



United States Department of the Interior

United States Forest Service

APR 16 2008



Subject: 2008 Direction to Leaders -- Federal Fire and Aviation Programs

To: Regional Directors, Bureau of Indian Affairs
State Directors, Bureau of Land Management
Regional Directors, Fish and Wildlife Service
Regional Directors, National Park Service
Regional Foresters, United States Forest Service

Attached is the *Direction to Leaders---Federal Fire and Aviation Programs* which was developed by the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group. This document establishes and communicates direction to agency administrators, firefighters and other leaders in the USDA-Forest Service and Department of the Interior, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service.

This document focuses on five areas: Appropriate Management Response (AMR), safety/wildland urban interface, cost containment, long duration fire planning and succession planning/training. These focus areas and the supporting guidance is based on our collective emphasis topics for the 2008 fire season. Please ensure this document is distributed to the appropriate personnel within your agency.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this document, please direct them to your agency fire director.

Attachment

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DIRECTION TO LEADERS FEDERAL FIRE AND AVIATION PROGRAMS 2008

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to emphasize existing direction to agency administrators, fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders in the USDA Forest Service and the US DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. This direction is fundamental in nature; specific and detailed direction exists in many agency and interagency policy documents. This document provides broad direction in several critical areas where superior performance is critical to successful wildland fire management.

- Appropriate Management Response
- Safety/Wildland Urban Interface
- Cost Containment
- Long Duration Fire Planning
- Succession Planning/Training

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 the 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*, the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook*, and the *Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide* attest to this. Fire leaders must support the ongoing effort to improve interagency fire operations effectiveness, efficiency, and safety. 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.

APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (AMR)

AMR is any specific action suitable to meet fire management unit (FMU) objectives. Typically, the AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical options (from monitoring from a distance to intensive suppression actions). The AMR is developed by using fire management unit strategies and objectives identified in the land/resource and fire management plans. Beginning with the initial response to any wildland fire, decisions will reflect the goal of using available firefighting resources to manage the fire for the most effective, most efficient and safest means available.

The AMR strategies and tactics will consider firefighter and public health and safety, fire cause, current and predicted weather, current and potential fire behavior and fire effects, values to be protected from fire, management priorities, post-fire tradeoffs, resource availability, cumulative effects of the fire, and cost effectiveness. Direct assessment of resource benefits is currently allowed only where wildland fire use has been identified in the Land/Resource Management Plan and/or Fire Management Plan as an acceptable objective. The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSa) and Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) are used to plan and document these actions. The Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) is being developed to replace these tools. Some agencies will prototype WFDSS this season.

Human caused wildland fires will be initial attacked and suppressed. When a prescribed fire is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed, it will be declared a wildfire.

Where the objective identified in the Land/Resource Management Plan and/or Fire Management Plan is to put the fire out, "wildfire" fire managers may apply different strategies as part of the appropriate management response. Full suppression may be the preferred strategy for a portion of the perimeter and on another portion of the perimeter; point protection may be the desired strategy. By taking into account the time of year, current and expected weather, burning conditions, fire managers apply the best strategies to mitigate risks to the public and firefighters, meet cultural/natural resource management objectives and meet protection priorities as defined in land/resource and fire management plans.

The 2003 *Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Policy* fundamentally altered the AMR philosophy of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy. Proposed improvements that embrace a broader interpretation of AMR, which is in alignment with the 2001 Federal Fire Policy, will be evaluated and piloted for 2008. After this evaluation the 2003 Implementation Strategy will be revised and a plan of action developed to implement the changes for the 2009 fire season.

SAFETY/WILDAND URBAN INTERFACE

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

mitigate it. This helps leaders make sound organizational and operational safety decisions in a logical manner.

As the wildland urban interface continues to grow and we find ourselves working more in this environment it is essential that our firefighting resources maintain a high level of understanding and awareness of this environment. The Wildland Fire Safety Training Annual Refresher (WFSTAR) website: <http://www.nifc.gov/wfstar/index.htm> and the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center website: <http://www.wildfirelessons.net/home.aspx> are great resources to stay up to date.

Wildland Urban Interface Operating Principles

1. The first priority for all risk-decisions is human survival, both of firefighters and the public.
2. Incident containment strategies specifically address and integrate protection of defensible improved property and wildland values.
3. Operating within agency policy, direct protection of improved property is undertaken when it is safe to do so, when there are sufficient time and appropriate resources available, and when the action directly contributes to achieving overall incident objectives.
4. The firefighter's decision to accept direction to engage in structure protection actions is based on the determination that the property is defensible and the risk to firefighters can be safely mitigated under the current or potential fire conditions.
5. A decision to delay or withdraw from structure protection operations is the appropriate course of action when made in consideration of firefighter safety, current or potential fire behavior, or defensibility of the structure or groups of structures.
6. Firefighters at all levels are responsible to make risk-decisions appropriate to their individual knowledge, experience, training, and situational awareness.
7. Every firefighter is responsible to be aware of the factors that affect their judgment and the decision-making process, including: a realistic perception of their own knowledge, skills, and abilities, the presence of life threat or structures, fire behavior, availability of resources, social/political pressures, mission focus, and personal distractions such as home, work, health, and fatigue.
8. An individual's ability to assimilate all available factors affecting situational awareness is limited in a dynamic wildland urban interface fire environment. Every firefighter is responsible to understand and recognize these limitations, and to apply their experience, training and personal judgment to observe, orient, decide, and act in preparation for the "worst case".
9. It is the responsibility of *every* firefighter to participate in the flow of information with supervisors, subordinates, and peers. Clear and concise communication is essential to overcome limitations in situational awareness.

COST CONTAINMENT

Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the fire operations resources necessary to accomplish mission and incident objectives. Maximizing cost effectiveness of fire operations is the responsibility of all involved, including those that authorize, direct or implement those operations: Agency Administrators (AAs) and Incident Commanders (ICs) for *direct* cost containment, and Multi-Agency Coordination Groups for exercising *indirect* cost containment. Although accomplishing fire operations objectives safely and effectively will not be sacrificed for the sole purpose of “cost savings” (social, political, economic, and environmental factors may influence spending decisions), leaders must ensure that suppression expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected.

One area in which costs should be considered involves the length of assignment for resources. The current 14 day length of assignment policy is the result of evaluating fire operations productivity, efficiency and safety to determine optimal assignment duration.

The intent of the current policy is to manage fatigue, while at the same time providing flexibility for ICs and AAs managing initial attack, extended attack, and large fires. The policy inherently affords flexibility for these managers to evaluate each incident to determine if an assignment extension could meet identified incident objectives and provide cost containment, consistent with appropriate safety management. If such extensions beyond 14 days are prudent, this should be anticipated by AAs and/or ICs, and negotiated based on policy direction provided in the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide* or the *Interagency Standards Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*. On long duration incidents, negotiation may occur before mobilization, so that ICs may plan accordingly. Type 1 and 2 IMT length of assignment approval resides with the NMAC.

PLANNING FOR LONG DURATION FIRES

With increasing frequency, local units may face the reality of dealing with a long duration fire which is measured in weeks rather than days. While a variety of circumstances may lead up to a long term event, it is critical that the potential be recognized as early as possible. Evaluation of fires begins with an assessment of weather, fuels, topography, values to be protected and hazards. These factors and the evaluation of the probability that events or situations will influence incident outcome require periodic monitoring. These are usually evaluated in terms of short, medium and long term time periods. IMTs consider these as well as firefighting resource availability and capability when developing initial strategies. Working with the local agency administrator, political and social considerations are factored in which can influence or modify the initial strategy. Strategic wildland fire management decisions, analyses, and the determined course of action as reflected in a wildland fire decision and analysis process (WFSA, WFIP, and soon WFDSS) must reflect these considerations.

As the incident progresses, local situations or conditions may change, or events occur in another part of the country that may influence what can be achieved on the incident. Strategies will likely need to change over time. The collaboration between IMTs managing these fires and AAs should be frequent. Validating strategy is an iterative process, and needs to occur on a daily basis. The ability to think “bigger” in size and longer in terms of duration is critical to a successful outcome. The longer term look will define strategic objectives, identify critical protection needs, specific areas that need direct management action, what those actions are, and what will cause their implementation. Managers will determine the best course of action to meet objectives, reduce long term commitment of resources, and avoid excessive expenditures for such fires.

Another conceptual change is that firefighting resources may come and go from a longer duration incident, working specific tasks that are accomplished within a defined timeframe and then move on to another assignment. This also applies to cache resources such as water handling equipment. This equipment should be moved to the next task or returned to the cache, if not needed for current operations. It is not appropriate to hang on to contingency resources in every case when the demand for resources to meet other wildland fire priorities is high. ICs must consider emergency stabilization and rehabilitation requirements and work closely with BAER Teams to provide needed support such as radio communications, transportation, and other logistical support. This coordination should take place prior to the release of potentially needed BAER resources such as dozers.

A variety of decision support tools can assist in understanding conditions and probabilities, while reducing the level of uncertainty on the part of IMTs, managers and the public. Predictive Service units are a good source for much of this information.

SUCCESSION PLANNING/TRAINING

Federal agencies must do a good job of planning for timely replacement of critical wildland fire skill sets as retirements increase and fewer personnel are available for fire management assignments due to a variety of professional and personal reasons. Fire managers must inventory their organizations on an annual basis to determine local capability and off-unit support potential. Critical incident position needs should be an organizational priority while also contributing to other program goals like Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM).

Maintaining a robust fire management skill set is an investment for our future, and short term cost concerns should not preclude a commitment to training and the use of trainees on incidents. Developmental steps in achieving these goals and priorities are:

Recruiting – Conduct outreach to agency personnel, both in fire and non-fire positions to inform them of fire management opportunities in the variety of jobs and skills that exist, particularly those of critical need. Provide incentives to help recruit for shortage positions.

Training – Budget for and provide training opportunities for both fire and non-fire employees who have extended support and personal commitment for training and incident

assignments. Acknowledge supervisors who support sending employees to training and achieving certification.

Developing – Be sure task books are initiated and progress is made each year towards certifying skills. Identify specific incident management positions that are nationally recognized as being in short supply. Local managers must be aware of Geographic and National IMT needs in order to assist in the development of local skills pools that will expedite filling these gaps. Ensure IMTs order those trainee positions they can integrate into their organizations to provide effective training opportunities. Be sure the dispatch/coordination system is aware of priority needs and monitor their effectiveness in facilitating assignments. Acknowledge supervisors who develop and maximize the availability of those in critically needed positions.

Retention – Support the employee pursuing these goals by conveying the importance of the work and facilitating the accomplishment of the “home job” tasks while the employee is on assignment. Seek some variety in duties and assignments to maintain individual interest while challenging them to broaden their skill sets.

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