



Key Issues 2009

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to emphasize existing direction to agency administrators, fire program managers, firefighters and other leaders in the US Forest Service and the US DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. The intent is to keep this direction fundamental in nature, as specific and detailed direction exists in many agency and interagency policy documents. This document provides emphasis in several critical areas where superior performance is critical to successful wildland fire management.

- Guidance for Implementing Fire Policy
- Pre-Planning Decision Support for Fires
- Mutual Expectations
- Interagency Large Fire Cost
- Succession Planning and Training
- Strategic Management of Resources

The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001), signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, is the key interagency policy document for federal wildland fire management. It was followed by the *Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy (June 2003)*, which has been superseded by *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (February 2009)*. This implementation guidance requires that each of the federal wildland fire agencies work together through development of unified direction and guidance for agency/bureau manuals, directives, handbooks, guidebooks, plans agreements and other pertinent documents to complete final implementation of this guidance. This will improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of wildland fire operations. Leadership must support this and develop consistent fire policies and procedures between the five federal fire agencies. This document is part of that effort.

REVISED GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTING FIRE POLICY

On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. This Guidance provides for consistent implementation of the 1995/2001 Federal Fire Policy, as directed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council. The following guidelines should be followed to provide consistent implementation of federal wildland fire policy.

1. Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective collaboration among cooperating agencies.
2. Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and responsibilities among local, state, tribal and federal fire protection entities.
3. Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
4. Fire management planning will be intergovernmental in scope and developed on a landscape scale.
5. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
 - a. Wildfires – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared wildfires
 - b. Prescribed Fires – Planned ignitions.
6. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
7. Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on objectives established in the applicable Land/ Resource Management Plan and/or the Fire Management Plan.
8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to firefighter and public safety.
9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

PRE-PLANNING DECISION SUPPORT FOR FIRES

With increasing frequency, local units may face the reality of dealing with multi-jurisdictional fires (those crossing protection authority boundaries) which challenge collaboration and cooperation during critical times in the decision process. While a variety of circumstances may lead up to a multi-jurisdictional event, it is critical that the potential be recognized as early as possible and preferably be addressed in preseason meetings involving local agency administrators and fire managers. Recognize that preseason meetings are crucial to mutual understanding between agencies and provide for time to develop or review and revise annual operating plans addressing firefighting resource availability and capability, strategic objectives and management constraints, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation requirements, current political and social considerations and establish communication expectations.

One topic to address in preseason meetings is the application of strategic wildland fire management decisions through analyses and determining course of action as reflected in wildland fire decision and analysis processes.

The various processes (the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA), the Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP), the Long-Term Implementation Plan (LTIP), and the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) may not be consistent across jurisdictions. WFDSS and its reporting components are endorsed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and designed to support the Federal Wildland Fire Policy implementation guidance update (2009) and replace three current decision analysis processes - the WFSA, WFIP, and LTIP. Implementation of WFDSS will not occur simultaneously across the agencies. Fire Management must remain conversant in WFSA, WFIP, and LTIP procedures as WFDSS is implemented across the agencies.

MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

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 objectives, operational strategies and tactical measures including keeping fire on their own jurisdiction, conditions for managing fire across jurisdiction boundaries and establishing cost-share expectations for all mutual response areas.

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, recognizing jurisdiction limitations and protection agreements. The following two step process will assist local units in identifying opportunities for increased efficiency.

Step 1: Establish a common understanding among all entities interacting in the interface as to jurisdictional protection boundaries, unit legal mandates, policies, and management constraints. Clarify and agree on the 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.

Step 2: 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.

Use available tools to document understanding and agreement to work together, share resources and knowledge and establish framework for cost-sharing and reimbursement.

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

INTERAGENCY LARGE FIRE COST REVIEW

The high costs of wildland fire suppression, particularly large and complex incidents, are of considerable concern to Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office, the public, and the agencies themselves. The Department of Interior agencies and the Forest Service have committed to take comprehensive actions to address the high cost of wildland fire suppression and improve program management by increasing oversight and accountability through a large fire cost containment review process.

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) has developed an [Interagency Large Fire Cost Review Guidebook](#) (see [NWCG#003-2009 Memorandum](#) - Interagency Large Fire Cost Reviews – Process and Guidance, February 5, 2009) for use by all Federal wildland fire management agencies to ensure consistency in the review process across Departments. This guidance is intended to be used for after-the-fact reviews at the local/state/regional level to identify lessons learned. This is a living document which will change as we work through the process over the next several years.

An Interagency Large Fire Cost Review will be conducted when an incident (single fire or complex) meets or exceeds Federal combined expenditures of \$10 million.

A review may also be conducted when an incident (single fire or fire complex) meets or is expected to meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The predicted time to achieve the fire management objective exceeds 21 days.
- There are significant political, social, natural resource, or policy concerns.
- There are significant and complicated cost-share or multi-jurisdictional issues.
- The affected agency requests a review.

It is the responsibility of the leadership to monitor large fire costs and advise the appropriate individual(s) within their agency of the need for a Large Fire Cost Review. The agency director will provide a [delegation of authority](#) to the Cost Review Team (Large Fire Guidebook, Chapter 2) authorizing the implementation of a review. When a multi-jurisdictional fire requires review, the local agency administrator will determine which agency will be designated as the lead in the review process.

SUCCESSION PLANNING/TRAINING

We must plan for timely replacement of critical wildland fire skill sets as retirements increase and fewer personnel are available for fire management assignments due to a variety of professional and personal reasons. It is important to inventory your organizations on an annual basis to determine local capability and off-unit support potential. Critical incident position needs should be an organizational priority while also contributing to local and agency program goals like Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM).

Maintaining a robust fire management skill set is an investment for the future of the interagency fire community. Short term cost concerns should not preclude a commitment to training and the use of trainees on incidents. Achieving these organizational investment goals and priorities should focus on the fire community needs.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

During periods of high activity, it is unlikely that every incident will be able to acquire desired numbers of firefighting resources. As strategies and tactics adapt to that reality, alternative management strategies, such as theater operations and ready mobile reserve, can allow for making progress towards intended objectives. These alternative management strategies focus on efficient and effective use of existing resources to address specific prioritized missions.

We need to recognize theater operations as implemented within a specified area and reflect management's potential to increase the efficiency and productive application of the existing firefighting resources. Decision support and prioritization, resource coordination, and logistical support activities are typical actions conducted within a theater of operations.

Another conceptual change is that areas will identify ready reserve and have these firefighting resources available for initial attack, extended attack, and emerging incidents in response to area and national priorities. These reserves will typically consist of a mix of the following kinds of resources configured as a task force:

- Type 1 Crews
- Type 2 Crews
- Engines, Type 6-7
- Aviation assets (e.g. Helicopter, Air Tanker, Lead Plane, Air Attack Platform, etc.)
- Overhead positions identified as situation demands (e.g. Division Group Supervisor, Incident Commander Type 3, Helicopter Managers, Helicopter Modules, Air Tactical Group Supervisors, etc.)

These firefighting taskforce resources may come and go from a large fire or longer duration incident, working specific tasks that are accomplished within a defined timeframe and then move on to another assignment. This may also be expanded to cache resources such as water handling equipment.

Managers must consider emergency stabilization and rehabilitation requirements and work closely with BAER Teams to provide needed support such as radio communications, transportation, and other logistical support in a similar fashion.