**PL-5 Background Paper and Talking Points**

**August 10, 2017**

**Background**

* The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) increased the national Preparedness Level (PL) to “5” effective at 4 p.m. on August 10, 2017. NMAC is located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.
* The raised level reflects high fire activity, a major commitment of fire resources, and the probability that severe conditions will continue for at least a few days.
* NMAC has been delegated the authority to set national Preparedness Levels (PL). NMAC consists of top fire managers from five federal agencies (BIA, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service); the National Association of State Foresters; and the U.S. Fire Administration.
* PLs range from one (minimal fire activity) to five (high fire activity).
* It is not unusual for the national PL to reach five. Since 2000, the national PL has been at 5 for a total of 308 days (the number of days at PL 5 each year is located at the end of this document). This is the fifth time that PL 5 has been reached in the last ten years (2007, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017).
* The last time that the National Preparedness Level was raised to 5 was at 0530 Mountain Time on August 13, 2015. The National Preparedness Level remained at 5 for 24 days until it was dropped to 4 at 0530 Mountain Time on September 6, 2015.
* The earliest the national PL was set at 5 was June 21, 2002. The latest was August 20, 2013. The most days at PL-5 was 62 days, also in 2002.
* The primary reasons behind raising the PL at this time are:
* A high level of current fire activity in Montana, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Northern California; and ongoing large fires in several other areas (i.e. Idaho, Southern California, Wyoming and Utah).
* Some shortages of national resources, including Type 1 Interagency Hotshot Crews, smokejumpers, helicopters, and large airtankers.
* A weather forecast that predicts conditions conducive to new ignitions and spread of existing wildfires in the Northwest, Northern Rockies, Northern and Southern California, and Great Basin Areas for the next several days.
* According to the “National Interagency Mobilization Guide” (available online at <http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/mobguide/Chapter%2010.pdf> on p. 17) characteristics for PL-5 include:
* Full commitment of national resources is ongoing.
* Resource orders are filled at the National Incident Coordination Center at NIFC by specifically coordinating requests with Geographic Area Coordination Centers as resources become available.
* Potential for emerging significant wildland fires is high and expected to remain high in multiple geographic areas.
* PL-5 indicates that further military assistance may be sought. It may also initiate discussions with cooperating nations for wildfire assistance.

**Talking Points**

* **Human life remains the top consideration in all fire management decisions**. No structure, or natural or cultural resource is worth the loss of life.
* **The spring forecasts for a long and challenging fire season are being fulfilled.**
* **Some resources are becoming scarce.**  They include smokejumpers, hotshot crews, Type II Initial Attack crews, airtankers, and helicopters. However, shortages are not uncommon at PL-5. **Fire managers have a high level of expertise in balancing needs and resources. They are working diligently to best allocate the available resources and make progress on the most difficult fires.**
* The military has supported wildfire suppression efforts by providing three military C-130s equipped with “Modular Airborne Firefighting Systems” (MAFFS) to serve as airtankers.
* **It’s not uncommon to reach a national PL-5**. Since 2000, the national PL has been at 5 for a total of 308 days. The last time a national PL-5 was designated was 2015.
* **Teamwork, partnerships and cooperation are essential in managing wildfire**. During times of peak activity, it takes the best efforts of federal, state and local fire managers and firefighters to successfully suppress wildfires.
* Wildland fire suppression agencies need to maintain the capability to continue to respond to new and emerging fires while suppressing existing large fires.
* There are a limited number of wildfire suppression assets (firefighters, aircraft, and equipment).  We are setting priorities and doing the best we can to meet requests for assets from incidents as quickly as possible.
* When there is this much wildfire activity, wildfires are staffed through a deliberative prioritization process where the most significant fires – those threatening human life, communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources - get the most critical assets first.  Requests for assets from incidents are met as quickly as possible.
* The key to effective wildfire suppression is to have the right assets in the right place at the right time.  Incident management teams are highly skilled and experienced in adjusting their wildfire suppression strategies and tactics based on the assets that they have available.
* **In areas prone to wildfire, it’s still not too late to make your homes and communities more defensible**. Firefighters are grateful to people who are willing to take a few simple steps that reduce risks. It helps keep the public and firefighters safe.
* **The public can help by taking steps to prevent human caused wildfires**. Nationwide, 9 out of 10 wildfires are human caused. The fewer wildfire suppression assets that have to be used to respond to human caused wildfires, the more that are available to respond to the lightning caused wildfires that can’t be prevented.

Days at PL 5

2000 – 40

2001 – 16

2002 – 62

2003 – 48

2004 – 0

2005 – 0

2006 – 50

2007 – 39

2008 – 22

2009 – 0

2010 – 0

2011 – 0

2012 – 0

2013 – 7

2014 – 0

2015 – 24

2016-0

Total – 308