

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.

Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)

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.

- 1 **3.** Fire Management Plans (FMPs), programs, and activities support Land and
2 Resource Management Plans and their implementation.
- 3 **4.** Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities.
4 Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be
5 understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate to the cost
6 of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will
7 be an important component of decisions.
- 8 **5.** Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based
9 upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management
10 objectives. Federal Agency Administrators are adjusting and re-organizing
11 programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process,
12 investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other
13 agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set
14 short and long term priorities, and clarify management accountability.
- 15 **6.** FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science. Knowledge
16 and experience are developed among all wildland fire management
17 agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency
18 collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire
19 managers.
- 20 **7.** FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality
21 considerations.
- 22 **8.** Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and
23 cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work forces require
24 that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with
25 the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full
26 collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies,
27 international, state, tribal, and local governments, and private entities results
28 in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of
29 public needs.
- 30 **9.** Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an
31 ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides the
32 fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate
33 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for
34 cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.

35
36 *-Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*
37 *(January 2001)*
38

39 **Elements of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

40 **1. Safety**

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

43 **2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**

44 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve
45 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and
46 social components.

- 1 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**
2 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource
3 management plans and activities on a landscape scale across agency
4 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and
5 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire
6 occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare,
7 the natural and cultural resources, and the values to be protected dictate the
8 appropriate response to fire.
- 9 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**
10 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and,
11 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.
12 Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific
13 prescriptions contained in operational plans.
- 14 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**
15 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and
16 sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect
17 infrastructure.
- 18 **6. Protection Priorities**
19 The protection of human life is the single overriding suppression priority.
20 Setting priorities among protecting public communities and community
21 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural
22 resources will be done based on the values to be protected, public health
23 and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed
24 to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be
25 protected.
- 26 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**
27 The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland
28 urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction, cooperative
29 prevention, education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression
30 is the responsibility of tribal, state, or local governments. Federal agencies
31 may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire
32 protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the
33 partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural
34 protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may
35 also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with
36 structural protection.)
- 37 **8. Planning**
38 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs
39 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed
40 fires based on the area's approved land management plan (LMP). FMPs
41 must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management
42 strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and
43 public health issues; and be consistent with resource management
44 objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
45
46

- 1 **9. Science**
2 FMPs and fire programs will be based on a foundation of the best available
3 science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific
4 knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information
5 needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated
6 interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available
7 to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of
8 LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.
- 9 **10. Preparedness**
10 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire
11 management programs in support of land and resource management plans
12 through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and
13 management oversight.
- 14 **11. Suppression**
15 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public
16 safety, benefits and all values to be protected consistent with resource
17 objectives.
- 18 **12. Prevention**
19 Agencies will work together with their partners, other affected groups, and
20 individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
- 21 **13. Standardization**
22 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,
23 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-
24 be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire
25 management activities.
- 26 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**
27 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression,
28 restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be
29 conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and
30 partners.
- 31 **15. Communication and Education**
32 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
33 management policies and practices through internal and external
34 communication and education programs. These programs will be
35 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
36 information among all affected agencies and organizations.
- 37 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**
38 Agency Administrators will ensure their employees are trained, certified,
39 and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally,
40 regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with
41 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire
42 programs as necessary. Agency Administrators are responsible and will be
43 held accountable for making employees available.
- 44 **17. Evaluation**
45 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to
46 determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the *2001*

1 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*. The evaluation will assure
2 accountability, facilitate resolution in areas of conflict, and identify resource
3 shortages and agency priorities.

4
5 *-Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*
6 *(January 2001)*

7
8 ***Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy***
9 ***(February 13, 2009)***

10
11 On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved guidance for
12 the implementation of federal wildland fire management policy. This guidance
13 provides for consistent implementation of the *Review and Update of the 1995*
14 *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001)*, as directed by the
15 Wildland Fire Leadership Council.

16
17 *-Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management*
18 *Policy (February 13, 2009), page 3.*

19
20 The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation
21 of federal wildland fire policy:

- 22 **1.** Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all
23 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective
24 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
- 25 **2.** Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that
26 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and
27 responsibilities among local, state, tribal, and federal fire protection entities.
- 28 **3.** Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government
29 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
- 30 **4.** Fire Management Plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed
31 on a landscape scale.
- 32 **5.** Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs
33 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
 - 34 a. Wildfires - Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
35 wildfires.
 - 36 b. Prescribed Fires - Planned ignitions.
- 37 **6.** A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives
38 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.
39 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying
40 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental
41 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- 42 **7.** Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on
43 objectives established in the applicable Land/Resource Management Plan,
44 and/or the Fire Management Plan.

- 1 **8.** Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the
2 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to
3 firefighter and public safety.
- 4 **9.** Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document
5 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational
6 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and
7 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

8
9 *-Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management*
10 *Policy (February 13, 2009), page 7.*

12 **Definitions**

14 **Wildland Fire**

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

18 **Fire Type**

19 Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:

- 20 • Wildfires- Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
21 wildfires.
- 22 • Prescribed fires- Planned ignition.

24 **Wildfire Management Objectives**

25 A wildfire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives as specified
26 in the L/RMP and FMP. Objectives can change as the fire spreads across the
27 landscape and are affected by changes in fuels, weather, and/or topography;
28 varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other
29 governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.

- 30 • **FS-** *All wildfires will have a protection objective.*

32 **Response to Wildfire**

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

35
36 Management response to a wildfire on federal land is based on objectives
37 established in the applicable L/RMP and FMP. A wildfire may be concurrently
38 managed for more than one objective. Unplanned natural ignitions may be
39 managed to achieve L/RMP and FMP objectives when risk is within acceptable
40 limits.

- 41 • **FS-** *Human caused fires and trespass fires must be suppressed safely and*
42 *cost effectively and must not be managed for resource benefits.*
- 43 • **BLM-** *All known human caused fires, except escaped prescribed fires, will*
44 *be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource*
45 *benefits.*

- 1 • **FWS-** All escaped prescribed fires will be suppressed. When reporting in
2 *FMIS*, the cause of the wildfire will be “Escaped RX” and the narrative will
3 document the link between the prescribed fire and the wildfire.
4 • **NPS-** Refer to *RM-18*, Chapter 2 for further guidance.

5
6 Response to wildfire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of
7 the fire. The appropriate response to the fire is dictated by:

- 8 • The circumstances under which a fire occurs;
9 • The likely consequences to firefighter/public safety and welfare; and
10 • The natural/cultural resource values to be protected.

11 12 **Initial Response**

13 The initial decisions and actions taken in reaction to a reported incident.

14 15 **Initial Attack (IA)**

16 A Preplanned response to a wildfire given the wildfire’s potential. Initial Attack
17 may include size up, patrolling, monitoring, holding action or suppression.

18 19 **Extended Attack**

20 Actions taken on a wildfire that has exceeded the initial response.

21 22 **Extended Attack Incident**

23 An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial attack resources and/or
24 organization to successfully manage the incident to conclusion.

25 26 **Suppression**

27 Management action to extinguish a fire or confine fire spread beginning with its
28 discovery.

29 30 **Protection**

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

33 34 **Prescribed Fire**

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

37 38 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

39 40 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

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

Release Date: January 2015

01-07

1 The Nature of Fire Operations

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

10

11 Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management

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

20

21 Fire Preparedness

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

34

35 Fire Operations Command Philosophy

36 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire
37 operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in
38 fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commanders'
39 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly
40 articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on
41 their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander's intent. A
42 competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may
43 understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance
44 removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to
45 take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational
46 objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or

1 that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and
2 cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective.
3 Unified, coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the
4 fireline or between the highest command level and the most subordinate
5 firefighter, is critical to successful fire operations.

6

7 **Fire Leadership**

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

17

18 **Fire Suppression**

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

35

36 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

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

46

1 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

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

7 **1. Objective**

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

12 **2. Speed and Focus**

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

18 **3. Positioning**

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

26 **4. Simplicity**

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

30 **5. Safety**

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

36 **Cost Effective Fire Operations**

37
38 Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of
39 all involved, including those that authorize, direct, or implement those
40 operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression
41 resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire
42 operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole
43 purpose of “cost savings”. Care will be taken to ensure that suppression
44 expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding
45 that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social,
46 political, economic, and biophysical environments.