

## Chapter 01

### Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Guidance Overview

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#### Scope

The *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 ~~2004~~2009 *Implementation Strategy for the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* and other existing federal policy.

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#### 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, 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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~~2004~~2009 *Implementation Strategy for the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*

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The ~~2004~~2009 *Implementation Strategy for the Federal Wildland Fire Policy* comprises the following guiding principles and discreet 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.

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#### 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.
3. Fire Management Plans (FMP)s, programs, and activities support land and resource management plans and their implementation.
4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities. Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost

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- 1 of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will  
2 be an important component of decisions.
- 3 **5.** Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based  
4 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management  
5 objectives. Federal agency administrators are adjusting and reorganizing  
6 programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process,  
7 investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other  
8 agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set  
9 short and long term priorities and clarify management accountability.
- 10 **6.** FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge  
11 and experience are developed among all wildland fire management  
12 agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency  
13 collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire  
14 managers.
- 15 **7.** FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality  
16 considerations.
- 17 **8.** Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and  
18 cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require  
19 that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with  
20 the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full  
21 collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies and  
22 international, state, tribal, and local governments and private entities results  
23 in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of  
24 public needs.
- 25 **9.** Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an  
26 ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the  
27 fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate  
28 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for  
29 cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.  
30 *(2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 21-22)*

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

#### 32 **1. Safety**

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

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

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

#### 39 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**

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

1 ~~Fire management plans~~FMPs and ~~fire~~ programs will be based on a  
2 foundation of the best available science. Research will support ongoing  
3 efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and  
4 sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management will  
5 be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program.  
6 Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner  
7 and must be used in the development of LMPs, ~~fire management~~  
8 ~~plans,~~FMPs and implementation plans.

#### 10 **10. Preparedness**

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

#### 16 **11. Suppression**

17 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public  
18 safety, benefits, and all values to be protected, consistent with resource  
19 objectives.

#### 21 **12. Prevention**

22 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and  
23 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

#### 25 **13. Standardization**

26 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,  
27 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-  
28 ~~be~~ protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire  
29 management activities.

#### 31 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

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

#### 37 **15. Communication and Education**

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

#### 44 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

45 Agency administrators will ensure ~~that~~ their employees are trained, certified  
46 and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally,

1 regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with  
2 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire  
3 programs as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be  
4 held accountable for making employees available.

## 6 17. Evaluation

7 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to  
8 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the *2001*  
9 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*. The evaluation will assure  
10 accountability, facilitate resolution ~~of~~in areas of conflict, and identify  
11 resource shortages and agency priorities. See *2001 Federal Wildland Fire*  
12 *Management Policy, pages 22-24.*

13 ~~(2001~~

### 14 Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management 15 Policy, pages 22-24)

16 In February, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (the fire directors of the DOI -  
17 OWFC, BLM, BIA, USFWS and the USDA- USFS) issued the *Guidance for*  
18 *Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, February 13,*  
19 *2009, which was intended to “be used to provide consistent implementation of*  
20 *federal wildland fire policy.” The key statements from that document are:*

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

- 1 • 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 • 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 See *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy,*  
9 February 13, 2009, page 7.

## 11 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

### 13 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

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

### 21 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

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

### 31 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

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

### 41 **Fire Preparedness**

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

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

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### 8 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

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

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### 26 **Fire Leadership**

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

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### 37 **Fire Suppression**

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

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

### 8 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

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

### 19 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

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

#### 26 **1. Objective**

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

#### 32 **2. Speed and Focus**

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

#### 39 **3. Positioning**

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



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#### 4. **Simplicity**

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

#### 5. **Safety**

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

#### **Cost Effective Fire Operations**

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

#### **Fire Management Objectives**

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

Wildland fire management objectives are:

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

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

#### 8 **Professional Liability Insurance**

9 With the ~~passage~~signing of Public Law ~~106-58~~, ~~agencies are now required~~ 110-  
10 161 on December 26, 2007 temporary fire line managers, in addition to pay  
11 management officials and law enforcement officers, may be reimbursed for up  
12 to 50% (no more than \$150) one half of the annual cost incurred for professional  
13 liability insurance premiums for qualified supervisors, management officials,  
14 and law enforcement officers who choose to purchase this including any  
15 administrative processing cost charged by the insurance. Fire company. To  
16 qualify, these “temporary fire line managers” must meet one of the following  
17 three criteria:

- 18 • Provide temporary supervision or management of personnel may fall within  
19 the qualified supervisors and management official’s categories. engaged in  
20 wildland fire activities;
- 21 • Provide analysis or information that affects a supervisor’s or manager’s  
22 decision about a wildland fire;
- 23 • Direct the deployment of equipment for a wildland fire, such as a base camp  
24 manager, an equipment manager, a helicopter coordinator, or an initial  
25 attack dispatcher.

26 Refer to agency specific policies.

27 *NPS—December 14, 1999 memorandum from the Associate Director,*  
28 *Administration to Regional Directors [P34 (2653)] transmitted the NPS policy*  
29 *on these reimbursements and should be referred to for qualifications and*  
30 *reimbursement criteria. for reimbursement.*  
31