

Chapter 01**Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Guidance Overview**

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Scope

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.

Purpose

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 guiding principles and policy statements guide the philosophy, direction, and implementation of fire management planning, activities, and projects on federal lands.

29

Guiding Principles of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

- 31 1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management
32 activity.
- 33 2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural
34 change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal
35 agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use
36 and desired future condition of the various public lands.
- 37 3. Fire Management Plans, programs, and activities support land and resource
38 management plans and their implementation.
- 39 4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities.
40 Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be
41 understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the
42 cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit
43 will be an important component of decisions.
- 44 5. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based
45 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management
46 objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and reorganizing

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

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

27 **1. Safety**

28
29 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management
30 Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.

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

32
33 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve
34 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and
35 social components.

36 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**

37
38 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource
39 management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency
40 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social and
41 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances, under which a fire
42 occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and
43 welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected; dictate
44 the appropriate response to fire.

45
46

- 1 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**
2 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain and enhance resources and,
3 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.
4 Use of fire will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will
5 follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.
6
- 7 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**
8 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and
9 sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect
10 infrastructure.
11
- 12 **6. Protection Priorities**
13 The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority.
14 Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community
15 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural
16 resources will be done based on the values to be protected, human health
17 and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed
18 to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be
19 protected.
20
- 21 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**
22 The operational roles of the federal agencies as a partner in the Wildland
23 Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative
24 prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire
25 suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state or local governments.
26 Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection
27 activities under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual
28 responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies
29 have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they
30 administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and
31 local governments with structural protection.)
32
- 33 **8. Planning**
34 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire
35 Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a
36 program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's
37 approved Land Management Plan. Fire Management Plans must provide
38 for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies,
39 tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health
40 issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities
41 of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
42
- 43 **9. Science**
44 Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of the
45 best available science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase
46 our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors.

1 Information needed to support fire management will be developed through
2 an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be
3 made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the
4 development of land management plans, fire management plans, and
5 implementation plans.

6
7 **10. Preparedness**

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

12
13 **11. Suppression**

14 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public
15 safety, benefits, and all values to be protected; consistent with resource
16 objectives.

17
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
22 **13. Standardization**

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

27
28 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

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

33
34 **15. Communication and Education**

35 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
36 management policies and practices through internal and external
37 communication and education programs. These programs will be
38 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
39 information among all affected agencies and organizations.

40
41 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

42 Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained,
43 certified and made available to participate in the wildland fire program
44 locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees
45 with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland

1 fire programs as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will
2 be held accountable for making employees available.

3

4 **17. Evaluation**

5 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to
6 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001
7 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The evaluation will assure
8 accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify
9 resource shortages and agency priorities.

10 *(2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 22-24)*

11

12 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

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14 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

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

21

22 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

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

31

32 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

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

41

42 **Fire Preparedness**

43 Fire preparedness is the state of being prepared to provide an appropriate
44 response to wildland fires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the
45 result of activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions.
46 Preparedness requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and

1 implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness
2 requires a continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting
3 infrastructure, predicting fire activity, identifying values to be protected, hiring,
4 training, equipping, pre-positioning and deploying firefighters and equipment,
5 evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving operations. All
6 preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations
7 capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

8

9 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

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

26

27 **Fire Leadership**

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

37

38 **Fire Suppression**

39 The purpose of fire suppression is to put the fire out in a safe, effective, and
40 efficient manner. Fires are easier and less expensive to suppress when they are
41 smaller. When the management goal is full suppression, aggressive attack is the
42 single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the public,
43 and to limit suppression costs. Aggressive attack provides the Incident
44 Commander maximum flexibility in suppression operations. Successful attack
45 relies on speed and appropriate force. All aspects of fire suppression benefit
46 from this philosophy. Planning, organizing, and implementing fire suppression

1 operations should always meet the objective of directly, quickly, and
2 economically contributing to the suppression effort. Every firefighter, whether
3 in a management, command, support, or direct suppression role, should be
4 committed to maximizing the speed and efficiency with which the most capable
5 firefighters can engage in suppression action. When the management goal is
6 other than full suppression, or when conditions dictate a limited suppression
7 response, decisiveness is still essential, and an aggressive approach toward
8 accomplishment of objectives is still critical.

9

10 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

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

20

21 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

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

27

28 **1. Objective**

29 The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression operation
30 toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective. The purpose
31 of fire suppression operations is to achieve the suppression objectives that
32 support the overall management goals for the fire.

33

34 **2. Speed and Focus**

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

40

41 **3. Positioning**

42 The principle of positioning maintains that rapid, flexible and opportunistic
43 movement increases the effectiveness of fire suppression resources.

44 Positioning ranges from single resource offensive or defensive reactions to
45 dynamic fire conditions, to pre-positioning of multiple resources based on
46 predicted activity and values at risk. Positioning should always be

1 undertaken with speed and focus in mind, and with sufficient time for
2 positioning to occur before operations begin.

4 **4. Simplicity**

5 The principle of simplicity is that clear, uncomplicated plans and concise
6 orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion. Simplicity
7 contributes to successful actions.

9 **5. Safety**

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

15 **Cost Effective Fire Operations**

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

26 **Fire Management Objectives**

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

29 Wildland fire management objectives are:

- 30 • Protect human life, property, and natural/cultural resources both within and
31 adjacent to agency administered lands.
- 32 • Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within
33 the framework of land use objectives and Resource Management Plans.
- 34 • Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent
35 as expressed in the annual appropriations act and enabling legislation, and
36 comply with applicable departmental manual and agency policies and
37 procedures.
- 38 • Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- 39 • Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and
40 public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are consistent with
41 values to be protected and management objectives.
- 42 • Stabilize and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged
43 by fire or suppression activities.
- 44 • Minimize, and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to
45 resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire
46 activities.

- 1 • Promote public understanding of fire management programs and
2 objectives.
- 3 • Organize a fire staff that can apply the highest standards of professional
4 and technical expertise.
- 5 • Encourage research to advance the understanding of fire behavior, effects,
6 ecology, and management.
- 7 • Integrate fire management through all levels of the planning process.
- 8 • Prevent and investigate all unplanned human-caused fires.