

Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC) and the new Federal Wildland Fire Policy

In the wake of the ever evolving fire management policy within the Federal agencies, a new set of fire standards has emerged. As federal fire managers, we now have a new Federal Wildland Fire Policy (2/13/09). For ease and clarification with our non federal partners, the new Federal Wildland Fire policy will categorize Wildland Fire as *Prescribed Fire or Wildfire*. All of the management flexibilities still exist but we must educate our entire workforce on the change in terminology to reduce the amount of confusion within our agencies.

The federal work force, in particular, must face the fact that they will be losing a tremendous amount of fireline expertise due to retirement. Each home unit has the opportunity and responsibility to let their employees know the Agency's expectations and needs for employee development to narrow the gap in fireline expertise at the local level. It is evident, when talking to participants that come through the Center each year the gap seems to get larger before it gets smaller. This is due to the fact that on each unit, there are employees with open task books, often multiple employees with the same open task book, with not enough burns or assignments to offer each employee the opportunity to accomplish tasks and eventually complete a task book. This resulting "bottle neck" contributes greatly to the increased length of time for employees to build experience and benefit the home unit and agency.

PFTC is the only hands on training center opportunity in the country. It is structured to allow the participant to build prescribed fire confidence in the planning and execution of a burn. The participant is provided an accelerated broad-base field experienced training in an environment that allows for wide prescription windows as well as a diversity of burn objectives. PFTC has the capability to reduce the "bottle neck" on the home units allowing task books to be worked on when the home unit is not able to provide the necessary opportunities to complete task books.

How can prescribed burn skills become beneficial in wildfire applications? The use of prescribed fire operations permits the employee to plan a burn (tools/equipment/personnel/burn techniques/weather/fuel types/last burned); execute the burn for objectives within the unit/station Fire Management Plan (FMP) or Land Management Plan (LMP); become pro-active and less re-active; conduct landscape scale burns; and most importantly - perform the operation safely and within time frames set forth by the local unit. In today's fire suppression responses the skills necessary to conduct large burnouts are in higher demand. Many of the wildfires are managed using all the suppression strategies from direct to indirect and all have to keep the land management plan direction embedded in these practices. Learning how to implement these techniques on planned prescribed fire will better prepare the workforce when the suppression need arises.

We encourage you to call a member of the staff here at PFTC if you have any questions. The staff and cooperators you will be burning with are extremely eager to assist you into becoming an active fire practitioner. The website has links to session accomplishments, videos, statistics, photos, session announcements, workshops and much more. We hope to hear from you in the near future.

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