

## WHAT IS THE URGENCY?

Over the past century, land-use practices and our good efforts to suppress all fires have slowly but surely changed the face of the landscape. Dead vegetation has accumulated unnaturally in many places, and we are now faced with the reality of larger, more severe wildland fires. Not only are these intense wildland fires dangerous and difficult to control, but they are generally much more harmful to the resources than the low-intensity fires Mother Nature intended as a housekeeping tool.

The increasing challenge of protecting wildland/urban interface areas needs immediate attention. This is not a new problem, and we've been struggling for many years to find a solution. Federal agencies cannot solve this problem alone, but they can work with state and local organizations, communities, and homeowners to help close the growing gap between the problem and the solution.

### KEY POINTS OF THE REPORT

- ▶ Reconfirms that public and firefighter safety is the top priority.
- ▶ Adjusts protection priorities from a strict 1 - human life, 2 - property, and 3 - resource values to 1 - human life and 2 - property and natural/cultural resources, based on relative values to be protected.
- ▶ Creates a framework for allowing fire to function, as nearly as possible, in its natural ecological role and for using fire to achieve goals of ecosystem health.
- ▶ Places heavy emphasis on partnerships within the Federal fire management agencies; with State, Tribal, and local governments; and with the private sector.
- ▶ Directs agencies to jointly develop programs to expand the use of prescribed fire in fire-dependent ecosystems.

- ▶ Requires that fire management goals and objectives be set forth in land and resource management plans.
- ▶ Requires that every area subject to wildland fires be covered by a Fire Management Plan that is responsive to land and resource management plan objectives.
- ▶ Asks Federal agencies to ensure that all wildland/urban interface areas are covered by Fire Protection Agreements, to renegotiate existing agreements as needed to reflect a Federal responsibility that is compatible with current policy, and to ensure that State and local responsibilities are apportioned appropriately.
- ▶ Clarifies that structural fire protection is generally the responsibility of Tribes, States, and local governments and identifies the Federal responsibility as wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, and cooperative prevention, education, and technical assistance.
- ▶ Utilizes the Western Governors' Association as a catalyst for involving State agencies as well as local and private stake-holders in the wildland/urban interface; recommends using the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Protection Program, which includes Federal and State cooperators, as a forum for focusing on wildland/urban interface issues.

### FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY & PROGRAM REVIEW

*For more information about wildland fire management or the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review, contact your local agency administrator or fire program manager.*

Bureau of Land Management · USDA Forest Service · National Park Service  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service · Bureau of Indian Affairs  
National Interagency Fire Center



WHAT DOES  
IT MEAN  
TO ME AND  
MY JOB?

## FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROGRAM REVIEW

ANSWERS FOR  
EMPLOYEES



## ABOUT THE REVIEW



The Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review was chartered by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior on December 30, 1994.

The principal agencies involved were the USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Others who participated were the National Biological Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Weather Service, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The December 18, 1996, final report contains more than 80 recommended action items. These actions will ultimately result in improved firefighter and public safety, reduced costs and losses, and a wider acceptance, both internally and externally, of the important role that wildland fire plays in the management of our public lands.

Resource managers have been steadily moving in this direction for some time because it makes sense, but each agency has been doing it within its own boundaries, at its own pace, and based on its own agency-specific policies. The Fire Policy Report outlines for the first time a set of "umbrella" Federal fire management policies and creates a solid framework for enhancing cooperation among land management agencies. While it provides Federal agencies with broad parameters, however, it does not prohibit them from implementing agency-specific fire management programs and activities.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION?

The May 23, 1996, Implementation Action Plan outlines a strategy for implementing the recommendations of the Fire Policy Report. It is very clear

about who is responsible for what: the Management Oversight Team, Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council, National Wildfire Coordinating Group, Geographic Area Coordination Groups, Agency Administrators, special teams and task forces, and in some cases, specific individuals.

But this review wasn't done so teams could meet and more reports could be prepared. It was done to improve the health of the land and do it safely. That means every employee must get involved and do his or her part. It's what happens on the ground that counts!

So it's everyone's responsibility, led and supported by Agency Administrators. Your role may be in one or more of the following areas of emphasis:

- ▶ Agency Administrators must get involved, demonstrate their support, hold employees accountable, and be accountable themselves. We cannot be successful without commitment by top-level managers.
- ▶ Firefighter and public safety remains the first priority. Once people are safe, the second protection priority is property and natural/cultural resources, based on their relative values. This is a change from previous priorities and must be coordinated with local partners.
- ▶ Be responsible to educate yourself and others — coworkers, customers, and neighbors — about fire's role as a critical natural process in the ecosystem and about the long-term economic, ecological, and social benefits that can come from a compatible, cohesive Federal wildland fire program.
- ▶ The planning process is a critical factor if we are to make progress on the ground...and not just *fire* planning. Agencies must work closely with each other to ensure their *land and resource* planning processes are compatible and, when appropriate, to ensure that fire management objectives are consistent across agency jurisdictions.

Land and resource management plans and activity plans must incorporate fire as a tool to achieve resource management objectives and consider the impacts of fire exclusion.

All areas subject to wildland fires must be covered by an approved Fire Management Plan, developed with the full participation of all partners, which will describe fire management goals and objectives and present a range of options for dealing with fires when they occur.

- ▶ Working with our partners is a key part of fire policy implementation, whether we're working on Fire Management Plans, Fire Protection Agreements, prescribed fire, prevention, education, preparedness or severity planning, training, qualifications, equipment, or any other aspect of fire management. We must place more emphasis on communicating and working with our neighbors, cooperators, and partners.
- ▶ More emphasis will be placed on properly planning and conducting prescribed fire projects. This includes working with partners to assess the need for prescribed fire, the probability of success or failure, and the potential positive and negative consequences. And Agency Administrators and managers must support employees who implement a properly planned and conducted prescribed fire program, even if there are unplanned results.
- ▶ Everyone has an obligation to participate in and support the fire management program in whatever way they can. Trained, certified employees will participate in the wildland fire program, and others will provide support. Agency Administrators will be held accountable for results.

We can all help find innovative ways to meet the goals and objectives of the fire policy review; the use of wildland fire crosses all functional boundaries. Every person has skills and experience that can contribute to its success.