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February 22, 2001

**Memorandum**

**To: Regional Directors**

**From: Deputy Director /s/ Denis P. Galvin**

**Subject: Review and Update of the 1995 Wildland Fire Management Policy**

The 1994 fire season with its 34 fatalities precipitated the 1995 Federal Wildland Management Policy and Program Review (1995 Report). This report resulted in the first comprehensive statement of wildland fire policy coordinated between the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

Following the investigation and subsequent report, by the Independent Review Board of the May 2000 Cerro Grande Prescribed Fire in New Mexico, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture reconvened the Working Group that developed the 1995 Federal Fire Policy to assess the status of the policy and its implementation.

The Working Group found that the policy is generally sound and continues to provide a solid foundation for wildland fire management activities and for natural resources management activities of the Federal government. The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001 Federal Fire Policy) replaces the 1995 Federal Fire Policy.

The Guiding Principles remain the same as those contained in the 1995 Report with the addition of the word international to the guiding principle on coordination and cooperation.

The 2001 Federal Fire Policy takes the 13 original policy statements from the 1995 policy and adds five additional policy statements. The new policy statements complement and supplement the set, and include:

- The role of fire in ensuring ecosystem sustainability;
- The need for restoration and rehabilitation of fire-damaged lands and ecosystems;
- The role of science in developing and implementing fire management programs;
- The importance of communication and education internally and externally; and
- The critical need for regular, ongoing evaluation of policies and procedures.

A number of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy statements were revised to reflect experiences since 1995 and to underscore the importance of key issues. These include:

- Better recognition that Fire Management Plans identify and integrate all fire management and related activities within the context of approved land management plans;
- Clearly stating that the management response to fire is based on the circumstances surrounding the fire, not the source of ignition or location of the fire;
- Clarifying threat, following protection of human life, suppression priority decisions include consideration of human health and consequences on community rather than property; and

## Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Key Messages

\*The working group that conducted the review of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, which guides wildland fire management on federal lands across the country, has concluded that the policy is generally sound and continues to provide a solid foundation for wildland fire and natural resources management activities of the federal government.

\*However, as a result of experiences since 1995, as well as greater understanding of the complexity and seriousness of the wildland fire situation in this country, the working group has determined that some elements of the policy need clarification of purpose and intent and that some issues were not fully covered, such as ecosystem sustainability, restoration, science, education and communication, and program evaluation.

\*The working group has also determined that federal agencies have not fully implemented the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, which has hindered its effectiveness. The working group has recommended a series of actions in several key areas, such as response to wildland fire, wildland urban interface, and planning, to ensure that the revised policy is fully implemented.

\*Some aspects of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy have been implemented very successfully and effectively, such as the increased emphasis on safety and the use of wildland fire to reduce fuels. However, other aspects, such as the development of fire management plans and items requiring interagency cooperation and coordination, have not been completed. The review and update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy seeks to build on the strengths of the original policy while addressing its weaknesses.

\*The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy will ensure more consistent wildland fire management on federal lands across the country because it will apply for the first time to Department of Defense and Department of Energy agencies as well as to Department of Agriculture and Department of The Interior agencies.

\*The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, which is the result of a collaborative effort by representatives of 12 federal agencies and the National Association of State Foresters, represents the consensus of top wildland fire and natural resource management professionals about how to best address wildland fire management on federal lands.

## Key Components of the Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

\*The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy is generally sound and appropriate. However, it has been modified to reflect experience and new information gathered over the last several years. A series of actions have been recommended to improve implementation of the policy.

\*The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy consists of findings, guiding principles, policy statements, and implementation actions. The guiding principles, policy statements, and implementation actions are called the "2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy." This replaces the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

\*The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy working group reached 14 findings regarding the overall fire management situation, the adequacy and appropriateness of federal wildland fire policies, and the implementation of those policies. The guiding principles and the policy statements have been revised, several policy statements have been added, and implementation actions have been developed, to address the working group's findings.

\*The Guiding Principles in the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy are the same as those contained in the original 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy with only one exception. The word "international" has been added to the guiding principle on coordination and cooperation to recognize the increasing role that other countries play in assisting the U.S. and in the increasing exchange of technology, training, skills, and knowledge of wildland fire issues between the U.S. and other countries.

\*Several policy statements contained in the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy have been revised in the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy to reflect experiences since 1995 and to underscore the importance of key issues. These include:

- \*Better recognition that Fire Management Plans identify and integrate all fire management and related activities within the context of approved land management plans;

- \*Clearly stating that the management response to fire is based on the circumstances surrounding the fire, not the source of ignition or location of the fire;

- \*Clarifying that, following protection of human life, suppression priority decisions include considerations of human health and consequences on communities rather than property;

- \*Clarifying the 1995 Federal Fire Policy on the Wildland Urban Interface to recognize the role of wildland fire agencies in protecting structures, but not suppressing fires in them; and

**Key Components of the  
Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy  
(continued)**

\*Emphasizing that a broad cross section of employees, not just dedicated fire management personnel, need to be trained, certified, and available for wildland fire assignment and that all employees will be available to support wildland fire if the situation demands.

\*The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy contains five new policy statements that complement and supplement the 1995 Policy, and include:

\*The role of fire in ensuring ecosystem sustainability;

\*The need for restoration and rehabilitation of fire damaged lands and ecosystems;

\*The role of science in developing and implementing fire management programs;

\*The importance of communication and education internally and externally; and

\*The critical need for regular, ongoing evaluation of policies and procedures.

\*The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy contains 11 strategic Implementation Actions that represent the most important management actions necessary to implement the 2001 policy.

\*The working group recommends the appointment of a group to develop a specific plan to create an interagency, interdisciplinary mechanism at the senior level to ensure that fire policy is implemented effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner throughout the federal government.

\*The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy greatly expands the number of agencies that work together on wildland fire management to include those with land management responsibilities, those with supporting programs in science, information, and technology, and those with regulatory activities that directly affect fire management.

## Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Questions and Answers

### **1. What is the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and why was it developed in the first place?**

The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy was the first comprehensive statement of wildland fire policy coordinated between the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. The policy provided clear direction on important issues of safety, the role of fire in natural resource management, and the relative roles of federal and non-federal agencies in the Wildland Urban Interface. The policy was developed in response to several incidents, including the severity of the 1994 fire season, during which 34 firefighters died.

### **2. Why was the 1995 Federal Fire Policy reviewed?**

The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy recognized for the first time the essential role of fire in maintaining natural systems. As a result, federal agencies increased the use of wildland fire to treat fuels significantly over the last few years. In the aftermath of the Cerro Grande Fire, which started as a prescribed fire and eventually burned 48,000 acres and 200 homes in Los Alamos, New Mexico in May 2000, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture requested the group that developed the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy to reconvene to evaluate the policy and the status of its implementation and to make recommendations for improvements.

### **3. Who conducted the review?**

The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture asked that the Working Group that developed the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy be reconvened. The structure and membership of the earlier group was replicated as nearly as possible, using as many of the same individuals as available. As in 1994-95, the Working Group was co-chaired by the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior. Principal agencies from these two Departments included the Forest Service from USDA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service from the USDI. The review also included the Environmental Protection Agency, National Weather Service, Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration. In recognition of the importance of wildland fire in other agencies, the Departments of Energy and Defense and the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Survey were invited to join the working group. In addition, the National Association of State Foresters was invited to join the group to represent the important perspectives of non-federal wildland fire agencies.

## Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Questions and Answers (continued)

### **4. How was the review conducted?**

The working group reviewed a wide variety of material, including reports from wildland fire management agencies on the status of action items assigned in the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy; internal and external reports, reviews, studies, and investigations of various aspects of wildland fire; statistical and other descriptive sources of information about wildland fire scope and activity; short papers or oral presentations on specific issues developed by professional staff; and a Brookings Institution survey of fire managers, resource managers, and agency administrators around the country regarding their views on adequacy and implementation of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. In addition, the working group considered comments on the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and its implementation from employees, who were invited to provide their views through a Web site, and non-governmental organizations, who were sent letters requesting their views.

### **5. Why weren't many action items from the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy implemented?**

There are several reasons why many parts of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy have not been implemented. The items that have been implemented least successfully are those that require coordination and agreement among agencies or across disciplines within agencies. This partially stems from organizational and cultural barriers to working across program and agency lines and partially stems from the lack of an effective means of overseeing and evaluating implementation of fire policy. Also, after attempting to implement the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, it has become apparent that some items could not or should not be implemented as originally written. In addition, there is little evidence that managers have been held accountable for implementation of the policy.

### **6. What makes you think it will be implemented better this time?**

The working group reviewed each of the 83 specific action items in the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. Aspects that were found to be unclear or unrealistic were revised to make it possible to implement. Some items were found to be no longer appropriate for action and have been dropped. In addition, the working group found that currently there is no effective means of overseeing and evaluating implementation of the Federal Fire Policy especially across agency and program lines. A policy statement on evaluation has been added to emphasize the critical need for regular, ongoing evaluation of policies and procedures. In addition, the implementation action item on program

management also calls for the creation of an interagency, interdisciplinary  
Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy  
Questions and Answers (continued)

**6. (continued)**

mechanism at the senior level to ensure that fire policy is implemented effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner throughout the federal government.

**7. What specifically has been fixed or changed to prevent a Los Alamos fire or similar scenario from happening again?**

Subsequent to the Cerro Grande Fire, two investigations were conducted, including one by the General Accounting Office. Each of these concluded that the underlying Federal Fire Policy was not the cause of the escape of the prescribed fire. Each review included recommendations for improving operational and program management elements of the wildland fire program. The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy did not address specific operational or program implementation issues, but focused on broader policy goals and issues. The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Policy contained in the report will strengthen some of the weaknesses that lead to the Cerro Grande Fire, including increased emphasis on planning and multi-agency coordination. However, most of the findings and recommendations from the investigations address operational, not policy, matters. Those recommendations are now being reviewed by both Departments to determine how to best incorporate into wildland fire operational procedures.

**8. What will happen next?**

All agencies with fire management related programs and activities in the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture have been directed to adopt the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, which replaces the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy as appropriate through directives, manuals, handbooks, and other documents. Other federal agencies participating in the review will need to take similar action.

**9. Why haven't fire management plans been completed in many areas?**

Federal agencies that have not completed fire management plans cite a variety of reasons for not getting the work done. The most common are heavy workloads with other competing mandatory tasks and lack of skill and training in developing these types of plans among wildland fire management employees.

## Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Questions and Answers (continued)

### **10. How does the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy mesh with the National Fire Plan?**

The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy provides the philosophical and policy foundation for all aspects of wildland fire management on federal lands, including the use of wildland fire in managing natural resources, wildland fire suppression, and wildland fire rehabilitation and restoration. The National Fire Plan is a plan that contains specific actions the federal government is taking to enhance wildland fire management. The National Fire Plan is consistent with and complimentary to findings and recommendations contained in the Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

### **11. How can the public get involved in wildland fire management?**

The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy require that fire management plans be completed for every acre of federal land with burnable vegetation. These plans are developed based on the underlying land use or resource management plan, such as a Forest Plan or a Resource Management Plan. In any case, fire management plans will be developed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, which provides for public involvement.

### **12. What will happen with the policy since the administration is changing?**

Since the review was conducted by a large, diverse group of professionals from many different federal agencies and from many different wildland fire and natural resource disciplines, it is anticipated that the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy will be implemented by the incoming administration.



## Federal Wildland Fire Management 2000 Review & Policy Update Communications Plan

### Introduction

This communications plan contains actions the participating agency representatives agree to take as a group to generate understanding of, and support for, the Federal Wildland Fire Management 2000 Review & Policy Update before, during, and after its release among key internal and external audiences. Each participating agency is encouraged to tailor this communications plan to meet their own needs. This communications plan lists target audiences and suggested communications tactics and tools for the pre-release, release, and post-release time periods.

### Objectives

- \*To ensure that key administration and agency officials understand the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the review, and have tools to explain them to internal and external audiences, before the report is released.
- \*To generate understanding of, and support for, the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the review among internal and external audiences, including administration and agency employees, elected officials, and stakeholder groups.

## Communications Plan Task Summary/Assignments

### Pre-Release

Target Audience: Key Administration and Agency Officials

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Develop list of key administration and agency officials that need to be briefed before the report is released.	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Draft and send letter, memo, or e-mail to key administration and agency officials to inform them of status of review, target date for release of report, and need for pre-release briefing.	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Schedule appointments with key administration and agency officials for pre-release briefing.	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Develop and distribute briefing paper on purpose, findings, and recommendations of review.	Jones	11/27
Develop Powerpoint presentation that can be used to brief key administration and agency officials.	Jones	12/12

Target Audience: Participating Agencies

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Determine minimum and optimum number of hard copies of report each participating agency will need for internal and external audiences. Distribute minimum number of copies to them prior to release and increase to optimum number as copies become available.	Jones	11/27
Develop and distribute internal and external fact sheets, talking points, and questions and answers explaining purpose, findings and recommendations of report and outlining next steps to participating agencies for use by agency managers and employees in explaining report internally and/or externally when it is released.	Jones	12/12
Provide participating agencies with National Interagency Fire Center URL to link website to when report is released.	Jones	12/15

## Communications Plan Task Summary/Assignments

Target Audience: Elected Officials

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Identify key elected officials at national level that need to be briefed about report purpose, findings, recommendations, and next steps.	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Identify key elected officials at regional and local level that need to be briefed about report purpose, findings, recommendations, and next steps.	Participating Agencies	
Contact key elected officials at national level and schedule briefings.	USD/USDA	
Contact key elected officials at regional and local level and schedule briefings.	Legislative Affairs Participating Agencies	

Target Audience: Stakeholder Groups

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Identify key stakeholder groups at national level that need to be briefed about report purpose, findings, recommendations, and next steps (i.e. National Association of Counties, Western Governors Association, etc.)	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Identify key stakeholder groups at regional and local level that need to be briefed about report purpose, findings, recommendations, and next steps	Participating Agencies	

## Communications Plan Task Summary/Assignments

### Release

Target Audience: Agency and Administration Employees

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Develop template letter from participating agency heads to employees informing them of availability of report and supporting documents, outlining next steps, and providing expectations for report distribution to internal and external audiences. Distribute template letter to participating agency reps/PAOs to tailor and send.	Jones	12/12
Post report (and possibly supporting documents, i.e. internal and external fact sheets, talking points, questions and answers) to NIFC web site	Smith	Week of 12/18
Set up e-mail on NIFC web site where internal and external audiences can ask questions	Smith	Week of 12/18

Target Audience: Elected Officials

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Conduct briefings and provide copies of report and supporting documents to elected officials at national level	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Conduct briefings and provide copies of report and supporting documents to elected officials at regional and local levels	Participating Agencies	

## Communications Plan Task Summary/Assignments

Target Audience: Stakeholder Groups

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Conduct any scheduled briefings and provide copies of report and supporting documents to stakeholder groups at national level.	Douglas/Mills	TBD
Conduct any scheduled briefings and provide copies of report and supporting documents to stakeholder groups at regional/local level.	Participating Agencies	

Target Audience: Interested Publics

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Determine policy for responding to media requests for additional information and interviews.	Douglas/USDI/USDA Communications	
Identify individuals who can serve as spokespersons for national news media.	Douglas/USDI/USDA Communications	

## Communications Plan Task Summary/Assignments

Post-Release

Actions/Tools	Assigned To	Due Date
Determine whether additional hard copies of report need to be printed and distribute accordingly	NIFC External Affairs	Ongoing

Monitor requests for information and update questions and answers as needed	NIFC External Affairs	Ongoing
Monitor hits to NIFC and participating agency websites	NIFC External Affairs/Participating Agency Public Affairs Contacts	Ongoing
Develop communications plan for "next steps"	NIFC External Affairs	