels of the planning process.
- 15 • Prevent and investigate all unplanned human-caused fires.

16

17 Professional Liability Insurance

18 With the passage of Public Law 106-58, agencies are now required to pay up to
19 50% (no more than \$150) of the annual professional liability insurance
20 premiums for qualified supervisors, management officials, and law enforcement
21 officers who choose to purchase this insurance. Fire management personnel
22 may fall within the qualified supervisors and management official's categories.
23 Refer to agency specific policies.

- 24 • *NPS - December 14, 1999 memorandum from the Associate Director,*
25 *Administration to Regional Directors [P34 (2653)] transmitted the NPS*
26 *policy on these reimbursements and should be referred to for qualifications*
27 *and reimbursement criteria.*