

## 6 - Prescribed Fire



### Introduction

Fire is an essential ecological process in many ecosystems. Prescribed fire is used to maintain or restore vegetative communities, achieve potential future conditions, and to protect life, property, and values that could be degraded by wildland fire. Prescribed fire is accomplished only through management ignition.

Prescribed fire is the application of fire, under specified conditions, in a designated area to achieve land management objectives. Prescribed fires are defined as: any fire ignited by management action to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements must be met, prior to ignition.

A complete reference for prescribed fire activities is the *Prescribed Fire Management Handbook*, H-9214-1. Additional information on prescribed fire operations can be found in the chapters on safety, training and qualifications, reviews and investigations, and administration.

### Policy

All prescribed fire projects will have a written and approved burn plan prior to ignition.

All burn plans will contain measurable objectives, a predetermined prescription, and a contingency plan in case the fire escapes.

All prescribed fire projects will comply with NEPA requirements.

### Planning

The BLM's prescribed fire activities are coordinated between resources and fire management. All disciplines will coordinate the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and funding for prescribed fire projects. Resource managers are responsible for managing vegetation; fire staffs are responsible for ignitions.

All prescribed fire will support land and resource management plans (RMP). The RMP, or other land use plans initiate, analyze and justify prescribed fire activities.

The fire management plan (FMP) serves as the strategy document for prescribed fire activities. The prescribed fire plan serves as the project implementation document for an individual prescribed fire project.

### Prescribed Fire Plan

The prescribed fire plan is a stand alone and legal document that provides the prescribed fire burn boss information needed to implement the project. Prescribed fire projects will comply with the written plan. At a minimum, consider each of the items below. The size and complexity of the prescribed fire project will determine the level of detail required and which sections are required.

Plan Approval	Technical Review	Complexity Rating
Risk Assessment	Physical Description	Map
Management Objectives	Prescription	Fire Behavior Calculations
Smoke Management	Notifications	Ignition & Holding

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Organization	Cost	Contingency Plan
Safety Briefing	Public Safety	JHA
Go/No Go Checklist	Test Fire	Medical Plan
Communications Plan	Prescribed Fire Report	

Agency administrators, fire managers, and the prescribed fire burn boss should be aware of and understand the parts of the prescribed fire plan (if any) that may be changed on the site prior to implementing the project. This information may be included in the plan or it may be established as local policy.

### Restrictions

Implementation of prescribed fires at national Preparedness Levels IV and V is restricted. (See the *National Mobilization Guide*.)

At national Preparedness Level IV concurrence by the SFMO must be obtained before implementing the local agency administrator's recommendation for a prescribed fire. An evaluation of significant risk is made by the SFMO or representative in a presentation of the prescribed fire implementation proposal to the geographic multi-agency coordinating (MAC) group prior to prescribed fire approval. A coordination/ tracking function will be established to track prescribed fires and resource commitments at geographic area and national coordination levels.

At national Preparedness Level V a national-level representative must concur with the SFMO's recommendation. The national level representative will present an evaluation of significant risk in a proposal to the national MAC group prior to prescribed fire approval.

## Complexity & Smoke Management

### Complexity Rating

A complexity rating will be completed for each prescribed fire project. The determination of prescribed fire complexity will be based on an assessment of **risk** (the probability or likelihood of an unplanned event or situation), **potential consequences** (some measure of the cost or result of an undesirable event or situation occurring), and **technical difficulty** (the level of skills needed to complete the project **and** deal with unplanned events).

The complexity rating will be based on the prescribed fire plan and the potential social, political, economic, biological, environmental, and legal consequences. Use the complexity rating to guide staffing levels, determine skill and experience requirements, and to determine the level of detail needed in the prescribed fire plan.

The Prescribed Fire Complexity System does not tie directly to the Prescribed Fire Qualifications System. The following guidance will apply. **All prescribed fire projects rated as complex will require a prescribed fire burn boss rated as RXB1 and an ignition specialist rated as RXI1.**

### Smoke Management

As per Public Law 95-95, compliance with federal, state, and local air quality regulations is mandatory and will require coordination with state and local air quality authorities. Personnel developing prescribed fire plans must be aware of state and local regulations and the impacts that a specific project may have on critical areas. Potential smoke impacts on critical areas such as Class I air sheds, restricted areas, and designated areas (often called non-attainment areas) must be considered. Equally important are local features that could be impacted such as highways, airports, recreation sites and smaller population centers. Prescribed fire plans need to identify sensitive areas and provide operational guidance to minimize the impacts from smoke. If potential negative impacts from smoke could occur, an assessment of potential downwind impacts using an appropriate smoke management model will be completed. Some states require that some type of smoke dispersion modeling be done before they will issue a permit for the prescribed fire project.

## Project Financing

Prescribed fire projects will be funded by program areas who will cover their own regular (base-eight) salaries and fixed costs. This applies to items such as preliminary site assessments, writing environmental assessments, developing prescribed fire plans, obtaining clearances, training, and monitoring. Regular salaries for fire staff involved in prescribed fire activities are programmed in Preparedness (2810).

Funding for the implementation of prescribed fire projects must be identified and agreed to at the field office level. The hazardous fuel reduction subactivity (2823) will provide funding for operational implementation costs. The *BLM Fiscal Fund Coding Handbook* provides specific guidance for using this funding. The primary focus of the 2823 funding is to implement prescribed fire projects. Additional guidance for using 2823 funds can be found in the "Administration" Chapter.

Hazard pay will not be given for prescribed fire.

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The BLM can contract all or part of the prescribed fire operations and/or all or part of mechanical treatments for "hazard fuel reduction" projects.

If a contractor is involved in igniting, holding or mopping up a BLM prescribed fire, a contracting officers authorized representative (COAR) or project inspector (PI) will be on site (exceptions can be made for late stage mop-up and patrol) to ensure burn objectives are being met and the terms of the contract are followed. The BLM representative (COAR or PI) must have prescribed fire and/or wildland fire qualifications equal to what the BLM requires if a BLM prescribed fire burn boss was conducting the actual operations.

## Cooperation and Assistance

Offices are encouraged to enter into agreements for the cooperative use of prescribed fire resources. Joint ecosystem-based prescribed fire management programs are encouraged to accomplish resource or landscape management objectives when consistent with resource management plans. These partnerships are encouraged at both the programmatic and project levels to implement prescribed fire projects.

Any prescribed fire that involves BLM employees or major equipment (engines or helicopters, etc.) will be supported by a prescribed fire plan. In the absence of a cooperative agreement the field office manager will provide a memo authorizing BLM participation. This memo will state the type and amount of assistance to be provided, identify safety, liability and other issues, and specify financial arrangements.

## BLM and Other Federal Agencies

Assistance to other BLM units may be provided without formal agreement. If the assistance is related to the implementation of prescribed fire projects, the assisting unit may use the prescribed fire number assigned by the host unit.

Coordination with other federal agencies will occur in the planning phase for joint prescribed fire projects. The BLM may provide assistance for prescribed fire that will be conducted on land administered by other federal agencies. The "Interagency Agreement for Fire Management," dated 2/20/97, provides for interagency assistance without additional agreements. Assistance is initiated by the issuance of "task orders" that provide the project specifics. Fuels management, "including prescribed fire," is specifically covered in the agreement.

The guidance for prescribed fire operations says that, "Interior and the Forest Service should not charge each other for personnel and other resources." All five fire directors agree that the general policy of not cross billing is appropriate.

Generally costs for assistance with prescribed fire projects should be offset at the local level as much as possible. Agency resources (goods, services, and personnel) that are planned and funded as part of an agency's program are usually not reimbursable items. Examples of reimbursable items are:

- Equipment and aircraft use rates
- Major repairs and equipment replacement
- Contract/lease availabilities for early activation or extensions
- National caterer, shower, and Type I and II CWN helicopters
- Cache charges (e.g., shipping, refurbishment, replacement)
- Overtime for weekends and holidays
- Emergency Workers (EFF) where the using office has no assistant Disbursing Officer (ADO) to pay the crews

The four DOI fire directors have further agreed that **NO** local reimbursement among BLM, BIA, FWS, and NPS will be made. As always the field offices will code all costs to a fuels management project number. The usual process of combining the Federal Financial System data and the Fire Report System data gives BLM offices the ability to track these costs by agency and office. If there is an unreimbursed deficit at the local level that will impact the field office's ability to complete it's workload, it needs to contact their state office. If the state office cannot resolve the issue it should contact the national fire budget lead. At the national level the individual Interior agencies' hazardous fuel reduction ceilings will be balanced to account for assistance workloads.

In summary, assistance to other agencies should be offset locally. With the exception of the items noted above, there will be no cross-billing with the Forest Service. Assistance not offset locally must be absorbed by the office providing the assistance. Assistance provided to other DOI agencies and not offset locally

will be offset at the state and national office levels. Assistance costs do not count against the local office's 2823 ceiling.

### Private Land Owners

Agency administrators should enter into agreements with private parties on intermingled lands when resource objectives can best be met through this approach. The agreements will specify the exact lands involved, the overall objectives, actions to be taken by each party, and how costs will be shared. The private land owner should fund a proportional share of the project cost. However, this does not need to be a monetary exchange. The private land owner may provide services (e.g., line construction), equipment (e.g., engines, water tenders or dozers), supplies (e.g., fuel), or personnel to fulfill their part of the obligation.

There may be occasions when a private land owner would allow the BLM to burn private land to facilitate a BLM project. For example moving a perimeter to a road or natural barrier on private land would allow the BLM to avoid constructing as much fire line. In such cases, there is a clear benefit to the BLM, and asking the private land owner to share the cost would not be appropriate.

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## Escaped Prescribed Fires

A prescribed fire becomes a wildland fire when the prescribed fire burn boss determines an escape has occurred, is likely to occur, or environmental conditions and/or fire behavior exceeds the parameters in the prescribed fire plan. As such, the fire is no longer meeting identified management objectives. Fire outside of the planned perimeter that cannot be contained with the holding forces identified in the prescribed fire plan is an escape, and will be declared a wildland fire. This is not a "slopover" that crosses the fire line, but which can be contained by resources on-site. (No suppression charges will be used.)

When a prescribed fire is declared a wildland fire, managers still have the full range of suppression options available under the concept of "Appropriate Management Response." If a prescribed fire is declared a wildland fire, a fire number will be assigned and all suppression costs will be charged to the 2821 subactivity.

The following actions will be taken on all BLM prescribed fires that escape and are declared wildland fires:

- 1) Take prompt and reasonable action to control and suppress the fire. This could include developing a "Wildland Fire Situation Analysis;"
- 2) Notify the BLM agency administrator responsible for the area;

- 3) Notify other agency administrator(s) and/or other land owners that may be affected of the escaped fire. Coordinate suppression actions with the other affected parties;
- 4) Document the time and environmental conditions that existed when the escape occurred;
- 5) Document the incident, including all actions prior to and after the escape. Set up a file that includes all pertinent information, i.e., the prescribed fire plan, a chronology of events including the prescribed fire report and unit logs or individual statements, the fire investigation report, weather forecasts including any spot forecasts, Remote Automated Weather Station (RAWS) data and National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) data for the day of the escape for the nearest weather stations, photos, and any appraisal of damages.

All escaped prescribed fires will receive an administrative review. The level and scope of the review will be determined by the injuries, damage, and cost associated with the escape. See the "Reviews/Investigation" Chapter for additional information.

## Prescribed Fire Support

### NPS Prescribed Fire Modules

Prescribed Fire Modules provide wildland fire management agencies with skilled and mobile personnel who are dedicated principally to prescribed fire management. As a national and interagency resource, the modules are available throughout the prescribed fire season. On an interagency basis these modules are available to ignite, hold, and monitor prescribed fires.

### Organization

Six prescribed fire modules are normally available. They are located at:

- Bandolier National Recreation Area
- Whiskeytown National Recreation Area
- Yellowstone National Park
- Zion National Park *These modules are normally available from late April to the end of September.*
- Buffalo National River *This module is normally available from late February to late August.*
- Great Smoky Mountain National Park *This module is normally available from mid-February to mid-August.*

The four western modules are composed of seven members; the eastern modules are composed of five members. Specialists associated with these modules include:

- prescribed fire analyst
- prescribed fire specialist
- prescribed fire monitor
- ignition specialist
- single resource boss (holding)
- burn boss

### Mobilization

All assignments will be scheduled and tracked by the program coordinator. To schedule modules contact: NPS Program Coordinator, NPS-NIFC, at 208-387-5219.

### BLM Smokejumpers

The BLM smokejumpers at NIFC are available to provide assistance for prescribed fire and other fuels management projects.

The smokejumper unit can provide the following prescribed fire specialists:

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- prescribed fire monitor
- single resource boss/strike team leader (holding)
- crewmembers
- ignition specialist
- burn boss

The smokejumpers can also assist in writing burn plans, site preparation, and non-fire hazardous fuels reduction.

Generally, the smokejumpers are available for prescribed fire or other management work from March 1 to May 20 and from September 15 to November 15.

### Mobilization

To schedule smokejumper support for prescribed fire or other fuels management projects, contact: Smokejumper prescribed fire coordinator at 208-387-5426.

### BLM Interagency Hot Shot Crews

The BLM has seven interagency hot shot crews that support prescribed fire or other fuels management projects. Depending on personnel availability and the location of the project, part or all of a crew may be able to assist. Scheduling should be done through the sponsoring unit or crew superintendent.

The BLM IHCs are located at:

- Chena – Fairbanks, AK
- Midnight Suns – Fairbanks, AK
- Kern Valley – Bakersfield, CA
- Diamond Mountain – Susanville, CA
- Jackson – Jackson, MS



- Silver State – Carson City, NV
- Vale – Vale, OR

### AD Hire Authority

The DOI has the authority to hire personnel under the Administratively Determined (AD) pay plan for “fire use” work related to hazardous fuel reductions. The AD pay plan may be used to supplement regular personnel assigned to prescribed fire projects. The term of hire is restricted to no greater than the period beginning 24 hours prior to the planned ignition and extending through 24 hours after the perimeter is secured.

Complete guidance for the use of this authority can be found in the “Administration” chapter.

### Resource Ordering Process

The resource ordering process for prescribed fire mirrors the process for suppression. Every effort should be made to use the “closest forces” concept. Orders that cannot be filled locally should be placed through the resource ordering process. When another agency requests assistance for a prescribed fire project, the local BLM office assigns one of its prescribed fire project numbers. This will be the only BLM number issued for that assistance activity, regardless of the location from where the BLM assistance is provided. When a request for assistance is received, the local BLM office will determine if it can provide assistance. If the assistance can be provided, activities are handled strictly between the two interagency neighbors. If only part or none of the requested assistance can be provided, the local BLM office will provide a prescribed fire project number to the requesting agency. The office should also explain that if the requestor decides to seek assistance from other BLM offices, the BLM project number should be provided and used for all BLM resources.

## Reports

All prescribed fire, will be assigned a prescribed fire number and reported on the DI-1202. A prescribed fire number should also be assigned to mechanical treatment projects to aid in tracking accomplishments and costs. A prescribed fire number should also be assigned whenever assistance is provided to another agency. Prescribed fire, mechanical treatments, and other agency assistance reporting will be done electronically similar to wildland fire reporting.

Accomplishment reporting will be done using two figures:

**Burned/Treated** Calculate the total acres treated based on the number of acres of vegetation (live or dead) altered by burning, mechanical, or chemical methods less significant unaltered acres. The value of the burned/treated acres must be less than or equal to the total project acres.

**Total Project** This acreage figure represents the total acreage in the project, including areas that were left untreated. Calculate the total project acres based on the perimeter of the project when attempting to obtain resource objectives that are covered in a treatment or prescribed fire plan.

Should a prescribed fire escape and be declared a wildland fire, two reports are required. The acreage burned while the fire was considered a prescribed fire is reported as prescribed fire acreage using the prescribed fire number. Acreage burned after the fire was declared a wildland fire is reported as wildland fire acreage using the local fire number.

Prescribed fire numbers will be assigned for other agency assists. The purpose of using assist numbers is to track funds spent to assist other agencies with prescribed fire or other fuels management projects. While “offset services” or billing is not required when providing assistance, using an assist number provides the basis for such actions and allows the national office to track overall costs.

**6** Assign one number per project where the cost must be tracked. Use the next available prescribed fire number from the block assigned to your office.

Do not use an assist number for assists to other BLM offices; use the prescribed fire number assigned by the host unit.

Instructions for all reports can be found at the following web site:  
[http://www.nifc.blm.gov/nsdu/fire\\_reporting/doc/SpecificInstructions.html](http://www.nifc.blm.gov/nsdu/fire_reporting/doc/SpecificInstructions.html)

## Qualifications

A discussion of prescribed fire training and qualifications can be found in the “Training and Qualifications” Chapter.

## Safety

A specific discussion of prescribed fire related safety issues can be found in the “Safety” Chapter.