

Chapter 01**Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Guidance Overview****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 2009 *Implementation Strategy for the Federal Wildland Fire Policy* and other existing federal policy.

Purpose

The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* provides fire and fire aviation program management direction for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, 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*.

2009 Implementation Strategy for the Federal Wildland Fire Policy

The *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.

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 of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.

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

28

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

30 **1. Safety**

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

33

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

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

38

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
44 occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare,
45 the natural and cultural resources and the values to be protected dictate the
46 appropriate response to fire.

- 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 FMPs and will follow specific
5 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 public 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, public health
17 and safety and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to
18 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 partners in the wildland
23 urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative
24 prevention, education and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression
25 is the responsibility of tribal, state or local governments. Federal agencies
26 may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire
27 protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the
28 partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural
29 protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may
30 also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with
31 structural protection.)
32
- 33 **8. Planning**
34 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs
35 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed
36 fires based on the area's approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs
37 must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management
38 strategies, tactics and alternatives; address values to be protected and public
39 health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives,
40 activities of the area and environmental laws and regulations.
41
- 42 **9. Science**
43 FMPs and fire programs will be based on a foundation of the best available
44 science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific
45 knowledge of biological, physical and sociological factors. Information
46 needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated

1 interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available
2 to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of
3 LMPs, FMPs and implementation plans.
4

5 **10. Preparedness**

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

11 **11. Suppression**

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

16 **12. Prevention**

17 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups and
18 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
19

20 **13. Standardization**

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

26 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

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

32 **15. Communication and Education**

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

39 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

40 Agency administrators will ensure their employees are trained, certified and
41 made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally
42 and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational,
43 administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire programs as
44 necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held
45 accountable for making employees available.
46

1 **17. Evaluation**

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

9 **Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

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

- 15 ● Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all
16 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective
17 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
- 18 ● Agencies and bureaus will review, update and develop agreements that
19 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and
20 responsibilities among local, state, tribal and federal fire protection entities.
- 21 ● Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government
22 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
- 23 ● Fire Management Plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed
24 on a landscape scale.
- 25 ● Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs
26 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
 - 27 ➤ Wildfires - Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
28 wildfires.
 - 29 ➤ Prescribed Fires - Planned ignitions.
- 30 ● A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives
31 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.
32 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying
33 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental
34 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- 35 ● Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on
36 objectives established in the applicable Land/Resource Management Plan
37 and/or the Fire Management Plan.
- 38 ● Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the
39 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to
40 firefighter and public safety.
- 41 ● Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document
42 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational
43 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions and
44 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

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

3

4 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

5

6 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

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

13

14 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

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

23

24 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

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

33

34 **Fire Preparedness**

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

46

1 Fire Operations Command Philosophy

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

18

19 Fire Leadership

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

29

30 Fire Suppression

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

1 Principles of Suppression Operations

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

11

12 Principles of Fire Suppression Action

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

18

19 1. Objective

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

24

25 2. Speed and Focus

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

31

32 3. Positioning

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

40

41 4. Simplicity

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

45

46

1 **5. Safety**

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

6
7 **Cost Effective Fire Operations**

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

17
18 **Fire Management Objectives**

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

21 Wildland fire management objectives are:

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

1 **Professional Liability Insurance**

- 2 With the signing of Public Law 110-161 on December 26, 2007 temporary fire
3 line managers, in addition to management officials and law enforcement
4 officers, may be reimbursed for up to one half of the cost incurred for
5 professional liability insurance including any administrative processing cost
6 charged by the insurance company. To qualify, these “temporary fire line
7 managers” must meet one of the following three criteria:
- 8 • Provide temporary supervision or management of personnel engaged in
9 wildland fire activities;
 - 10 • Provide analysis or information that affects a supervisor’s or manager’s
11 decision about a wildland fire;
 - 12 • Direct the deployment of equipment for a wildland fire, such as a base camp
13 manager, an equipment manager, a helicopter coordinator, or an initial
14 attack dispatcher.
- 15
16 Refer to agency specific policies for reimbursement.