Forest Service

Washington Office

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Washington, DC 20250

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Subject: Chief's Letter of Intent - 2016 Wildland Fire

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Directors, IITF Director and Deputy Chiefs

Once again we had a record fire season, another tragic fire season that only amplifies the hazardous complex system that defines our wildland fire operating environment. This only increases our pride and appreciation of the wildland fire community's use of emerging technology, leadership in the application of risk management and facilitated learning analyses, and your ability to work across boundaries. Without reservation you are acknowledged as *the world's best!*

We also feel increasing anxiety about outcomes in the wildland fire environment and are convinced that continual learning and adaptation are key to keeping pace with the rate of increasing complexity in the wildland fire system (i.e., a system that includes partners and publics with interdependent and diverse roles and interests; policies, practices and protocols that guide how we respond to fire; and a changing environment of fuels, communities and climate). We commit to co-leadership with our partners to continuously improve the wildland fire system, to *more reliably protect responders and the public, sustain communities and conserve the land.* We can be the world's best and still want to be better!

For 2016, our expectation is for *all* of us to focus our efforts intently on the decisions we make as agency administrators, commanders and individual responders. ***Implement strategies and tactics that commit responders only to operations where and when they can be successful, and under conditions where important values actually at risk are protected with the least exposure necessary while maintaining relationships with the people we serve.***

This direction requires more work before fire comes. We must help build broad understanding and acceptance that intense fire behavior may mean we can't protect values at risk under all circumstances. We expect that during such periods protecting lives of responders is <u>the</u> objective – we don't expect and we won't allow responders to risk their lives attempting the improbable.

This direction also requires greater focus on identification of unnecessary exposure during incidents. We specifically ask each of you to "*stop, think, and talk*" before "*acting*" in any circumstance that feels like it may represent unnecessary exposure – as you do so we'll have your back.

I expect us to be aggressive implementing tactics that are necessary and have a high probability of success; to accept when all we can do is point protection, until the fuels or weather change. I also expect us to be aggressive recognizing when tactics are unnecessary or will have no effect and only increase the exposure of our fire responders and pilots.

We will continue to increase our hazardous fuels and restoration work to reduce the wildland fire threat to communities and to our fire responders. We will continue to use mechanical treatments where available and expand the use of fire, when and where it is beneficial.

This spring we are beginning conversations, that will continue over the long term, with the wildland fire community and our partners to reduce exposure while protecting values and improving outcomes on the landscape. Strengthening collaboration with our partners and local communities is how we will implement the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy to achieve the continual improvement we seek.

We have much to learn from your experience and wisdom and invite you to join the conversation. With our fire seasons growing hotter, drier and longer—with more and more homes and structures in the wildland urban interface—the work becomes more hazardous, more challenging. But it is only by working together that we can put ***Life First*** and ensure that **"everyone goes home safely every day".**

Thomas L. Tidwell

THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief