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## Chapter 01

### Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Overview

#### Scope

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, U.S 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 *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)* and the *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (February 13, 2009)* and other existing federal policy.

#### 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, U.S. 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. Other references, such as the *National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Response Pocket Guide (PMS 461, NFES 1077)* and the *NWCG Fireline Handbook (PMS 410-1, NFES 0065)* provide operational guidance.

#### *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)*

The *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)* is comprised of the following guiding principles and discrete 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.

#### 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.

- 1 **3.** Fire Management Plans (FMPs), programs, and activities support Land and  
2 Resource Management Plans and their implementation.
- 3 **4.** Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities.  
4 Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be  
5 understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost  
6 of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will  
7 be an important component of decisions.
- 8 **5.** Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based  
9 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management  
10 objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and re-organizing  
11 programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process,  
12 investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other  
13 agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set  
14 short and long term priorities, and clarify management accountability.
- 15 **6.** FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge  
16 and experience are developed among all wildland fire management  
17 agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency  
18 collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire  
19 managers.
- 20 **7.** FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality  
21 considerations.
- 22 **8.** Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and  
23 cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require  
24 that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with  
25 the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full  
26 collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies,  
27 international, state, tribal, and local governments, and private entities results  
28 in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of  
29 public needs.
- 30 **9.** Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an  
31 ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the  
32 fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate  
33 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for  
34 cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.

35  
36 *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
37 *(January 2001)*  
38

### 39 **Elements of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

#### 40 **1. Safety**

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

#### 43 **2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**

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

- 1 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**  
2 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource  
3 management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency  
4 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and  
5 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire  
6 occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare,  
7 the natural and cultural resources, and the values to be protected dictate the  
8 appropriate response to fire.
- 9 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**  
10 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and,  
11 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.  
12 Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific  
13 prescriptions contained in operational plans.
- 14 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**  
15 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and  
16 sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect  
17 infrastructure.
- 18 **6. Protection Priorities**  
19 The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority.  
20 Setting priorities among protecting public communities and community  
21 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural  
22 resources will be done based on the values to be protected, public health  
23 and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed  
24 to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be  
25 protected.
- 26 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**  
27 The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland  
28 urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative  
29 prevention, education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression  
30 is the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies  
31 may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire  
32 protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the  
33 partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural  
34 protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may  
35 also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with  
36 structural protection.)
- 37 **8. Planning**  
38 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs  
39 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed  
40 fires based on the area's approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs  
41 must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management  
42 strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and  
43 public health issues; and be consistent with resource management  
44 objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.  
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- 1 **9. Science**  
2 FMPs and fire programs will be based on a foundation of the best available  
3 science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific  
4 knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information  
5 needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated  
6 interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available  
7 to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of  
8 LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.
- 9 **10. Preparedness**  
10 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire  
11 management programs in support of land and resource management plans  
12 through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and  
13 management oversight.
- 14 **11. Suppression**  
15 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public  
16 safety, benefits and all values to be protected consistent with resource  
17 objectives.
- 18 **12. Prevention**  
19 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and  
20 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
- 21 **13. Standardization**  
22 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,  
23 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-  
24 be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire  
25 management activities.
- 26 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**  
27 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression,  
28 restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be  
29 conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and  
30 partners.
- 31 **15. Communication and Education**  
32 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire  
33 management policies and practices through internal and external  
34 communication and education programs. These programs will be  
35 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of  
36 information among all affected agencies and organizations.
- 37 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**  
38 Agency administrators will ensure their employees are trained, certified,  
39 and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally,  
40 regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with  
41 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire  
42 programs as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be  
43 held accountable for making employees available.
- 44 **17. Evaluation**  
45 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to  
46 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the *2001*

1 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.* The evaluation will assure  
2 accountability, facilitate resolution in areas of conflict, and identify resource  
3 shortages and agency priorities.

4  
5 *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
6 *(January 2001)*

7  
8 ***Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy***  
9 ***(February 13, 2009)***

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11 On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved guidance for  
12 the implementation of federal wildland fire management policy. This guidance  
13 provides for consistent implementation of the *Review and Update of the 1995*  
14 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)*, as directed by the  
15 Wildland Fire Leadership Council.

16  
17 *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
18 *(February 13, 2009), page 3.*

19  
20 The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation  
21 of federal wildland fire policy:

- 22 **1.** Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all  
23 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective  
24 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
- 25 **2.** Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that  
26 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and  
27 responsibilities among local, state, tribal, and federal fire protection entities.
- 28 **3.** Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government  
29 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
- 30 **4.** Fire Management Plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed  
31 on a landscape scale.
- 32 **5.** Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs  
33 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
  - 34 a. Wildfires - Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are  
35 declared wildfires.
  - 36 b. Prescribed Fires - Planned ignitions.
- 37 **6.** A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives  
38 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.  
39 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying  
40 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental  
41 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- 42 **7.** Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on  
43 objectives established in the applicable Land/Resource Management Plan,  
44 and/or the Fire Management Plan.

- 1 8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the  
2 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to  
3 firefighter and public safety.
- 4 9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document  
5 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational  
6 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and  
7 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

8

9 *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
10 *(February 13, 2009)*, page 7.

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## 12 **Fire Management Objectives**

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14 Federal agency fire management programs should assist resource managers with  
15 protecting, maintaining, and enhancing federal lands in a cost effective manner.  
16 Wildland fire management objectives are:

- 17 • Protect human life, property, and natural/cultural resources, both within and  
18 adjacent to agency administered lands.
- 19 • Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within  
20 the framework of land use objectives and Land/Resource Management  
21 Plans.
- 22 • Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent  
23 as expressed in the annual appropriations act and enabling legislation and  
24 comply with applicable departmental manual and agency policies and  
25 procedures.
- 26 • Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- 27 • Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and  
28 public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are consistent with  
29 values to be protected and management objectives.
- 30 • Stabilize and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost or damaged by  
31 fire or suppression activities.
- 32 • Minimize and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to  
33 resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire  
34 activities.
- 35 • Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- 36 • Organize a fire staff that can apply the highest standards of professional and  
37 technical expertise.
- 38 • Encourage research to advance the understanding of fire behavior, effects,  
39 ecology, and management.
- 40 • Integrate fire management through all levels of the planning process.
- 41 • Prevent and investigate all unplanned human-caused fires.

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**1 Fire Operations Doctrine**

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**3 Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

4 Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of fire  
5 operations. This doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire  
6 operations. It provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire operations, a  
7 mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire operations doctrine  
8 does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific situations so much as it  
9 sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application.

10

**11 The Nature of Fire Operations**

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

20

**21 Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

22 The primary means by which we prevent accidents in wildland fire operations is  
23 through aggressive risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that  
24 while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard free work environment is not  
25 a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized,  
26 comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we will determine the  
27 acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for safety yet still achieve fire  
28 operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of  
29 injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

30

**31 Fire Preparedness**

32 Fire preparedness is the state of being ready to provide an appropriate response  
33 to wildland fires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the result of  
34 activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions. Preparedness  
35 requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and implementing  
36 coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness requires a  
37 continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting infrastructure,  
38 predicting fire activity, identifying values to be protected, hiring, training,  
39 equipping, pre-positioning, and deploying firefighters and equipment, evaluating  
40 performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving operations. All  
41 preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations  
42 capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

43

**44 Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

45 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire  
46 operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in

1 fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commanders'  
2 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly  
3 articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on  
4 their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander's intent. A  
5 competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may  
6 understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance  
7 removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to  
8 take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational  
9 objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or  
10 that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and  
11 cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective.  
12 Unified, coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the  
13 fireline or between the highest command level and the most subordinate  
14 firefighter, is critical to successful fire operations.

15

### 16 **Fire Leadership**

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

26

### 27 **Fire Suppression**

28 The purpose of fire suppression is to put the fire out in a safe, effective, and  
29 efficient manner. Fires are easier and less expensive to suppress when they are  
30 small. When the management goal is full suppression, aggressive initial attack  
31 is the single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the  
32 public and to limit suppression costs. Aggressive initial attack provides the  
33 Incident Commander maximum flexibility in suppression operations.  
34 Successful initial attack relies on speed and appropriate force. All aspects of fire  
35 suppression benefit from this philosophy. Planning, organizing, and  
36 implementing fire suppression operations should always meet the objective of  
37 directly, quickly, and economically contributing to the suppression effort. Every  
38 firefighter, whether in a management, command, support, or direct suppression  
39 role, should be committed to maximizing the speed and efficiency with which  
40 the most capable firefighters can engage in suppression action. When the  
41 management goal is other than full suppression, or when conditions dictate a  
42 limited suppression response, decisiveness is still essential and an aggressive  
43 approach toward accomplishment of objectives is still critical.

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1 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

2 The primary means by which we implement command decisions and maintain  
3 unity of action is through the use of common principles of suppression  
4 operations. These principles guide our fundamental fire suppression practices,  
5 behaviors, and customs, and are mutually understood at every level of  
6 command. They include Risk Management, Standard Firefighting Orders and  
7 Watch Out Situations, LCEs and the Downhill Line Construction Checklist.  
8 These principles are fundamental to how we perform fire suppression operations  
9 and are intended to improve decision making and firefighter safety. They are  
10 not absolute rules. They require judgment in application.

11

12 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

13 The principles of fire suppression action provide a framework for developing  
14 fire suppression strategy and for conducting fire suppression operations. Again,  
15 these are not absolute or immutable rules. These five principles provide a  
16 consistent set of considerations with which to evaluate decisions, plans, and  
17 actions in different situations.

18 **1. Objective**

19 The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression operation  
20 toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective. The purpose of  
21 fire suppression operations is to achieve the suppression objectives that  
22 support the overall management goals for the fire.

23 **2. Speed and Focus**

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

29 **3. Positioning**

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

37 **4. Simplicity**

38 The principle of simplicity is that clear, uncomplicated plans and concise  
39 orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion. Simplicity  
40 contributes to successful actions.

41 **5. Safety**

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

46

**1 Cost Effective Fire Operations**

2  
3 Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of  
4 all involved, including those that authorize, direct, or implement those  
5 operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression  
6 resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire  
7 operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole  
8 purpose of “cost savings”. Care will be taken to ensure that suppression  
9 expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding  
10 that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social,  
11 political, economic, and biophysical environments.