

Foundational Doctrine

Guiding Fire Suppression in the U.S. Forest Service

Introduction

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), and **Fire Suppression** (i.e., are specific to fire fighting activities).

The Operational Environment

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

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.

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

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

Mission (cont.)

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

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

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

Leadership and Accountability

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

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

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

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

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

Roles and Relationships

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

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

Roles and Relationships (cont.)

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

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

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

Operations

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

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

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

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

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

25. Command and control must be decentralized to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire. To achieve their leader's intent and accomplish operational objectives, subordinate commanders are required to make decisions on their own initiative, and to coordinate their efforts.

26. Unity of effort is maintained and suppression actions are coordinated at all times.

Operations (cont.)

27. Using principles requires judgment in application, while adherence to rules does not. In combination principles and rules guide our fundamental wildland fire suppression practices and behaviors, and are mutually understood at every level of command

28. Rapid deployment and concentration of fire suppression resources at the decisive time and place is essential to successful fire suppression actions.

29. Maintaining high capability for initial attack is essential to public and fire fighter safety, accomplishment of management objectives, and cost containment.

Risk Management

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