

Mutual Expectations for Preparedness and Suppression In the Interface¹

Clear definitions and alignment of responsibilities between all wildland fire protection entities needs to exist. Under the direction of WiFLC, a small cadre of government entities with statutory wildland fire protection responsibilities gathered in Emmitsburg, MD in early October, 2008 to help clarify wildland fire management expectations and responsibilities for the Interface.

This paper is intended to clarify new direction and expectations for wildland fire protection agencies (Federal, State, and Local). It is meant to initiate dialogue and action, while reducing the tensions being experienced during preparedness and suppression operations, cost-sharing negotiations and reimbursements. This is the first document to address expectations and responsibilities in preparedness and suppression. Additional papers will be developed to address hazardous fuels reduction, rehabilitation of forest and rangelands, and community capacity building.

ALL wildland fire protection entities are encouraged to conduct a collaborative review and mutually agree upon current jurisdictional expectations and responsibilities prior to the beginning of this fire season. Discussions should seek to clarify tactical measures including operational strategies which will keep fire on their own jurisdiction and outline mutually developed cost-share expectations for all areas of response. This overall effort will greatly improve our ability to achieve coordinated and efficient fire prevention education, hazard mitigation and suppression operations.

Premise: The protection and management of wildlands surrounding or adjacent to the interface¹ should be provided and coordinated by the fire protection organization that is best suited and positioned to effectively and cost-efficiently provide it. All suppression actions will be based on firefighter and public safety and resources at risk.

First Step: Establish a common understanding among all entities interacting in the interface. Clarify and agree on the following expectations and authorities of federal, tribal, state, and local fire protection organizations and individuals that are currently providing wildland fire protection in the interface areas. Monitor and evaluate actions to ensure expectations are being met.

Below are the expectations for each of these entities:

All Wildland Fire Protection Entities:

- Manage all actions to provide for public and firefighter safety as the highest priority.

¹ Interface is defined as any boundary (landowner, states, homes and fuels, etc.) where differing jurisdictions intersect.

- Collaboration as outlined in the 10-year Strategy should be the primary operating principle for all entities.
- Assist in the development and implementation of Community Wildland fire Protection Plans (CWPP) and comparable land resource management plans to create fire-adaptive communities.
- Support a rigorous wildland fire prevention program which may include:
 - A public education program that engages the public into the WUI solution, such as the “Ready, Set, Go!” Program.
 - Strategic engagement with insurance sector partners.
 - Public education efforts to expand understanding of wildland fire such as the “Partners in Fire Education” and Firewise principles.
- Provide national standards for fire suppression including a training and qualification system.
- Ensure collaborative agreement and training are established on cost-sharing of suppression expenditures.
- Actively manage fuels (native & structural) to reduce fire spread potential, in accordance with management objectives, along boundaries with other jurisdictions.
- Aggressive action must be taken to keep unwanted wildland fires from spreading to adjacent jurisdictions during initial attack. The need for aggressive action must be revisited cooperatively during extended attack and should be commensurate with values at risk, while looking at consequences and recognition of statutory responsibilities.
- Allow reasonable access and incident management across ownership to support neighboring jurisdictions.
- All entities must be prepared to respond in a coordinated and cohesive manner.
- Assist with identifying and developing adequate suppression response for areas of unprotected and under-protected lands.
- Improve and sustain both community suppression capacity and individual responsibility to prepare, respond and recover from wildland fire.
- Provide assistance and coordinate with all jurisdictions on preparedness and suppression to manage wildland fires that exceed their capabilities.
- Respond to or provide assets for suppressing wildland fires within their jurisdiction consistent with their land management objectives, while recognizing that decisions on one jurisdiction may affect another jurisdiction.
- Coordinate response to wildland fire and when necessary request local, state and federal assistance.

Federal Wildland Fire Entities:

- Fund and support fire prevention and education programs.
- Develop international agreements among countries to allow the sharing of preparedness & suppression resources.

- Provide access to resources from other federal departments, such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.
- Maintain a national and regional dispatch system to facilitate the coordinated mobilization of suppression resources including international resources to support large fire suppression efforts.
- Maintain an adequate level of shared national preparedness and suppression resources such as air tankers, smoke jumpers, helicopters, crews, contract resources and incident management teams that allows for a reduction in large costly fires.
- Provide mutually agreed preparedness and suppression assistance to state, tribal, and local government on wildland fires that exceed their capabilities.
- Strategically manage wildland fires on federal land, in accordance with management objectives, to create healthy, resilient, fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Manage wildland fires on federal lands considerate of protecting communities and other valuable state or private resources.

Tribal Wildland Fire Entities:

- Respond to and aggressively manage wildland fires according to land resource management plans (LRMP) and fire management plans (FMP) within legal jurisdiction.

State Government Wildland Fire Entities:

- Coordinate state level response to wildland fire and request assistance when necessary.
- Mobilize state National Guard resources to assist with wildland fire preparedness and suppression.

Local Government –Wildland Fire Entities:

- Take the lead role in providing structural fire protection/suppression, while recognizing local government’s “all-hazard” role.

Local Government – Policy & Community Planning Entities:

- Develop and implement community growth planning, zoning and subdivision development consistent with recognized principles.
- Assist in the development and implementation of CWPPs to create fire-adaptive communities.
- Ensure that adequate fire protection resources are maintained commensurate with population growth.
- Implement building/fire codes, which include measures to reduce structural vulnerability.

Private Property Owners:

- Create fire-adapted communities. This should include:
 - Becoming actively involved in the WUI solution by implementing principles to improve survivability of property, such as FIREWISE / Fire Safe Principles. For example:
 - Use appropriate construction materials for new construction and retrofitting existing structures.
 - Create and maintain effective defensible space around structures -homes and businesses.
 - Manage potential ignition sources.
 - Get involved in a public education programs that engages the public into the WUI solution, such as the “Ready, Set, Go!” Program.
 - Actively work with neighbors to create a fire-adapted community. Steps may include participating in local CWPP development and implementation, and/or becoming involved in organized community-lead programs to reduce wildland fire risk.

Second Step: Once federal, state, tribal, and local government have confirmed their responsibilities, authority and jurisdiction based on the above expectations, identify opportunities to realign interface protection expectations and responsibilities among existing protection organizations to better match their organizational missions and response capabilities. Examples include:

- Community Wildland Fire Response Planning. If federal/state protected lands are adjacent to a community with a fully developed CWPP and a robust local response capability, consider developing a joint community wildland fire response plan that links to the federal/state fire management plan. Such a plan would provide for immediate local government assistance on wildland fires originating in a pre-defined area on adjacent federal/state protection lands, and provide full federal/state reimbursement of suppression costs. This response plan would provide for a local response that greatly exceeds what is typically included in a standard mutual aid agreement.
- Exchanges of Protection Responsibility. Identify opportunities for federal, state and local agencies/entities to formally exchange areas of legal fire protection jurisdiction. For example; one objective may be to allow federal agencies to protect predominately undeveloped state or private forest lands, while states could protect federal land adjacent to areas with significant WUI development. Prior to such an exchange of fire protection, federal, state and local agencies/entities would be able to ensure that vegetative fuels on federal, state and local agencies/entities lands have been modified sufficiently to reduce fire behavior and structural developments are “fire-adaptive” to increase initial and extended attack effectiveness. All entities would also be able to ensure that initial and extended attack policies, strategies, and commitments by the receiving protection agency is

equivalent, to ensure adequate protection of state and private lands, improvements, and natural resources.

- Trading Initial Response Areas. Develop agreements between federal agencies and state or local government to trade areas of initial response authority to improve the response capability in areas with significant WUI development.
- Cost-Share / Mutual-Aid Agreements: Before a wildland fire starts, make sure the various entities responsible for wildland fire protection have agreed on available cost share methodologies and have clarified mutual-aid response expectations.
- Local Initial Response Contracts. Identify opportunities to consider contracting with local government for all initial response on adjacent lands.
- Training: Wildland fire fighting resources should be trained with equivalency in mind, meaning that qualifications under one system should be recognized in other systems.