

2012 Pre-Season Talking Points



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2012 Pre-Season Talking Points

Ethical Standards for Fire and Aviation

- The Fire and Aviation program continues to be scrutinized for improprieties associated with charge card purchases, gift cards, and time coding. The issues are troubling and our top leadership is well aware of them.
- The reported incidents reflect a lack of leadership and managerial oversight within our agency. It also reflects the lack of an automated system that would replace our obsolete paper-based review with limited transparency. We have much to do in this area as leaders in the fire and aviation community and as managers.
- In our pre-season meetings, our managers need to emphasize that this kind of illegal activity will not be tolerated. The percentage of people involved in questionable activities is small, but we know it takes only a few to pull down the image and trust for an entire program. Additionally, managers at all levels, whether they work in the fire and aviation program or not, need to institute clear performance standards, supervisory reviews of all credit card statements and whatever other internal controls are needed.
- Inconsistency among the states has been a problem for us. In some ways, we have ten states doing business in ten different ways. BLM's Fire Leadership Team has chartered a new Business Management Committee, and we will ask it to become involved in identifying systemic problems and solutions, so that we have standard procedures and protocols in all of our states. That's another step forward.
- The reputation of our entire agency could be at stake here. It is a serious matter and we all need to stay close to it and ensure there are no further problems.

2012 Budget

- DOI Preparedness funding was cut in the 2012 Appropriation by \$13.9 million from the 2011 enacted level. BLM's portion of this reduction is about 60 percent, or roughly \$7.7 million.
- The reduction in 2012 was accomplished by reducing FA and state base budgets in both 2011 and 2012, and by reducing BLM and departmental off-the-top programs. The Fire Program Decision Support System (FPDSS) outputs were used to help apportion these base reductions among the states.
- The President's budget proposed that the DOI agencies would complete 90 percent of their fuels reduction work in the WUI, with the remaining 10 percent in areas adjacent to the WUI. Appropriations Committee language, however, relaxed the WUI/non-WUI split, allowing the agencies to treat high priority projects in high priority areas.
- In 2012, as in 2011, we have two sources of funding for suppression: the regular Suppression Account and FLAME Act funds for qualifying fires. Caps on expenditures remain in place for the Severity and Emergency Stabilization portions of the Suppression account.

2013 Budget

- The 2013 President's Budget includes a slight increase (\$3 million at the departmental level) in Preparedness, and a large reduction (\$39 million) in Hazardous Fuels, from the 2012 Enacted level. The only significant increase in the 2013 Wildland Fire Management request is in Suppression and FLAME, where the requested level would maintain funding at the 10-year Suppression average level.

401/301

- Currently Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM) fire management positions classified at the GS-11 level and above, with the exception of local dispatch center managers, must be in the GS-0401 series. This IFPM standard requires positive education in natural resources, while education and degrees in multiple other fields fail to qualify a candidate for these positions. In turn, this limits leaders' ability to recruit and hire a diverse professional workforce.
- According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, only a narrow pool of graduates, representing approximately just 2 percent of all graduates, would qualify for fire management positions. The exclusion of the other 98 percent means workforce diversity in gender, race, educational experience and the broad scope of perspectives inherent in diversity is largely unavailable and difficult to achieve in the fire management community.
- BLM fire program leadership believes fire managers must have the flexibility to advertise, recruit and fill positions based upon individual district and field office program complexities and is working toward using a GS-301 series to foster that flexibility and more opportunities for diversity. Steps in this direction are being taken judiciously to consider and understand all issues and concerns involved.
- While a move to the GS-301 series is in alignment with the Forest Service, it is a departure from the BLM's partner DOI agencies who wish to continue exclusive use of the GS-401 series. Not satisfied with the status quo, BLM fire leadership believes this move can significantly increase diversity within the fire and aviation management workforce.
- An updated briefing will be prepared, including recommendations for addressing the GS-0401 series concerns, and used for discussion the BLM Field Committee at their May, 2012 meeting.

90/10 Fuels Split (also mentioned in Fuels Budget section)

- The last two years, BLM has been directed to spend 90 percent of our fuels money in the WUI, with the remaining 10 percent spent in areas adjacent to the WUI. That was included in the President's budget for 2012, but overturned in the Appropriations Committee language. That change was greeted with relief by the fire agencies. Recent meetings between DOI and OMB seem to have been successful in expanding the definition of WUI to include resources that include all "interests of the community." We're hopeful that will allow DOI agencies more flexibility in planning fuels treatments.

Aviation

- The BLM is proceeding with changes in procurement for Single Engine Air Tankers beginning this year. For 2012 and the foreseeable future, BLM is pursuing 11 independent, 60-day exclusive-use SEAT contracts that will be assigned to seven western states, including Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Montana and Oregon. This fleet will be hosted and managed at the local level but the aircraft are national resources and part of the national response framework.
- Forty SEAT pilots are going through simulator training exercises the first two weeks of March at the Wildland Fire Training Center at McClellan Air Force Base near Sacramento, California. The high-tech simulators provide pilots hands-on training experience in fire flight operations.
- In addition to the SEATs, the BLM is supporting national response capabilities with the following aircraft on exclusive-use contracts: two water-scooper air tankers; nine Type II helicopters; 14 Type III helicopters; seven smokejumper planes; nine air tactical airplanes; five aerial supervision modules; and five fixed-wing utility aircraft.
- On an interagency basis, federal agencies have On-Call/Call-When-Needed contracts for three water scoopers; approximately 65 SEATs; 75 air tactical aircraft; and an estimated 39 Type I helicopters, 122 Type II helicopters and 295 Type III helicopters. The Forest Service also will have 11 large air tankers on exclusive use contracts.

Cohesive Strategy Update

- The final phase of the Cohesive Strategy effort has begun. Although the process is in its final year of development, we do expect to refresh and validate the effort every five years.
- This year representatives from BLM will participate with the National Science Team's effort to develop a "Trade-Off Analysis." We will continue to participate in the Western Region and nationally on a variety of efforts to transform identified actions into implementable solutions. Those actions apply to three goal areas: *Healthy and Resilient Landscapes*, *Creating Fire-adapted Communities*, and *Safe and Effective Fire Response*. We will also attempt to draw more BLM participation and key partners into the effort this year to improve the products.

Why BLM should remain an active and engaged stakeholder in these CS proceedings:

- It is likely that Congress and the Administration will hold us accountable for following the Cohesive Strategy. It would be in our best interest to ensure that the elements within each of the three phases of the strategy are as consistent as possible with our agency mission.
- It is also likely that the Cohesive Strategy and its components will influence future DOI fire budget allocations.
- If you would like to participate or desire more information, Deputy Assistant Director Lynda Boody is our national point-of-contact and Wyoming High Desert District Manager John Ruhs is our Western Region POC.

Do What's Right/EEO

- BLM Fire and Aviation continues to use the 2010 version of Do What's Right to complete two hours of EEO training for all F&A supervisors and employees. No updates of the program are currently planned.
- All supervisors and managers are required by the Department to complete four hours of EEO training as well as four hours of Diversity training each fiscal year. Employees are required to complete four hours total of Diversity and EEO training.

DOI Medical Standards Program Description

Program Objectives:

- Ensure arduous duty wildland firefighters are medically qualified in accordance with 5CFR339 (Medical Qualifications Determinations) to perform their tasks safely in any environment at all times without hazard to themselves or others.
- Describe the health burden on wildland firefighters through cradle to grave tracking of medical standards data to inform prevention.
- Administer, manage and coordinate across DOI wildland firefighting agencies a medical standards program.

Summary of Program Operations for 2012:

BLM will maintain functioning medical standards program that adequately addresses identified safety and health risks. The program leadership will work simultaneously with stakeholders from each agency over the next year to revise the long-term exam process business model. During fiscal year 2013, the program anticipates beginning the long-term plan for implementation. In the interim, the functioning program model will remain the same as 2011. Key program activities in 2012 will include:

Functional Program

- Health Screening Questionnaire or Annual Exam/clinic visit dependent on employment category (see exam matrix)
- Shortened Annual Exam (from 24 to 14 pages), the formatting has been streamlined and clarifying revisions were made to help reduce clinics performing additional tests that are not authorized (available on web)
- Tracking tool for FMOs to assist in tracking firefighter clearance at the local level. FMOs should coordinate FF exams with local clinics to help ensure unauthorized tests/costs are minimized.
- Risk Mitigation/Waiver Process will remain the same http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards

Revision of Exam Process Business Model

- Opinion leaders meet at NIFC January 10 - 12 to revise the long-term exam process business model. Prior to the meeting, input will be gathered via survey from additional stakeholders in the field.
- DOI MSP will work with a Business Analyst and use input from opinion leaders to revise the long-term exam process business model by May 2012.

- Prior to beginning of Fiscal Year 2013, DOI MSP leadership anticipates beginning implementation of the new long-term business model.

Please contact a Customer Service Representative with questions at 1-888-286-2521 or wlfcsr@blm.gov.

Election Year and Fire Season

- Election years can pose challenges to fire agencies. You may find more interest than usual in fire and aviation activities by those running for office, especially if the season is active. You may be asked to sponsor meetings where candidates want to speak to a group of employees. You may be asked to host field tours or visits to the fireline by candidates for office. Remember, we cannot host any events that are tied to a campaign. We cannot provide any service for a candidate that would not generally be made available to the public.
- Remember, on the long chance you're asked about the President's budget, our stock answer is that we support it.

Fuels (including Fuels budget)

- In February 2012, the Interior Fire Executive Council approved the fiscal year 2012 hazardous fuels program of work and budget for the DOI. Due to the fiscal year 2012 HFPAS allocation decision, BLM's 2012 allocation for hazardous fuels reduction increased about \$8 million over the FY2011 level. (\$90.2 million in FY12)
- This program of work continues an emphasis on focusing hazardous fuels funds to projects in the wildland-urban interface.
- However, the Office of Management and Budget has recently broadened the concept of what can be included in the WUI, recognizing that protecting communities often means more than simply protecting homes. Many communities depend on federal lands for critical economic support, and projects that protect these places and the economic activity derived from them can now receive priority for fuels treatment. This recognition means the 90/10 policy for how to split fuels treatment dollars is no longer in effect.
- HFPAS ensures hazardous fuels reduction funds are allocated to the highest priority treatments in the highest priority areas regardless of agency. The HFPAS process comprises four components:
 - Programmatic Funding: Funding for that portion of the labor, operations, and administrative costs of the hazardous fuels reduction program that cannot be associated with specific projects.
 - Ecosystem Management Decision Support (EMDS): A model designed to evaluate high priority areas relative to risk from wildfire and associated consequences. Although agencies have concerns with the specific outcomes of this model, gradual adjustments over time should address those concerns.
 - Project Prioritization System (PPS): A process designed to evaluate how individual projects satisfy the Hazardous Fuels Program priorities stipulated by DOI.
 - Management Considerations: Management considerations adjust EMDS/PPS results to ensure that final allocations can be feasibly implemented, and that unforeseen circumstances can be accommodated. Management considerations are applied throughout the HFPAS process.

- Although BLM has concerns regarding the specificity and complexity of HFPAS, national managers are committed to using it as a tool to assist in the allocation of the hazardous fuels funding. HFPAS allows enough flexibility to complete specific bureau mission requirements and helps honor long-standing agreements and partnerships.
- States will only include a one-year program of work into NFPORS for FY 2013. The goal is to eventually have a four-year program of work, which will enable bureaus and states to do long-term project and workforce planning.
- An ongoing general trend of reductions in hazardous fuels dollars appears to be likely. States should be aware of this trend and begin developing strategic plans to identify the workforce that can be sustained into the future.

HSPD-12

- A process has been worked out between the DOI and Forest Service to allow computer use by those who need access.

Mitigation/Prevention/Education

- For the second year in a row there are no funds available for Rural Fire Assistance and the future is at best grim for this once-active program. RFA, which funded training and equipment for small rural departments, was frequently funded and de-funded according to budget proposals and congressional direction. RFA may be back in 2013 as the program was not terminated, but rather not currently funded.
- Although there also is no funding this year for the Ready Reserve program, the majority of the \$950,000 received late in 2011 was put into agreements and contracts carried over to provide training in 2012. This program is implemented in a variety of ways, including through states, universities, technical colleges, fire chiefs associations, contractors and by in-house BLM employees who instruct courses for local rural fire department cooperators. These funds can be used to offer NWCG or other Wildland Fire training courses or to sponsor Simulation exercises for local, cooperating fire agencies.
- There are very few new Community Wildfire Protection Plans being developed as most counties and communities were addressed in past years. The majority of work in this area today is on upgrading existing plans with new GIS data and refining site-specific implementation plans.
- A new fire prevention, mitigation and education planning template is expected to be released this year to provide, among other things, a framework for local units to identify their most common fire causes and target actions to prevent them. The template also will include sections for providing goals and accomplishments related to other National Fire Plan programs.
- The Fire Trespass Handbook is being updated and is expected to be released later this fiscal year. BLM states are continuing to place more emphasis on these cost-recovery efforts especially considering future budget predictions as these funds are returned to the state that collects them.

Safety

- Physical fitness is a key component to maintaining firefighter health. All wildland fire personnel are encouraged to participate in a comprehensive, well-rounded physical training program to improve their safety and health and reduce injuries.
 - Consider implementing the BLM's National Fire Operations Fitness Challenge. Specific information found at: http://www.blm.gov/nifc/st/en/prog/fire/fireops/fitness_challenge.html
 - Visit the FireFit web site for more information at <http://www.nifc.gov/FireFit/index.htm>.
- In an effort to continue to highlight principles of High Reliability Organizing (HRO), we want to emphasize the importance of reporting and reacting to small failure and indicators and utilize tools like SAFENET (wildland fire ground operations safety reporting system) and SAFECOM (aviation mishap reporting system) to raise awareness of safety issues and identifying corrective actions/mitigations.
- Risk management acknowledges the inherent dangers involved with managing both wildfire and prescribed fire (there are recently new definitions per Fed Fire Policy so if you use "wildland" fire it includes prescribe fire or if you separate out use "wildfire" Red Book, Ch. 1). The process of risk management includes the continual recognition of hazards and threats, and taking the steps necessary to eliminate, reduce or mitigate risk.
- Although critical incidents are rare and we all work very hard to prevent serious accidents, it is still important to ensure we are prepared when they do occur. Every field unit should ensure that its local emergency medical plans and Agency Administrator's Guide to Critical Incident Management (PMS 926) are updated. It is also critical that offices ensure that all employees Personal Emergency Information Cards (BLM Form 1400-71) are updated annually and that every new employee completes form.
- To review wildland fire accident statistics for 2011, visit the following websites:
 - For BLM: http://web.blm.gov/internal/fire/fire_ops/index.html (click on "Safety Updates" in bottom left column of page)
 - For NWCG SafetyGram: <http://www.nwcg.gov/branches/pre/rmc/index.htm>

Sage Grouse and Fire

- Bob Abbey has said repeatedly that healthy sagebrush ecosystems are BLM's top conservation priority. You may recall that the Fish and Wildlife Service determined the greater sage-grouse was "warranted for listing," but "precluded," because FWS had other species of higher priority to deal with.
- Essentially, FWS gave BLM three years to come up with a strategy to fix the health of sagebrush ecosystems. The clock has been ticking and now we're down to a couple of years.
- BLM is developing a "National Greater Sage-grouse Planning Strategy" that will address conserving and restoring range-wide sagebrush habitat. Interim guidelines were issued in December and they address fire. If you're not familiar with the section regarding fire and rehabilitation, you need to pull up the IM and read it carefully.
- It's hard to underestimate how much of the strategy depends on fire. You need to talk, and then talk some more, to your crews about the sagebrush conservation strategy, and emphasize that, next to protecting life and communities, it's our top priority.

- Late in the winter, fire was paid a compliment by the WO leadership. The statement was made that, “Fire has been the most pro-active in addressing sage-grouse concerns. It has issued annual guidance on the topic for some time.”
- That’s our reputation. Let’s live up to it.

Season Outlook

- The main weather feature informing the fire season outlook is the weakening of the current La Niña weather pattern. Equatorial sea surface temperatures are trending toward a neutral (or possibly even a warm) phase, suggesting that weather patterns as we enter spring will be less predictable than usual.
- Although recent precipitation eased the dryness in Texas and Oklahoma, not enough sustained moisture fell to completely transition these areas out of drought. The U.S. seasonal drought outlook forecasts drought to persist across much of the southwest and southern plains regions, along with Florida and much of the southern Atlantic coast. Drought is also persisting in Minnesota and eastern sections of the Dakotas.
- Precipitation leading up to June is expected to be below normal in the Southwest, central and southern plains, and along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Normal to above normal precipitation is likely to occur in the Northwest, Alaska, the Midwest, the Great Lakes region and across much of New England.
- Temperatures leading up to June are likely to continue above normal for most of the southern half of the country. Normal temperatures are expected for the northern Rockies, the west coast, the upper Midwest and the southern half of Alaska.
- Fine fuels across much of the west, including the Great Basin, remain heavy and continuous, and are largely dry or capable of drying quickly. Across the northern tier of the country, largely near normal seasonal fuel conditions exist, with some dryness lingering in the Great Lakes states.

Veterans Hiring

- The Bureau of Land Management is planning to host three hazardous fuels reduction crews, beginning in the 2012. These crews also will be trained and equipped as Type II wildland fire suppression crews and available for wildfire suppression assignments as needed.
- The goal of the veteran hazardous fuels crews is to provide returning veterans with meaningful wildland fire and hazardous fuels reduction experience and to provide them a foundation for future employment opportunities with the Bureau of Land Management. Veterans also provide a unique opportunity for the BLM to increase the pool of diverse candidates for recruitment.
- The hazardous fuels reduction crews will be stationed at Klamath Falls Field Office in the Lakeview District of Oregon; at El Dorado Hills in the Mother Lode Field Office at Sacramento, California; and in the Southern Nevada District in Las Vegas, Nevada.

- The BLM, in its efforts to recruit and hire returning veterans, can utilize a number of available appointing authorities and programs, including authorities designated as Veterans' Recruitment Appointment; 30-Percent or More Disabled Veterans and Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998; as well as the Wounded Warrior Program; the Wounded Warrior Volunteer Program; and the Veterans Green Corps Program.

Wildland Firefighter Boot Stipend

- In 2011, the DOI adopted a Department-wide policy of providing a boot purchase stipend for all wildland firefighters who hold a valid Incident Qualification Card with a fitness rating of moderate or arduous, and who, as a condition of employment, are required to purchase wildland fire boots. The stipend will amount to \$100 per calendar year.
- The DOI boot stipend policy includes firefighters hired under Administratively Determined (AD) authority. This stipend will be payable to AD employees at the time of payment following an AD employee's first fire assignment in an IQCS qualified position requiring a moderate or arduous fitness rating.
- In 2012, the BLM is implementing the Departmental boot stipend policy and will pay the stipend to qualified employees.
- To help meet the added program costs associated with paying boot stipends, BLM Fire and Aviation will allocate one-time preparedness funding to states based on each state's currently implemented resource table. Since Fire and Aviation has no hazardous fuels funds to contribute to this obligation, states will have to cover the fuels portion of this cost out of their current funding allocations.
- The Budget and Evaluation Division of BLM Fire and Aviation estimates that boot stipends will cost the Fire and Aviation Directorate and the BLM states about \$165,000 in 2012.

A Few More Points

- You can expect fire to be in the thick of the planning strategy. Wildfire is one of the major causes of habitat deterioration. The national office is engaged in the process, led by Tim Murphy, who is serving as a member of the Western Regional Management Team, and Lynda Boody, who is actively involved in the process in Washington, D.C. Fire is represented on other teams as well.
- In the meantime, interim management measures to assist with sagebrush conservation should be announced early this fall.
- Fire has taken some important steps to protect sagebrush habitat. It has been a priority and will only become more so as we work against the clock to develop a sagebrush conservation and restoration strategy.
- This is BLM's number one conservation priority. It's important to the Secretary, important to Bob Abbey, important to the state directors and needs to be important to everyone in the BLM fire and aviation community