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Chapter 05

USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire and Aviation Program Organization and Responsibilities

Introduction

This handbook is intended to be a program reference guide that documents the standards for operational procedures and practices for the USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management program. The standards provided in this handbook are based on current agency and interagency wildland fire management policy, and is intended to provide fire and aviation program guidance and to ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective fire and aviation operations. This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

Foundational Doctrine

The following collection of principles and beliefs form the foundational doctrine for fire suppression in the U.S. Forest Service. These principles and beliefs operate at multiple organizational levels, including:

- Forest Service Wide (i.e., apply to all employees and activities)
- Fire and Aviation Management (i.e., are specific to the fire and aviation management program)
- Fire Suppression (i.e., are specific to fire fighting activities).

The Operational Environment

- *Fire Suppression*

1. No resource or facility is worth the loss of human life, however the wildland fire suppression environment is complex and possesses inherent hazards that can, even with reasonable mitigation, result in harm to fire fighters engaged in fire suppression operations. In recognition of this fact, we are committed to the aggressive management of risk.

Mission

- *Forest Service Wide*

2. The Forest Service is prepared and organized to support national and international emergencies with trained personnel and other assets when requested.

3. Agency employees respond when they come across situations where human life is immediately at risk or there is a clear emergency, and they are capable of assisting without undue risk to themselves or others.

4. In responding to emergencies, we will bring the same professionalism and passion for safety as we do to non-emergency situations.

1 5. Support for local fire emergencies takes priority over accomplishment of local
2 resource targets. Support of non-local fire emergencies will be at the discretion
3 of the local line officer, as bounded by agency agreements and Regional or
4 National direction.

5

6 6. A cooperative relationship between the Forest Service and other agencies is
7 essential. The Forest Service is committed to honor its part of the joint
8 responsibility to develop and maintain effective working relationships with its
9 intergovernmental cooperators.

10

11 • *Fire & Aviation Management*

12 7. Fire management is central to meeting the Forest Service mission –
13 conserving natural resources, restoring ecological health, and protecting
14 communities.

15

16 • *Fire Suppression*

17 8. Successful fire suppression is essential to support the Forest Service mission.

18

19 9. The intent of wildfire suppression is to protect human life, property, and at
20 risk lands and resources.

21

22 **Leadership and Accountability**

23

24 • *Forest Service Wide*

25 10. The hallmarks of Forest Service leadership are action, attitude, and
26 accountability.

27

28 11. Leaders express clear and concise intent to ensure assignments are managed
29 safely, effectively, and efficiently.

30

31 12. Leaders regularly monitor operations for effectiveness, and take action when
32 there is recognition of exceptional or problematic employee performance.

33

34 13. Both positive reinforcement and discipline will be based on individual
35 behavior as measured by: adherence to the rules; appropriate application of
36 doctrine, principles and guidelines; execution of responsibilities commensurate
37 with role; and appropriate use of available information.

38

39 • *Fire Suppression*

40 14. Demonstrated fitness for command is a requirement for leadership positions
41 associated with fire fighting.

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1 **Roles and Relationships**

2

3 • *Forest Service Wide*

4 15. Commitment to duty, respect for others, and personal integrity are expected.
5 Every employee fosters a work environment that is enjoyable, rewarding,
6 recognizes the value of diversity, and is free of harassment.

7

8 • *Fire & Aviation Management*

9 16. Line officers with fire management responsibilities will have knowledge and
10 understanding of fire program management.

11

12 17. Contracted resources will meet identified standards for qualifications,
13 training, productivity, and efficiency necessary to meet emergency response
14 needs.

15

16 18. It is the Forest Service responsibility to initiate and participate in public
17 education efforts to promote support for necessary fire management activities.

18

19 • *Fire Suppression*

20 19. Every Forest Service employee has a responsibility to support fire
21 suppression emergencies in a manner that meets identified needs, and is within
22 their qualifications and capabilities.

23

24 **Operations**

25

26 • *Forest Service Wide*

27 20. Employees are expected and empowered to be creative and decisive, to
28 exercise initiative and accept responsibility, and to use their training, experience,
29 and judgment in decision-making to carry out their leader's intent.

30

31 21. Employees are expected and empowered to make reasonable and prudent
32 decisions to accomplish the agency mission while minimizing exposure to
33 hazards.

34

35 22. Clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders maximize effectiveness and
36 minimize confusion.

37

38 • *Fire Suppression*

39 23. When it is time to fight fire, we do so in a manner that maximizes
40 effectiveness of effort, has highest regard for firefighter and public safety, and
41 controls costs.

42

43 24. Every fire suppression operation is directed toward clearly-defined, decisive,
44 and obtainable objectives.

45

- 1 25. Command and control must be decentralized to cope with the unpredictable
2 nature of fire. To achieve their leader's intent and accomplish operational
3 objectives, subordinate commanders are required to make decisions on their own
4 initiative, and to coordinate their efforts.
5
- 6 26. Unity of effort is maintained and suppression actions are coordinated at all
7 times.
8
- 9 27. Using principles requires judgment in application, while adherence to rules
10 does not. In combination, principles and rules guide our fundamental wildland
11 fire suppression practices and behaviors, and are mutually understood at every
12 level of command.
13
- 14 28. Rapid deployment and concentration of fire suppression resources at the
15 decisive time and place is essential to successful fire suppression actions.
16
- 17 29. Maintaining high capability for initial attack is essential to public and fire
18 fighter safety, accomplishment of management objectives, and cost containment.
19

20 **Risk Management**

21 • *Fire Suppression*

- 22 30. We practice risk management to minimize the exposure and affects of the
23 inherent hazards in fire suppression while maximizing the opportunities to
24 achieve leader intent.
25

26 **Agency Administrator Positions**

27 The Forest Service Director of Fire and Aviation Management, the Director of
28 Human Resources and the Forest Service Line Officer Team have developed
29 core fire management competencies for inclusion into the position descriptions
30 and in selection criteria for agency administrators. They are presented here for
31 reference.
32

33 **Evaluation Criterion**

34 Knowledge of fire program management including ability to integrate fire and
35 fuels management across all program areas and functions; ability to implement
36 fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns into
37 collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies;
38 knowledge to oversee a fire management program including budget,
39 preparedness, prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction; ability to
40 serve as an agency administrator during an incident on an assigned unit; and
41 ability to provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diversified firefighting
42 workforce that exists in a "safety first" and "readiness" environment.
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1 **Training and Core Competencies**

- 2 • Attend a regional or national “Fire Management Leadership for Agency
3 Administrators” training session
4 • Require a shadow assignment with a fully qualified agency administrator
5 • Receive training or experience in the Wildfire Situation Analysis (WFSA)
6 and Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP)
7 • Provide a Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders

8
9 **Line Officer Certification Program**

10 The following principles will guide certification of agency administrators in fire
11 management:

- 12 • Regional Foresters are accountable for certification of line officers
13 • Line officer evaluation includes standards for training, background and
14 experience, and demonstrated ability, which will result in a qualitative
15 evaluation of readiness by the Regional Forester
16 • When the complexity level of a fire exceeds a line officer’s certification, a
17 coach will be assigned to advise (but not replace)
18 • This certification program will be periodically evaluated and updated as
19 needed
20 • Decision Support Groups may be requested and would be assigned as fire
21 costs approach certain thresholds
22 • The Coaching/Shadowing program, to be administered by each Region, is
23 an integral part of this certification program

24
25 **Line Officers will be evaluated in three basic areas**

- 26 • Training
27 • Background and experience
28 • Demonstrated understanding of concepts and principles

29
30 This certification program is a multi-level process where line officers
31 demonstrate competence in one of three levels of managing fires. Those levels
32 would be Working, Journey, and Advanced.

33
34 **Guidelines**

35 In consideration of the appropriate level (Working, Journey, and Advanced) to
36 assign a line officer, the Regional Forester should consider the following
37 guidelines:

- 38 • For individuals that do not meet at least the Working Level, a coach will be
39 assigned to support that line officer in managing Type3 or higher wildfire
40 incidents.

41
42 **Working Level** - The line officer could manage a low to moderate complexity
43 fire and Fire-Use fire. The line officer should meet the following:

- 44 • **Training:** Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for
45 Line Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130)

- 1 • **Background and Experience:** Successful management of a minimum of
2 one Type 3 or higher fire, or one successful higher complexity fire (Type
3 2I or higher) quality shadow assignment (consider complexity and size of
4 the fires). Management oversight of a low-complexity fire program and/or
5 experience as an agency administrator or representative. Applicable
6 experience in all-risk or other incident oversight may be considered in lieu
7 of this experience, as well as Fire-Use experience. Consider career fire
8 experience
- 9 • **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a coach (including
10 feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated
11 understanding and application of the responsibilities of an agency
12 administrator on smaller low-complexity fires with a basic understanding
13 of the elements of the core competencies

14
15 **Journey Level** - The line officer could manage a moderate to high complexity
16 fire. The line officer needs to be certified at the Working Level and should meet
17 the following:

- 18 • **Training:** Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for
19 Line Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130).
- 20 • **Background and Experience:**
 - 21 ➤ Successful management of a minimum of one Type II or higher fire,
22 or one successful higher complexity fire (Type I) quality shadow
23 assignment, depending on fire experience (complexity and size of the
24 fires should be considered).
 - 25 ➤ Management oversight of a moderate-complexity fire program or
26 experience as an agency administrator or representative on Type II or
27 higher fires.
 - 28 ➤ Applicable experience in all-risk or other incident oversight may also
29 be considered in lieu of other guidelines, as well as Fire-Use
30 experience.
- 31 • **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a coach (including
32 feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated
33 understanding and application of the responsibilities of an agency
34 administrator on moderate to large complex fires in the core competencies,
35 and other elements that may be relevant.

36
37 **Advanced Level** - The line officer could manage a high complexity fire. The
38 line officer needs to be certified at the Journey Level and should meet the
39 following:

- 40 • **Training:** Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for
41 Line Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130).
- 42 • **Background and Experience:**
 - 43 ➤ Successful management of a minimum of 5 Type I or II fires (at least
44 one of which is a Type I fire), depending on fire experience
45 (complexity and size of the fires should be considered).

- 1 ➤ Management oversight of a moderate to high-complexity fire
2 program.
3 ➤ Applicable experience in all-risk or other incident oversight may also
4 be considered in lieu of other guidelines, as well as Fire-Use
5 experience.
- 6 • **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a coach (including
7 feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated
8 understanding and application of the responsibilities of an agency
9 administrator on large complex fires in the core competencies, and other
10 elements that may be relevant.

11

12 **Other Considerations**

13 Core competencies, consistent with Fire Doctrine principles, include:

- 14 • Safety
15 • Strategies and tactics for Cost Containment
16 • Incident Management Processes
17 • Understanding of decision support tools
18 • Situational Awareness of resource availability & allocation
19 • WFSA/WFIP
20 • Monitoring and Evaluation of fire operations
21 • Risk Management
22 • Social/Political awareness and interpersonal relations

23

24 Other Training Opportunities to Achieve Core Competencies - Additional
25 Training Opportunities/Suggestions (will be updated as program is evaluated)

- 26 • Upper levels of Fire Leadership and Fire Management courses
27 • Be the actual line officer in the Type III IC certification sand table
28 exercises
29 • Develop a “graduate-level seminar” on advanced risk management
30 • The Fire Management for Agency Administrators course needs a
31 curriculum revision (Currently the national and regional courses are
32 redundant)
33 • Get assigned to a Type I or Type II team as a training assignment (e.g.
34 shadow Plans) and see the world from their viewpoint
35 • Assist in 420 simulation as a line officer
36 • WFSA and WFIP training
37 • Include risk management and fire management topics to annual line officer
38 meetings
39 • Attend staff rides (staff rides need to include a stand that portrays the line
40 officer perspective)
41 • Prescribed fire training centers

42

43 **Guidance on the Selection of Coaches**

44 Coaches can be current or former line officers. The Regional Forester
45 determines the level of certification for which a coach is qualified.

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1 Criteria for individuals serving as Coaches are as follows:

- 2 • Must be a "Journey" level line officer in dealing with large fire incident, or
3 rated at an experience level commensurate with incident being managed.
4 Present and past Agency Administrators can serve as coaches, including
5 retirees that were qualified/experienced.
- 6 • Is willing and able to serve as a Coach.

8 **Performance Standards**

9 Add the following standards to the existing performance standards for Forest
10 Supervisors and District Rangers under Performance Standard #4, Leadership,
11 Coaching, and Supervising:

- 12 • Integrate fire and fuels management across all functional areas.
- 13 • Implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource
14 concerns into collaborative community protection and ecosystem
15 restoration strategies on the unit.
- 16 • Manage a budget that includes fire preparedness, prevention, suppression,
17 and hazardous fuels in an annual program of work for the unit.
- 18 • Perform duties of agency administrator and maintain those qualifications.
- 19 • Provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diverse workforce in a "safety
20 first" environment.

21
22 These standards are based on current policy and provide program guidance to
23 ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective Fire and Aviation Operations.
24 This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

26 **Specific Agency Administrator Performance Standards for Fire and 27 Aviation at the Field Level**

29 **Preparedness**

- 30 • Take all necessary and prudent actions to ensure firefighter and public
31 safety.
- 32 • Ensure sufficient qualified fire and non-fire personnel are available to
33 support fire operations at a level commensurate with the local and national
34 fire situation.
- 35 • Ensure accurate position descriptions are developed and reflect the
36 complexity of the unit. Individual Development Plan promote and enhance
37 FMO currency and development.
- 38 • Provide a written Delegation of Authority to FMOs that provides an
39 adequate level of operational authority at the unit level. Include Multi-
40 Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group authority, as appropriate.
- 41 • Identify resource management objectives to maintain a current Fire
42 Management Plan (FMP) that identifies an accurate level of funding for
43 personnel and equipment.
- 44 • Develop preparedness and fire use standards that are in compliance with
45 agency fire policies.

- 1 • Management teams meet once a year to review fire and aviation policies,
2 roles, responsibilities, and delegations of authority. Specifically address
3 oversight and management controls, critical safety issues, and high-risk
4 situations such as transfers of incident command, periods of multiple fire
5 activity, and Red Flag Warnings.
- 6 • Ensure fire and aviation preparedness reviews are conducted each year.
- 7 • Meet annually with major cooperators and review interagency agreements
8 to ensure their continued effectiveness and efficiency.
- 9 • Convene and participate in annual conferences and fire reviews.
- 10 • Agency administrators, Fire Program Managers, and/or Safety and Health
11 Program Managers shall conduct after action reviews on all Type 3 fires
12 and a minimum of 10% of their unit's Type 4, and 5 fires and document
13 their inspections in the incident records.

14

15 **Suppression**

- 16 • Ensure use of fire funds is in compliance with Agency policies.
- 17 • Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) is completed and approved on
18 all fires that escape initial attack. Alternative evaluation and certification
19 requirements are followed.
- 20 • WFSA's that are expected to exceed \$10,000,000.00 in suppression costs
21 are forwarded to the Regional Office for review and approval.
- 22 • Management reviews are conducted on all fires that require a WFSA.
23 Personally attend reviews on Type 1 and Type 2 fires.
- 24 • Provide incident management objectives, written delegations of authority,
25 and a complete agency administrator Briefing to Incident Management
26 Teams.
- 27 • Evaluate the need for resource advisors for all fires, and assign as
28 appropriate.
- 29 • For all unplanned human-caused fires where responsibility can be
30 determined, ensure actions are initiated to recover cost of suppression
31 activities, land rehabilitation, damages to the resource, and improvements.

32

33 **Safety**

- 34 • Review safety policies, procedures, and concerns with field fire and
35 aviation personnel.
- 36 • Ensure timely follow-up actions to program reviews, fire preparedness
37 reviews, fire and aviation safety reviews, and management reviews.
- 38 • Monitor the fire situation and provide oversight during periods of critical
39 fire activity and situations of high risk.
- 40 • Ensure there is adequate direction in fire management plans to maintain
41 fire danger awareness.
- 42 • Take appropriate actions with escalating fire potential.
- 43 • Ensure appropriate investigations are conducted for incidents, entrapments,
44 and serious accidents.

45

1 Fire Use

- 2 • Ensure an approved burn plan is followed for each prescribed fire project,
3 including follow-up monitoring and documentation to ensure management
4 objectives are met.
- 5 • Ensure that a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is completed and
6 implemented for all fires managed for resource benefits.
- 7 • Provide management oversight by personally visiting wildland and
8 prescribed fire activities each year.
- 9 • Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction
10 for prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and
11 inspections of the prescribed fire program are completed.
- 12 • Approve Prescribed Fire Plans. Authority may be delegated to the agency
13 administrators as provided under specific directions.
- 14 • Review Prescribed Fire Plans and recommend or approve the plans
15 depending upon the delegated authority. Ensure that the Prescribed Fire
16 Plan has been reviewed and recommended by a qualified technical
17 reviewer who was not involved in the plan preparation.

19 Fire Management Positions

20 The following lists show the minimum operational experience recommended for
21 fire management positions. The *Interagency Fire Program Management*
22 *Qualifications Standards* will be used as guidelines in conjunction with specific
23 agency requirements when filling vacant fire program positions, and as an aid in
24 developing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for employees.

**26 Specific Fire Management Staff Performance Standards for Fire
27 Operations at the Field Level****29 Preparedness**

- 30 • Maintain “safety first” as the foundation for all aspects of fire and aviation
31 management.
- 32 • Ensure that only trained and qualified personnel are assigned to fire and
33 aviation duties.
- 34 • Develop, implement, evaluate, and document fire and aviation training
35 program to meet current and anticipated needs.
- 36 • Establish an effective process to gather, evaluate, and communicate
37 information to managers, supervisors, and employees. Ensure clear
38 concise communications are maintained at all levels.
- 39 • Ensure fire and aviation management staffs understand their roles,
40 responsibilities, authority, and accountability.
- 41 • Develop and maintain an open line of communication with public and
42 cooperators.
- 43 • Regardless of funding level, provide a safe, effective, and efficient fire
44 preparedness and fire use program.

- 1 • Organize, train, equip, and direct a qualified work force. An Individual
2 Development Plan (IDP) must be provided for incumbents who do not
3 meet new standards. Establish qualification review process.
- 4 • Take appropriate action when performance is exceptional or deficient.
- 5 • Ensure fire and aviation policies are understood, followed, and coordinated
6 with other agencies as appropriate.
- 7 • Ensure that adequate resources are available to implement fire management
8 operations.
- 9 • Provide fire personnel with adequate guidance, training, and decision-
10 making authority to ensure timely decisions.
- 11 • Develop and maintain agreements, annual operating plans, and contracts on
12 an interagency basis to increase effectiveness and efficiencies.
- 13 • Develop, maintain, and annually evaluate the FMP to ensure accuracy and
14 validity.
- 15 • Ensure budget requests and allocations reflect preparedness requirements
16 in the FMP.
- 17 • Develop and maintain current operational plans. (e.g., dispatch, pre-attack,
18 prevention).
- 19 • Ensure that reports and records are properly completed and maintained.
- 20 • Ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability in planning and
21 expenditures.
- 22 • Assess, identify, and implement program actions that effectively reduce
23 unwanted wildland fire ignitions and mitigate risks to life, property, and
24 resources.
- 25 • Work with cooperators to identify processes and procedures for providing
26 fire safe communities within the wildland urban interface.

27

28 **Suppression**

- 29 • Ensure completion of a job hazard analysis (JHA) for fire and fire aviation
30 activities, and implement applicable risk mitigation measures.
- 31 • Provide for and personally participate in periodic site visits to individual
32 incidents and projects.
- 33 • Utilize the incident complexity analysis to ensure the proper level of
34 management is assigned to all incidents.
- 35 • Ensure incoming personnel and crews are briefed prior to fire and aviation
36 assignments.
- 37 • Coordinate the development of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis
38 (WFSA) with local unit staff specialists for all fires that escape initial
39 attack.
- 40 • Ensure effective transfer of command of incident management occurs and
41 safety is considered in all functional areas.
- 42 • Monitor fire activity to anticipate and recognize when complexity levels
43 exceed program capabilities. Increase managerial and operational
44 resources to meet needs.
- 45 • Complete cost recovery actions when unplanned human-caused fires occur.

1 **Safety**

- 2 • Ensure work/rest and R&R guidelines are followed during all fire and
3 aviation activities. Deviations are approved and documented.
- 4 • Initiate, conduct, and/or participate in fire management related reviews and
5 investigations.
- 6 • Monitor fire season severity predictions, fire behavior, and fire activity
7 levels. Take appropriate actions to ensure safe, efficient, and effective
8 operations.

9
10 **Fire Use**

- 11 • Ensure a written, approved burn plan exists for each prescribed fire project.
- 12 • Ensure all escaped prescribed fires receive a review at the proper level.
- 13 • Provide the expertise and skills to fully integrate fire and aviation
14 management into interdisciplinary planning efforts.
- 15 • Effectively communicate the “natural role” of wildland fire to internal and
16 external agency audiences.
- 17 • Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction
18 for prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and
19 inspections of the prescribed fire program are completed.