

Pre-Season Talking Points

February 22, 2011

2011 Budget

- We continue to operate under a series of CRs while Congress and the administration negotiate on the 2011 and 2012 budgets. The President's proposed budget for 2011 is, so far, the basis for the CRs, and the 2011 President's Budget contains reductions in the Wildland Fire appropriation from 2010. The 2011 President's Budget eliminates funding for Rural Fire Assistance and the Ready Reserve, and reduces funding for rehabilitation, fuels and preparedness.
- All of DOI is under a travel ceiling. Fire suppression travel, and travel funded out of collections and reimbursables is not part of the ceiling.
- DOI Preparedness funding is cut in the PB by about \$7.8 million. BLM's portion of this reduction is about 60 percent. These reductions in 2011 may be absorbed through less training, equipment and travel, and leaving open positions unfilled. The Fire Program Decision Support System (FPDSS) outputs were used to inform the FLT through the allocation of the 2011 preparedness budget for BLM.
- The Fuels budget for DOI is reduced by about \$44 million in the non-WUI portion of the fund; BLM's share of this reduction is about \$17 million. HFPAS/EMDS were used as the basis for hazardous fuels allocations both to and within the DOI agencies. The President's budget proposes that the DOI agencies will complete 90 percent of their fuels reduction work in the WUI, with the remaining 10 percent in areas adjacent to the WUI. Under this scenario, the overall number of acres for fuels treatments is estimated to be about 500,000 per year among the DOI agencies, significantly less than in prior years. The new emphasis will require BLM and the other fire agencies to work closely with communities and revisit, and in cases, renegotiate, our agreements where work was scheduled for areas considered outside of the WUI. It also may mean more local involvement in treating fuels considered outside of the WUI.
- In 2011, as in 2010, we have two sources of funding for suppression: the regular Suppression Account and FLAME Act funds for qualifying fires.

2012 Budget

- As a reminder, the President's Budget is something that we support. We are early in the appropriation process and the next steps include action by Congress. Almost certainly, some aspects of the proposed 2012 budget will change, but these are extraordinary times for the federal budget and it's wise to assume that reductions are likely. We all need to start thinking about the budget, and it might not hurt to go through a "what if" exercise.
- The 2012 President's Budget includes reductions in preparedness, fuels, and BAR from the 2011 President's Budget. These reductions are tied to reduced expenditures for administrative support such as advisory contracts, travel and transportation, printing, and supplies.



Predictive Services Forecast

- The ongoing strong La Nina influence is expected to continue well into 2011. This tends to result in drier and warmer weather than usual.
- Most of the west, including Alaska, is predicted to have normal fire potential for 2011. Southern California and the southwest may experience above normal activity due to overall higher temperatures and lower precipitation during winter 2010-2011.
- In the Southwest, spring forecasts call for warm and dry conditions. The Northwest is forecasted to see cooler and wetter conditions.
- The severity of the 2011 fire season will ultimately be driven by the rate of spring snow melt, summer temperatures and frequency of thunderstorms.
- La Nina has influenced the winter months similar to what we are experiencing this year, in 2007/2008, and for several years starting in 1998. The fire seasons resulted in higher-than-normal activity in the Southwest, parts of California and northern Rocky Mountains.

Aviation Program

- Two flight/mission simulators will be added at the USFS training facility in Sacramento. These units will be configured as Single Engine Air Tankers (SEAT) and integrated with the other fire aircraft simulators to provide pilots with exposure to simple and complex tactical situations. This training venue replaces the BLM SEAT Flying Academy and is projected to provide a wider range of pilot evaluation elements, while reducing cost and risk to the BLM. 24 commercial SEAT pilots are expected to complete the simulation exercises in March.
- The retirement of three key personnel in the national aviation office has led to hiring and a realignment of previous duties among the staff. Aviation Division Chief Kevin Hamilton will leave near the end of March and a selection for his replacement is currently pending. Glen Claypool moved from his role in aviation training to become the Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) program manager behind Mark Bickham who retired at the end of 2010. The aviation safety position, formerly held by now-retired Joe Bates, was combined with training duties into one aviation safety and training spot and a selection is pending. Also, Don Bell, formerly with Region 6 of the Forest Service, was hired as a tactical pilot.
- An Information Bulletin will be issued by the Aviation Management Directorate (AMD) in March to provide procedural guidance about utilizing the Aviation Management System (AMS) the remainder of this fiscal year. AMS is a DOI web-based program designed to provide electronic aircraft invoicing, payment to vendors, billing to agencies and collection and reporting of detailed flight information. AMS was partially implemented during field season last year but contractors and government personnel encountered some coordination-related problems in the roll-out. The relationship between AMS and the Financial Business Management System (FBMS) has not been fully mapped out, which may create additional uncertainties as the Aviation Management Directorate (AMD) prepares to utilize FBMS in FY12.
- The Pilatus PC-12 airplane purchased in 2010 has exceeded all performance, flight time and cost-effectiveness expectations. The aircraft, assigned primarily to the BLM Alaska Fire Service, is well suited to provide logistical support in Alaska because of its speed, range and capacity. It has supported BLM and interagency fire and non-fire projects, including BLM involvement in the Iditarod Race and extensive survey work for NOAA in Alaska and the lower-48.

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- Following a protest submitted to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) by an unsuccessful contract bidder, and a subsequent determination that a resolution could take months to achieve, all variable-term contracts previously awarded to Single Engine Air Tanker vendors have been terminated. That move means the BLM will use existing, higher-cost call-when-needed contracts to deploy all SEATs in 2011.
 - The variable-term contracts, first used in 2008, proved to be cost-effective and allowed the greatest management flexibility in setting start dates and duty locations.
 - The most recent contracts were awarded to six vendors in late December following a rigorous “Best Value” rating process based on factors such as price, payload and overall capability, including past performance, experience, safety program and accident history. The protest, filed by an unsuccessful bidder, forced a “stay” of all contract activity and no order or activity could occur until a resolution was reached.
 - According to the DOI Solicitor’s office there was a high probability the protest would lead to a review of all contract proposals; a process that could take until July or August to resolve. That process was likely to lead to other protests from other vendors, extending the issue with no clear end.
 - Termination of the contracts should have no substantive effect on end users on the fireline as call-when-needed SEATs will be available.

Cohesive Strategy

- The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy), developed in 2010 as a requirement of the FLAME Act, was sent to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review last fall. The Strategy was originally scheduled to go Congress by November 1, 2010, but other budget matters slowed the OMB review. In the end, OMB changed parts of the Phase I document, but the cooperators agreed to the new language. The document soon will be signed by the Secretaries and forwarded to Congress.
- Despite the delay in reviewing the Strategy, efforts to implement Phase 2 of the plan are moving forward. Phase 2 includes the development of regional strategies and assessments to eventually address the nation’s fire problems in three primary areas: restoring and maintaining landscapes; creating fire-adapted communities; and responding effectively to fires. The target for completing Phase 2 is September 30, 2011.
- Consistent with moving forward in Phase 2 of the Cohesive Strategy, advisory/oversight groups have been established and FACA-chartered in three regions: South, North and West. Members serving on the groups represent federal, state and local representatives as well as non-government entities, thus requiring the FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act) charter. Each region may be further subdivided for more local analysis and planning.
- The Cohesive Strategy includes three phases. Phase one is a general framework or roadmap for a comprehensive means to address the nation’s wildland fire problem. Phase two is the development of regional assessments and strategies. Phase three will consist of a national trade-off analysis and implementation of the strategy.

Computer Access for Non-DOI Fire Personnel (HSPD-12)

- Short-term access to computers remains a problem for the BLM fire and aviation program. We're often caught in the bind of security requirements versus the need for a quick response during an emergency. Overall, while current Departmental direction provides guidance in a general sense, it will be difficult to implement in a consistent and equitable way because many specific issues are not addressed.
- Among the issues are:
 - Who, exactly, will need the clearances?
 - What level of security clearance will employees need?
 - Who will pay for the security clearances? The costs range from \$25 each up to \$3,780, depending on the level of clearance needed.
 - Many locations do not have the capability to fingerprint. What are the ramifications if the prints are unreadable or unidentifiable? How will reimbursements be made if incident personnel incur costs to get a hard copy of fingerprints?
 - The process could lead to grievances regarding loss of job or wages, union issues, and other legal matters.
 - Partner agencies and organizations should be notified regarding fingerprint checks and background investigations. Current systems are not in place to track work assignments for background investigations.
 - Agencies are vulnerable if audits find proper procedures are not in place or that the level of investigation is not commensurate with responsibilities. With a lack of consistent interpretation of standards, there will be variances in the type of investigations. It is very likely that incident personnel completing the same job as a federal employee would be subject to a different level of investigation.
- John Gebhard, chief information officer for BLM at NIFC, is working with a group that includes DOI personnel to resolve the issues. John and the others will work on both the short-term solution for the upcoming fire season and the longer-term approach to ensure we meet all the federal security requirements without impairing our ability to respond quickly to an emergency. Again, a short-term fix should be in place sometime this spring.
- If you have questions or thoughts regarding this issue, please get in touch with John.

DOI Medical Standards Talking Points

The DOI fire agencies did not renew an expired task order with Medical Development International (MDI) to provide firefighter physicals.

For the short-term red card qualifications have been extended until May 4, and the DOI agencies have sent out the annual exam packet and new exam protocols. The DOI Medical Standards Program oversight group is working on a long-term fix.

EEO

- The “Do What’s Right” training scenarios released in March 2010 were well received by the field. Nearly 5,000 BLM employees attended the training.
- “Do What’s Right” has two additional training packages and a total of 25 scenarios designed to be customized for the up-coming fire season. FMOs are encouraged to look at the material and find the topics that best fit their local needs.
- “Do What’s Right” training counts as two hours toward the DOI requirement for EEO training. The facilitator and participant guides can be downloaded from the BLM fire and aviation site at <http://www.blm.gov/nifc/st/en/prog/fire/more/eo.html>. DVDs are also available by contacting Debie Chivers at 208-387-5454.
- We need to remain vigilant about inappropriate behavior by our crews. At the beginning of the season, FMOs must make their expectations clear to fire personnel, along with pointing out the possible consequences of misbehavior. We still experience too many instances where fire personnel cross the line of acceptable conduct. Credit card abuse has been a huge and troubling issue in some locations. Surveys show that firefighters have the most credibility of anyone in the fire and aviation community. We need to work hard to maintain that public trust.
- Diversity of employees remains an issue in many locations. We encourage you to especially look at entry level positions and take the necessary steps to attract a diverse candidate pool. Our fire organizations need to mirror the communities they serve. We need to do a better job building from the foundation up.

Fuels

- The Federal Fire Policy Council (FFPC) recently approved the FY 2012 HFPAS process document describing a common, transparent, and systematic process to allocate hazardous fuels dollars across the four DOI wildland fire agencies. A technical guidance document is being prepared which will define the specific steps necessary to implement this policy.
- FY 2012 HFPAS ensures hazardous fuels reduction funds are allocated to the highest priority treatments in the highest priority areas regardless of agency. This HFPAS process for 2012 is made up of four components:
 - Programmatic (formerly Base) 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. There continue to be concerns with the specific outcomes of this model, but its hoped that gradual adjustments over time will address those concerns.
 - Project Prioritization System (PPS): A process designed to evaluate how individual projects satisfy the Hazardous Fuels Program priorities as stipulated by DOI. PPS identifies the highest priority projects regardless of bureau and location using up to 22 weighted attributes.
 - 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 help in the allocation of the hazardous fuels dollars, as it 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 2012. 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.
- There likely will be an ongoing general trend of reductions in available hazardous fuels dollars. States should be aware of this trend and begin developing strategic plans to identify the workforce that can be sustained into the future.

Incident Management Organization Succession Planning (IMOSP)

- For several years, NWCG has been aware of growing concerns that the traditional incident management team model is unsustainable.
- Agency employees participate less and less on IMTs for a variety of reasons, including difficulties associated with gaining qualifications, the amount of time they have to spend away from their regular jobs, the broadened scope of what IMTs are expected to do, and lack of supervisor support for involvement on teams.
- In 2010, the NWCG created the Incident Management Organization Succession Planning (IMOSP) project team. This team has developed a set of alternative models for reforming or replacing the traditional Type 1 and Type 2 incident management teams.
- The models range from an approach that would essentially upgrade the current system, to options to replace the current team configuration with contract teams, NIMO teams, and other forms of incident management teams.
- BLM employees can obtain detailed information about the IMOSP process by logging onto the IMOSP website (<http://www.nwcg.gov/imosp/index.htm>). This website has information about the six alternative models being considered, plus additional supporting information.
- Between mid-January and mid-April, the NWCG is asking for feedback on those models. Specifically, they would like to know which elements of the alternatives would be improvements, which ideas would be workable and effective, which elements would not going to be helpful, etc.
- For more information on stakeholder involvement in the process, contact Tom Romanello (BLM Fire Operations) at tromanel@blm.gov or Ken Frederick (BLM External Affairs) at kfrederi@blm.gov.

National Radio Operations Talking Points

- The Deputy Director of the BLM issued an Instruction Memorandum in February 2011 separating the duties of policy and operations for the national radio program.
- The IM specifically states, “policy and governance of the LMR (Land Mobile Radio) within BLM is hereby placed under the jurisdictional responsibility of the Assistant Directorate for Information Resources Management (IRM), WO-500. The LMR operational and technical support will remain with the Assistant Directorate for Fire and Aviation (FA), WO-400, and will be physically located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).”
- The policy also directed WO-500 and WO-400 to develop multi-year alternative strategies for optimizing funding, organizational responsibilities; technological standardization; and facilities improvements emphasizing safety, effectiveness, and interoperability with local, state, and federal governmental entities.