Chapter 01
Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Overview

Scope

The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook. This handbook attempts to quote verbatim, rather than to paraphrase policy that is stated elsewhere. It also attempts to limit duplication of source policy when a reference will suffice. Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations is intended to comply with and support the Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001) and the Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (February 13, 2009) and other existing federal policy.

Purpose

The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations provides fire and fire aviation program management direction for Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will continue to comply with all agency-specific health and safety policy. Other references, such as the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Response Pocket Guide (PMS 461, NFES 1077) and the NWCG Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide (PMS 210) provide operational guidance.


The Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001) is comprised of the following guiding principles and discrete policies. As a whole these principles and policy statements guide the philosophy, direction, and implementation of fire management planning, activities, and projects on federal lands.

Guiding Principles of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use and desired future condition of the various public lands.

4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities. Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.

5. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives. Federal Agency Administrators are adjusting and re-organizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process, investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set short and long term priorities, and clarify management accountability.

6. FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge and experience are developed among all wildland fire management agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire managers.

7. FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.

8. Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies, international, state, tribal, and local governments, and private entities results in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of public needs.

9. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.


Elements of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1. Safety
   Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All FMPs and activities must reflect this commitment.

2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability
   The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.
3. **Response to Wildland Fire**

   Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, the natural and cultural resources, and the values to be protected dictate the appropriate response to fire.

4. **Use of Wildland Fire**

   Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.

5. **Rehabilitation and Restoration**

   Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.

6. **Protection Priorities**

   The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority. Setting priorities among protecting public communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be done based on the values to be protected, public health and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

7. **Wildland Urban Interface**

   The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative prevention, education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with structural protection.)

8. **Planning**

   Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area’s approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
9. Science
FMPs and fire programs will be based on a foundation of the best available science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.

10. Preparedness
Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

11. Suppression
Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits and all values to be protected consistent with resource objectives.

12. Prevention
Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

13. Standardization
Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.

14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination
Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and partners.

15. Communication and Education
Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.

16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles
Agency Administrators will ensure their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire programs as necessary. Agency Administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

17. Evaluation
Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001
Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution in areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency priorities.


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 Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001), as directed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.

The following guidelines should be used 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 Plans 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.


Definitions

Wildland Fire
Any non-structure fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels. Wildland fire includes prescribed fire and wildfire.

Fire Type
Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
- Wildfires- Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared wildfires.
- Prescribed fires- Planned ignition.

Wildfire Management Objectives
A wildfire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives as specified in the L/RMP and FMP. Objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape and are affected by changes in fuels, weather, and/or topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- FS- All wildfires will have a protection objective.

Response to Wildfire
Response to wildfire will be coordinated with all affected agencies/cooperators regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition point.

Management response to a wildfire on federal land is based on objectives established in the applicable L/RMP and FMP. A wildfire may be concurrently managed for more than one objective. Unplanned natural ignitions may be managed to achieve L/RMP and FMP objectives when risk is within acceptable limits.
- FS- Human caused fires and trespass fires must be suppressed safely and cost effectively and must not be managed for resource benefits.
- BLM- All known human caused fires, except escaped prescribed fires, will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.
• **FWS**- All escaped prescribed fires will be suppressed. When reporting in FMIS, the cause of the wildfire will be “Escaped RX” and the narrative will document the link between the prescribed fire and the wildfire.

• **NPS**- Refer to RM-18, Chapter 2 for further guidance.

Response to wildfire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The appropriate response to the fire is dictated by:
- The circumstances under which a fire occurs;
- The likely consequences to firefighter/public safety and welfare; and
- The natural/cultural resource values to be protected.

**Initial Response**
The initial decisions and actions taken in reaction to a reported incident.

**Initial Attack (IA)**
A preplanned response to a wildfire given the wildfire’s potential. Initial Attack may include size up, patrolling, monitoring, holding action or suppression.

**Extended Attack**
Actions taken on a wildfire that has exceeded the initial response.

**Extended Attack Incident**
An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial attack resources and/or organization to successfully manage the incident to conclusion.

**Suppression**
Management action to extinguish a fire or confine fire spread beginning with its discovery.

**Protection**
The actions taken to mitigate the adverse effects of fire on environmental, social, political, economic, and community values at risk.

**Prescribed Fire**
Any fire intentionally ignited by management actions in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific objectives.

**Fire Operations Doctrine**

**Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**
Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of fire operations. This doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire operations. It provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire operations, a mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire operations doctrine does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific situations so much as it sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application.
The Nature of Fire Operations

Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as aircraft, vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the magnitude and complexity of the fire itself and of the human response to it will vary, the fact that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never change. A firefighter utilizing the best available science, equipment, training, and working within the scope of agency doctrine and policy, can still suffer serious injury or death.

Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management

The primary means by which we prevent accidents in wildland fire operations is through aggressive risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard free work environment is not a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized, comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we will determine the acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for safety yet still achieve fire operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

Fire Preparedness

Fire preparedness is the state of being ready to provide an appropriate response to wildland fires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the result of activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions. Preparedness requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness requires a continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting infrastructure, predicting fire activity, implementing prevention activities, identifying values to be protected, hiring, training, equipping, pre-positioning, and deploying firefighters and equipment, evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving operations. All preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

Fire Operations Command Philosophy

It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commanders’ intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander’s intent. A competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or
that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective.

Unified, coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the fireline or between the highest command level and the most subordinate firefighter, is critical to successful fire operations.

**Fire Leadership**

Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership. Good leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for wildland firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful circumstances. Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no simple, clear-cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make decisions and to take or direct action - in short, to provide leadership. All firefighters, regardless of position, must provide leadership.

**Fire Suppression**

The purpose of fire suppression is to put the fire out in a safe, effective, and efficient manner. Fires are easier and less expensive to suppress when they are small. When the management goal is full suppression, aggressive initial attack is the single most important method to ensure the safety of firefighters and the public and to limit suppression costs. Aggressive initial attack provides the Incident Commander maximum flexibility in suppression operations. Successful initial attack relies on speed and appropriate force. All aspects of fire suppression benefit from this philosophy. Planning, organizing, and implementing fire suppression operations should always meet the objective of directly, quickly, and economically contributing to the suppression effort. Every firefighter, whether in a management, command, support, or direct suppression role, should be committed to maximizing the speed and efficiency with which the most capable firefighters can engage in suppression action. When the management goal is other than full suppression, or when conditions dictate a limited suppression response, decisiveness is still essential and an aggressive approach toward accomplishment of objectives is still critical.

**Principles of Suppression Operations**

The primary means by which we implement command decisions and maintain unity of action is through the use of common principles of suppression operations. These principles guide our fundamental fire suppression practices, behaviors, and customs, and are mutually understood at every level of command. They include Risk Management, Standard Firefighting Orders and Watch Out Situations, LCES, and the Downhill Line Construction Checklist. These principles are fundamental to how we perform fire suppression operations and are intended to improve decision making and firefighter safety. They are not absolute rules. They require judgment in application.
**Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

The principles of fire suppression action provide a framework for developing fire suppression strategy and for conducting fire suppression operations. Again, these are not absolute or immutable rules. These five principles provide a consistent set of considerations with which to evaluate decisions, plans, and actions in different situations.

1. **Objective**
   
   The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective. The purpose of fire suppression operations is to achieve the suppression objectives that support the overall management goals for the fire.

2. **Speed and Focus**
   
   Speed is rapidity of action. Focus is the convergence of appropriate resources at the desired position to initiate action. The principle of speed and focus maintains that rapidly deploying and concentrating firefighting resources, in a calculated fashion, at the decisive time and place increases the likelihood of successful suppression actions.

3. **Positioning**
   
   The principle of positioning maintains that rapid, flexible, and opportunistic movement increases the effectiveness of fire suppression resources. Positioning ranges from single resource offensive or defensive reactions to dynamic fire conditions, to pre-positioning of multiple resources based on predicted activity and values at risk. Positioning should always be undertaken with speed and focus in mind and with sufficient time for positioning to occur before operations begin.

4. **Simplicity**
   
   The principle of simplicity is that clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion. Simplicity contributes to successful actions.

5. **Safety**
   
   The principle of safety maintains that ensuring the safety of firefighters and other persons affected by fire operations is fundamental to successful suppression action. Safety not only contributes to successful actions, it is indispensable to them.

**Cost Effective Fire Operations**

Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of all involved, including those that authorize, direct, or implement those operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole purpose of “cost savings”. Care will be taken to ensure that suppression expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social, political, economic, and biophysical environments.