Chapter 5
USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire and Aviation Program
Organization and Responsibilities

Introduction
This document is intended to be a program reference guide that documents the standards for operational procedures and practices for the USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management program. The standards provided in this handbook are based on current agency and interagency wildland fire management policy, and are intended to provide fire and aviation program guidance, and to ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective fire and aviation operations. This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

Vision and Objectives for Fire Management
The vision of the Forest Service’s Fire and Aviation Management program is to safely and effectively extinguish fire, when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a Nation, live with wildland fire. The following objectives support this vision:
- Risk Management and Risk Reduction – Assure management of risk to people, communities and natural and cultural resources is the fundamental principle used to make informed decisions in all fire management programs. Minimize the risk to people, communities and natural and cultural resources by assessing the potential benefits of actions, severity of concerns, and probabilities of occurrences to reduce risk.
- Ecological – Meet the Forest Service mission through the use of fire management programs to protect people and communities, conserve natural and cultural resources, and maintain and restore ecological health.
- Collaboration – Implement the wildland fire management program through collaboration and partnerships.
- Learning – Learn from science, and ours and our partners’ experiences, to improve fire management programs.
- Empowerment – Employees are expected and empowered to be creative and decisive, to exercise initiative and accept responsibility and use their training, experience, and judgement to implement the agency’s mission.

Foundational Doctrine
The vision of the Forest Service’s Fire and Aviation Management program is to use a doctrinal approach based on leadership, operations and risk management. To support this vision, Forest Service policy is to:
- Take all response actions to ensure the safety of firefighters, other personnel, and the public regardless of cost or resource loss; no resource or facility is worth the loss of human life.
• The intent of wildfire response is to protect human life, property, and achieve protection and natural resource management objectives established in Land and Resource Management Plans.

• Leadership principles are the foundational doctrine on which fire and aviation management operations will be based (Leading in the Wildland Fire Service, NWCG PMS 494-2).

A doctrinal approach goes beyond strict compliance with procedural rules, and promotes risk-based application of wildland fire management principles to improve decision making and firefighter safety. Foundational doctrine has been codified in Forest Service Manual 5100 direction and will guide fundamental wildland fire management policy, practices, behaviors, and customs to be mutually understood at every level of command.

Under this doctrinal approach:

• Employees are expected and empowered to be creative and decisive, to exercise initiative and accept responsibility, and to use their training, experience, and judgment in decision-making to carry out their leader’s intent.

• Employees are expected and empowered to make reasonable and prudent decisions to accomplish the agency mission while minimizing unnecessary risk.

Mission

• The Forest Service is prepared and organized to support national and international emergencies with trained personnel and other assets when requested.

• Agency employees respond when they come across situations where human life is immediately at risk or there is a clear emergency, and they are capable of assisting without undue risk to themselves or others.

• Support for local fire emergencies takes priority over accomplishment of local resource targets. Support of non-local fire emergencies will be at the discretion of the local line officer, as bounded by agency agreements and Regional or National direction.

• A cooperative relationship between the Forest Service and other agencies is essential. The Forest Service is committed to honor its part of the joint responsibility to develop and maintain effective working relationships with its intergovernmental cooperators.

Wildland Fire Response Principles

• Response to wildland fire is based on the ecological, social, and legal consequences of fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences to firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate management response to fire.
• Response to wildfire in the Wilderness focuses on the natural ecological role of fire and activities are conducted in a manner compatible with overall wilderness management objectives (see FSM 2320).
• Success is achieving reasonable objectives with the least firefighter risk necessary while enhancing stakeholder support for our management efforts.

Leadership and Accountability
• All levels of leadership must communicate a clear vision of Agency goals and management principles, ensuring they are shared and understood by all levels of the organization.
• All levels of leadership must express clear intent concerning roles and responsibilities to ensure wildfire response assignments are appropriate, risk-based and effective.
• Leaders regularly monitor operations for safety, efficiency and effectiveness, and take action when there is recognition of exceptional or problematic employee performance.

The Operational Environment
Risk Management
The wildfire response environment is complex and possesses inherent hazards. It should be recognized that even with reasonable risk mitigations responses can result in harm to firefighters.
• The Forest Service is committed to the aggressive management of risk.
• Apply a risk management process to minimize unnecessary risk in wildfire response while maximizing the opportunities to achieve management objectives.
• Maintaining state of the art decision support systems based on the best available science is essential for making sound decisions on how to manage all wildland fire to achieve Land and Resource Management Plan objectives, including public and Agency personnel safety.

Operations
Every wildfire response operation is directed toward clearly-defined, decisive, and obtainable objectives.

Wildfire Response
• When it is time to engage a wildfire, do so in a manner that is appropriate, risk-based, and effective.
• Command and control will be decentralized to cope with the unpredictable nature of wildfire. To achieve leader’s intent and accomplish operational objectives, subordinate commanders must make decisions on their own initiative, and coordinate their efforts to maintain unity of effort.
Judgement in combination with principles and rules will guide wildfire response practices and actions.

Rapid deployment and appropriate concentration of wildfire response resources at the decisive time and place are essential to successful wildfire response actions.

Maintaining a high capability to ensure effective initial attack is essential to public and firefighter safety, accomplishment of management objectives, and cost containment.

The interdependence of wildland fire jurisdictions requires the collaborative, proactive engagement of cooperators, partners, and the public in response activities.

Risk Management Protocol

Forest Service Risk Management Protocol begins with working with partners and stakeholders to identify values affected by fire (positively and negatively) and then forming clear and reasonable objectives around these values. The highest value is human life and thus the primary objective will always be protection of human life. Other objectives will be weighed against the amount of risk responders and the public must accept in order to accomplish the objectives as well as the likelihood of success. The Forest Service is committed to using a three phased risk management protocol:

I. Pre-season

Pre-season preparedness work is critical to success when the fire starts.

- Build decision maker and key stakeholder capacity to manage the uncertainties and inherent risks of fires.
  - Increase understanding of risk management with key stakeholders and partner agencies.
  - Build Agency Administrator capacity to perform as risk managers.

- Assess risk at a landscape level, looking at National Forest System (NFS) lands and those adjoining lands that may be impacted by a fire leaving NFS land.
  - Develop a common understanding of values to be protected by answering four questions; ‘What is important?’ ‘Why is it important?’ ‘Who is it important to?’ and ‘How important is it?’
  - Complete a risk analysis, with key stakeholders and partner agencies, to predetermine the optimal response strategies for protecting values at risk. Engage key stakeholders and partner agencies in tabletop exercises or other venues to ensure alignment.
  - Initiate dialogue with line officers and stakeholders aimed at understanding, acceptance, and support for alternative risk-based decisions. This is especially important where there is an expectation that a fire will become a long-term event, because of an opportunity to use fire to achieve land management objectives, and/or the need to
adjust the level of engagement based on risks to responders, lack of available resources and the level of risk toward values to be protected.

II. During Incident Phase

During incident phase focuses on a Seven (7) Step Risk Management Process:

1. Complete an incident risk assessment.
   - Develop an assessment of what is at risk (from preseason work or input from key stakeholders), and the associated probabilities and potential consequences.

2. Complete a risk analysis.
   - Consider alternatives (objectives, strategies and tactics) against desired outcomes, risks to human life (responders and the public), probability of success and values to be protected.

3. Complete two-way risk communications.
   - Engage community leaders, local government officials, partners, and other key stakeholders of the incident to share the risk picture and enlist input.

   - Engage appropriate senior line officers and political appointees (as necessary) regarding the potential decision aimed at obtaining understanding, acceptance, and support for the alternatives and likely decision.

5. Make the risk-informed decision.

6. Document the risk: assessment, analysis, communication, sharing and decision in WFDSS.

7. Continue monitoring and adjusting as necessary or as conditions change.

III. Post Incident Phase

As a learning organization we should always strive to improve how we conduct our business. We should endeavor to learn from each incident and apply those lessons.

- Complete an incident after action review.
  - Engage key stakeholders of the incident to be involved.
  - Review what worked, what did not work and suggestions for improvement.

- Conduct a peer review after action process.
  - Engage others who have had similar incidents to learn strategies for improvement.

- Implement plans for improvement.
  - Make use of lessons learned in real-time if possible.

The following Risk Assessment and Risk Decision questions are designed to inform fire management decisions by stimulating thinking and prompting dialogue, analyzing and assessing risk, and recognizing shared risks and communicating those risks within the Agency and with partners and stakeholders.
• Risk Assessment
  1. What are the critical values at risk?
  2. What is the chance the critical values will be impacted, and if so what are the consequences?
  3. What are the opportunities to manage fire to meet land management objectives?
  4. What are the possible low probability/high consequence events?
  5. Who are the stakeholders that should be consulted prior to making a decision?

• Risk Decision
  1. What alternatives (objectives, strategies, and tactics) are being considered?
  2. What is the relative exposure of responders for the alternatives being considered (exposure in terms of numbers of responders needed, amount of time (days) of commitment needed to accomplish the objectives and the amount and types of risks these responders will be asked to accept if the alternative is chosen)?
  3. What is the relative probability of success associated with the alternatives being considered?
  4. What alternative provides for the best balance between the desired outcome and risk to responders?
  5. What are the critical thresholds that will trigger reconsideration of the proposed alternative and how will they be monitored?

Specific Line Officer Responsibilities for Fire and Aviation at the Field Level

The Forest Service has developed core fire management competencies for Line Officers with oversight responsibilities over fire management programs. They are presented here for reference:

• Knowledge of fire program management including ability to integrate fire and fuels management across all program areas and functions;
• Ability to implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns into collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies;
• Knowledge to oversee a fire management program including budget, preparedness, prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction;
• Ability to serve as an Agency Administrator exercising authority to initiate prescribed fire and other hazardous fuel reduction activities;
• Ability to serve as an Agency Administrator during an incident on an assigned unit; and
• Ability to provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diversified firefighting workforce that exists in a “life first” and “readiness” environment.
Responsibilities

- Line Officers are responsible for all aspects of fire management.
- Integrate fire and fuels management across all functional areas.
- Implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns into collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies on the unit.
- Manage a budget that includes fire preparedness, prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels in an annual program of work for the unit.
- Perform duties of Agency Administrator and maintain those qualifications.
- Provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diverse workforce in a "safety first" environment.
- Support and participate in wildfire prevention.
- Ensure operational fire management responsibilities remain separated from agency administrator responsibilities in order to avoid collateral duty conflicts.

These responsibilities are based on current policy and provide program guidance to ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective fire and aviation operations.

Preparedness

Preparedness is a continuous process that includes all fire management activities conducted in advance of wildfire ignitions to ensure an appropriate, risk informed and effective wildfire response to meet National and Agency goals.

- Take all necessary and prudent actions to ensure firefighter and public safety.
- Ensure sufficient qualified fire and non-fire personnel are available to support fire operations at a level commensurate with the local and national fire situation.
- Ensure accurate position descriptions are developed and reflect the complexity of the unit. Individual Development Plans promote and enhance FMO currency and development.
- Provide a written Delegation of Authority to FMOs that provides an adequate level of operational authority at the unit level. Include Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group authority, as appropriate.
- Ensure the plans contained in the Fire Management Reference System (FMRS) are based on resource objectives found in the LRMP.
- Ensure budget requests and allocations reflect preparedness requirements from the program of work and support objectives from the LRMP.
- Develop preparedness standards that are in compliance with agency fire policies.
- Management teams meet once a year to review fire and aviation policies, roles, responsibilities, and delegations of authority. Specifically address oversight and management controls, critical safety issues, and high-risk situations such as transfers of incident command, periods of multiple fire activity, and Red Flag Warnings.
• Ensure fire and aviation preparedness reviews are conducted each year and include the key components of the record of decision for the nationwide aerial application of fire retardant on National Forest System land.

• Meet annually with cooperators and review interagency agreements to ensure their continued effectiveness and efficiency.

• Meet annually with local US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries specialists to ensure the avoidance maps reflect changes during the year on additional species or changes made for designated critical habitat, and reporting and monitoring guidelines are still valid and being applied.

Wildfire Response
• Ensure use of fire funds is in compliance with Agency policies.

• WFDSS will be used to approve and publish decisions on all fires. See Chapter 11 for the fire criteria that require a published decision.

• Personally attend reviews on Type 1 and Type 2 fires. Ensure Agency Administrator representatives are assigned when appropriate.

• Provide incident management objectives, written delegations of authority, and a complete Agency Administrator briefing to Incident Management Teams.

• Ensure briefings include any applicable information for avoidance areas and waterways per the nationwide aerial application of fire retardant direction, mapping, and cultural resources. Include the reporting requirements in the briefing if a misapplication of fire chemical occurs. Provide resource advisors if the use of aerially applied fire retardant is expected and the unit has mapped avoidance areas (which include waterways and 300’ or larger buffers) and otherwise evaluate the need for resource advisors for all other fires, and assign as appropriate.

• For all unplanned human-caused fires where responsibility can be determined, ensure actions are initiated to recover cost of suppression activities, land rehabilitation, damages to the resource, and improvements.

• Ensure structure exposure protection principles are followed (FSM 5135).

• Ensure that a sufficient number of incident after action reviews are conducted for Type 3, 4, and 5 wildfires to adequately assess the unit’s wildfire response capability, performance, procedures and to enhance learning.

Wildfire Response Responsibilities and Oversight
• Agency Administrators will ensure that all Forest Service employees and employees of interagency partners working on Forest Service jurisdiction wildfires clearly understand direction.

• Agency Administrators must approve and publish decisions in WFDSS in a timely manner and issue delegations of authority to the Incident Commander in accordance with FSM 5133.3.
• Line Officers will assign Agency Administrators to oversee incidents based on Certification Level according to incident type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>USFS AA Certification Level to Approve WFDSS Decisions &amp; Provide Incident Oversight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Advanced level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>Journey level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>Working level</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1Authority may be retained at the Regional Forester level.

• Critical long duration wildfire oversight roles include ensuring that:
  ○ Up-to-date Published Decisions are completed and documented in WFDSS.
  ○ Hazards are identified and risk assessments are incorporated into Published Decisions.
  ○ Coordination with partners and potentially affected parties is conducted (including smoke impacts); Unified Command is implemented early when appropriate.
  ○ Resource capacity and availability are adequately assessed to meet expectations.

• This oversight role should address concerns of the states, cooperators, and the public including air quality impacts from multiple wildfires.

Safety
• Review safety policies, procedures, and concerns with field fire and aviation personnel.
• Ensure timely follow-up actions to program reviews, fire preparedness reviews, fire and aviation safety reviews, and management reviews.
• Monitor the fire situation and provide oversight during periods of critical fire activity and situations of high risk.
• Ensure there is adequate direction in fire management plans to maintain fire danger awareness.
• Take appropriate actions with escalating fire potential.
• Ensure appropriate investigation or Lessons Learned analyses are conducted for incidents, entrapments, and serious accidents (see FSM 6730).

Fuels
• Plan and implement a hazardous fuels management and prescribed fire program applying principles and policy elements described in FSM 5100 and 5140 and guided by the goals described in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy.
• Complete a fuels treatment effectiveness assessment on all wildfires which start in or burn into a fuel treatment area.
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- Enter results of the assessment in the Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Monitoring (FTEM) database found at www.nwportal.fs.usda.gov within 90 days of control of the fire. Reference FSM 5140.

Prescribed Fire
- Provide program leadership by visiting prescribed fire treatment projects and providing leader’s intent to prescribed fire personnel.
- Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction for prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and inspections of the prescribed fire program are completed.
- Coordinate prescribed fire program activities with Regional air quality specialists and Federal, State, Tribal, air pollution control district or county regulatory authorities to ensure compliance with their regulations supported by the Clean Air Act.
- When multiple wildland fire events are occurring within an airshed, or any airshed is impacted by ongoing wildland fire events, fire managers will consider the cumulative impact to air quality. Initiation of new prescribed fire must be in compliance with air quality regulations and standards.
- Ensure a Prescribed Fire Plan is written and approved for each project prior to implementation in accordance with the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide (PMS 484) available at https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/484.
- Review and approve Prescribed Fire Plans and ignitions:
  - Engage in the development of the Complexity Analysis; review and approve the final complexity rating.
  - Ensure that the prescribed fire plan has been reviewed and recommended by a qualified technical reviewer.
  - Ensure that prescribed fire plans are designed to achieve desired conditions as described in Land and Resource Management Plans and project-specific NEPA decision document.
  - Approve prescribed fire plan amendments and determine the need for additional technical review of proposed plan amendments prior to approval.
  - If more than one year has elapsed since a prescribed fire plan was last approved, the plan will be reviewed, updated as necessary, and re-approved before implementation.
  - Authorize ignition of prescribed fire as delegated and adhere to procedures as described in 5140 for Regional and/or National level approvals for initiation of new and continued prescribed fire activities.
at National Preparedness levels 4 and 5 or when forecast National Fire
Danger Rating System adjective ratings are at “Extreme” category.
• Report all instances of prescribed fires resulting in a wildfire declaration
and/or air quality Notice-of-Violation as required in FSM 5140.

Agency Administrator Training and Certifications for Wildland Fire
Management

There are two separate and distinct certifications that administrators must attain
related to fire management, one for wildfire decision making and one for
prescribed fire. The training and experience requirements and certification
process for both wildfire and prescribed fire are described below.

Agency Administrator Core Competencies

Core competencies that must be demonstrated by Agency Administrators
exercising decision-making authority for wildfires or prescribed fires include:
• Risk Management
• Wildfire response and incident management processes
• WF DSS/IFT DSS and other decision support tools
• Fuels management and prescribed fire processes
• Fire Prevention, mitigation, and education processes
• Social, political, economic and environmental impacts of wildland fire
management activities
• Collaboration with partners and stakeholders
• Fiscal management

These core competencies form the basis for the Agency Administrator Task
Book which is used to document that an individual has indeed demonstrated
these competencies while working toward certification. For access to the Task
Book, Pathways Chart and additional information on the Forest Service Agency
Administrator Fire Certification Programs, visit the Decision Support Toolbox at

Definitions

Agency Administrator: A general term meaning the official with the delegated
authority, responsibility, and qualifications for decision-making on incidents or
prescribed fire within a particular administrative unit.

Coach: A fully qualified Agency Administrator/Representative at journey or
advanced level.

Shadow: An individual that does not perform the duty of Agency
Administrator/Representative, but observes a qualified, designated Agency
Administrator/Representative.

Agency Administrator Trainee: An Agency Administrator working on
certification at any given level by performing the role under the supervision and
authority of the Agency Administrator and/or Representative.
Coach/Shadow Team: A team comprised of a qualified Coach and group of Shadows who may travel to multiple incidents and support sites to increase their level of understanding.

Acting Agency Administrator: An individual who has been delegated in writing the necessary authorities to act in an Agency Administrator roll and is certified at the level required by the incident complexity to provide relief and support.

Regional Forester Agency Administrator Representative: A representative that carries out roles and responsibilities as delegated.

Agency Administrator Wildfire Certification Program

The following principles will guide certification of Agency Administrators in wildfire management:

- Regional Foresters are accountable for annual certification of Agency Administrators;
- Agency Administrator evaluation includes standards for training, background and experience, demonstrated ability, and utilizing the Task Book and Wildfire Pathways Chart which will result in a qualitative evaluation of readiness by the Regional Forester;
- When the complexity level of a wildfire exceeds an Agency Administrator’s certification, a coach will be assigned;
- Care should be taken when assigning Acting AAs to ensure operational fire management responsibilities remain separated from agency administrator responsibilities in order to avoid collateral duty conflicts;
- Agency Administrator competencies (aka certification level) supersedes position (e.g., a District Ranger certified at the Advanced Level may be the AA for a Type I Incident);
- This certification program will be periodically evaluated and updated as needed. When changes are made in training requirements, the Regional Forester may choose to “grandfather” Agency Administrators thereby maintaining their existing certification level; however, the updated training requirements must be met before advancement to the next level or before recertification after a lapse in currency;
- Assistance with decision documentation and analysis can be requested through the Wildland Fire Management RD&A – National Fire Decision Support Center (NFDSC); and
- The Coaching/Shadowing functions, to be administered by each region, is an integral part of this certification program.

Agency Administrators will be evaluated in three basic areas:

- Training;
- Background and experience; and
- Demonstrated understanding of concepts and principles as outlined in the Task Book.
This certification program is a multi-level process where Agency Administrators demonstrate competence in one of three levels of managing wildfires. Those levels would be Working, Journey, and Advanced.

**Guidelines**

In consideration of the appropriate level (Working, Journey, Advanced) to assign an Agency Administrator, the Regional Forester should consider the following guidelines:

- For individuals that do not meet at least the Working Level, a coach will be assigned to support that Agency Administrator in managing Type 3 or higher wildfire incidents.

**Working Level** – The Agency Administrator could manage a low to moderate complexity fire. The Agency Administrator Trainee must meet the following in order to be certified at the Working Level:

- **Required Training:** Risk Management 101 (in development); M-581, Fire Program Management, an Overview; or M-582, Fire Program Management, Leading Complex Fire Programs; and WFDSS training – WFDSS Refresher Topics located on the Decision Support Toolbox.

  https://wfmrda.nwcg.gov/line_officer_resources.php

- **Required Background and Experience:**
  - Successful management of a minimum of one Type 3 or higher fire. Consider duration, complexity and size of the fire.

- **Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:**
  - Applicable experience in prescribed fire, wildfire, all-hazard or other incident oversight may also be considered in addition to other guidelines.
  - Management oversight of a low-complexity fire program and/or experience as an Agency Administrator or representative.

- **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a coach (including feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an Agency Administrator on smaller low-complexity fires with a basic understanding of the elements of the core competencies. Use AA Task Book to document.

**Journey Level** – The Agency Administrator could manage a moderate to high complexity fire. The Agency Administrator Trainee needs to be certified at the Working Level and meet the following to become certified at the Journey Level:

- **Required Training:** Risk Management 101 (in development); M-581, Fire Program Management, an Overview; or M-582, Fire Program Management, Leading Complex Fire Programs; and WFDSS training – WFDSS Refresher Topics located on the Decision Support Toolbox.

  https://wfmrda.nwcg.gov/line_officer_resources.php
• Required Background and Experience:
  ○ Successful management of a minimum of one Type 2 or higher fire, or
    one successful higher complexity fire (Type 1). Duration, complexity
    and size of the fire should be considered.

• Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:
  ○ Applicable experience in prescribed fire, wildfire, all-hazard or other
    incident oversight may also be considered in addition to other
    guidelines.
  ○ Management oversight of a moderate-complexity fire program, or
    experience as an Agency Administrator or Representative on Type 2 or
    higher fires.

• Demonstrated Ability: Successful evaluation by a coach (including
  feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated
  understanding and application of the responsibilities of an Agency
  Administrator/Representative on moderate to large complex fires in the core
  competencies, and other elements that may be relevant. Use AA Task Book
  to document.

Advanced Level – The Agency Administrator could manage one or more high
complexity fire(s). The Agency Administrator Trainee needs to be certified at
the Journey Level, and meet the following to become certified at the Advanced
Level:

• Required Training: Risk Management 101 (in development); M-582, Fire
  Program Management, Leading Complex Fire Programs; and WFDSS
  training – WFDSS Refresher Topics located on the Decision Support

• Required Background and Experience:
  ○ Successful management of several Type 1 or 2 fires (at least one is a
    Type 1 fire), depending on fire experience. Duration, complexity, and
    size of the fires should be considered.

• Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:
  ○ Applicable experience in prescribed fire, wildfire, all-hazard or other
    incident oversight may also be considered in addition to other
    guidelines.
  ○ Management oversight of a moderate to high-complexity fire program.

• Demonstrated Ability: Successful evaluation by a coach (including
  feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated
  understanding and application of the responsibilities of an Agency
  Administrator on large complex fires in the core competencies, and other
  elements that may be relevant. Use AA Task Book to document.
Evaluation Process

- Every trainee will receive an evaluation from a certified Agency Administrator/Agency Administrator Representative or coach using the Agency Administrator Task Book identified in the Line Officer/Agency Administrator Desk Reference for Fire Program Management.
- Individuals involved in a shadow assignment should receive creditable experience through documentation.
- The purpose of the Task Book is to provide consistency for the Agency Administrator Coach/Evaluator to evaluate trainees and document their demonstrated abilities to achieve the core competencies, which will be used as a component to achieve the next level certification.
- Every trainee will complete a Task Book for evaluation from an Agency Administrator/Agency Administrator Representative or coach as identified in the Line Officer/Agency Administrator Desk Reference for Fire Program Management.

Creditable work experiences to achieve and maintain certification levels:

- Coaching
- Regional Forester Representative (RFR)
- Acting Agency Administrator/Representative assignments
- Shadow assignments

Training opportunities to achieve and maintain core competencies:

- Upper levels of fire leadership and fire management courses;
- Function as the Agency Administrator or cadre member for S-420, S-520, S-620, M-581, M-582, and other fire courses;
- Participate in advanced risk management training;
- Assigned to a Type 1 or Type 2 team as a training assignment (e.g., shadow plans) and see the world from their viewpoint;
- WFDSS training (see the WFDSS homepage https://wfdss.usgs.gov for training materials and the WFM RD&A Line Officer Resources page for Agency Administrator specific refresher training materials https://wfmrda.nwcg.gov/);
- Include risk management and fire management topics during annual line officer meetings;
- Attend staff rides (staff rides need to include a stand that portrays the Line Officer or Agency Administrator’s perspective);
- Participate in prescribed fires and/or attend prescribed fire training;
- Participate in other leadership and/or decision-making training;
- Attend L-580, Leadership is Action.

Currency

Currency is reviewed annually by the Certifying Official for frequency of demonstrated exercise of Core Competencies through activities such as those described above or assignment as Agency Administrator/Coach/Representative.
on an incident. To maintain currency, an Agency Administrator/Representative will as a minimum, engage in at least one extended response wildfire incident within a three-year period.

**Guidance on the Selection of Coaches**

Coaches can be a current or former Agency Administrator/Representative. The Regional Forester determines the level of certification for which a coach is qualified.

Criteria for individuals serving as coaches are as follows:

- Must be a “Journey” level Agency Administrator/Representative in dealing with large fire incident, or rated at an experience level commensurate with incident being managed. Present and past Agency Administrators can serve as coaches, including retirees that were qualified/experienced; and
- Must be willing and able to serve as a coach.

**Agency Administrator Prescribed Fire Certification**

The following principles will guide certification of Agency Administrators (AA) for prescribed fire:

- Regional Foresters are accountable for annual certification of AAs to approve and authorize prescribed fire.
- Agency Administrator evaluation includes standards for training, background and experience, and demonstrated ability, which will result in a qualitative evaluation of readiness by the Regional Forester.
- When the complexity level of a prescribed fire exceeds an AAs certification, an appropriately certified AA will be assigned and must approve the complexity analysis and the burn plan along with the AA being mentored/coached.
- The authorization to ignite a prescribed fire must be approved by an appropriately certified AA; however, the Line Officer with authority over their assigned unit will also retain authority to authorize or prohibit the ignition based on their judgement regardless of their certification level;
- Care should be taken when assigning Acting AAs to ensure operational fire management responsibilities remain separate from AA responsibilities in order to avoid collateral duty conflicts.
- This certification program will be periodically evaluated and updated as needed; when changes are made in training requirements, the Regional Forester may choose to “grandfather” AAs thereby maintaining their existing certification level, however the updated training requirements must be met before advancement to the next level or before recertification after a lapse in currency.
- The Coach/Shadow functions, to be administered by each region, is an integral part of this certification program.
Agency Administrators will be evaluated in three basic areas:

- Training;
- Background and experience; and
- Demonstrated understanding of concepts and principles.

This certification program is a multi-level process where Agency Administrators demonstrate competence in one of three levels of prescribed fire complexity. Those levels are Low, Moderate, and High.

Guidelines

In consideration of the appropriate qualification level (Low, Moderate, or High) to certify an Agency Administrator, the Regional Forester should consider the following guidelines:

**Low Complexity Level**

The Agency Administrator can review, approve, authorize and provide oversight for the management of low complexity prescribed fires. The Agency Administrator Trainee must meet the following in order to be certified at the Low Complexity level:

- **Required Training:** M-581, *Fire Program Management – An Overview* or M-582, *Fire Program Management – Leading Complex Fire Programs* or Agency Administrators Prescribed Fire Workshop at the Prescribed Fire Training Center (recommended for AAs seeking more hands-on prescribed fire experience).

- **Required Background and Experience:** Successful management of a minimum of one (1) Low Complexity prescribed fire, or one or more low complexity wildfires (Type 4 or 5).

- **Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:**
  - Applicable experience in prescribed fire, wildfire, all-hazard or other incident or project oversight may also be considered in addition to other guidelines.
  - Management oversight of a low-complexity fire program.

- **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a coach (including feedback from FMO/Fire Staff/Director) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an Agency Administrator on smaller low-complexity prescribed fires with a basic understanding of the elements of the core competencies. Use AA Task Book to document.

**Moderate Complexity Level**

The Agency Administrator can review, approve, authorize and provide oversight for the management of moderate complexity prescribed fires. The Agency Administrator Trainee needs to be certified at the Low Complexity Level and meet the following to become certified at the Moderate Complexity level:

- **Required Training:** M-581, *Fire Program Management – An Overview* or M-582, *Fire Program Management – Leading Complex Fire Programs* or
Agency Administrators Prescribed Fire Workshop at the Prescribed Fire Training Center (recommended for AAs seeking more hands-on prescribed fire experience).

- **Required Background and Experience:** Successfully review and approve one (1) or more prescribed fire plans at a moderate complexity level and authorize and provide oversight for the ignition of three (3) or more individual burn units under a moderate complexity plan, and complete a minimum of (1) post-burn review of a moderate complexity prescribed fire.

- **Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:**
  - Applicable experience in wildfire, all-hazard or other incident oversight may also be considered in lieu of other guidelines.
  - Management oversight of a moderately complex prescribed fire program, providing for a workforce with appropriate training and equipment, NEPA compliance and project planning, social/political considerations, smoke management, public information, etc.

- **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a supervisor or coach (including feedback from FMO/Fire Staff/Director) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an Agency Administrator on moderate complexity prescribed fires with an understanding of the core competencies and other elements that may be relevant.

### High Complexity Level

The Agency Administrator can review, approve, authorize and provide oversight for the management of high complexity prescribed fires. The Agency Administrator Trainee needs to be certified at the Moderate Complexity Level, and meet the following to become certified at the High Complexity Level:

- **Required Training:** M-582, *Fire Program Management, Leading Complex Fire Programs* or Agency Administrators Prescribed Fire Workshop at the Prescribed Fire Training Center (recommended for AAs seeking more hands-on prescribed fire experience).

- **Required Background and Experience:** Successfully review and approve one (1) or more prescribed fire plans at a high complexity level and authorize and provide oversight for the ignition of one (1) or more burn units under a high complexity prescribed fire plan and, complete a minimum of one (1) post-burn review of a high complexity prescribed fire.

- **Other Background, Experience, and Training That Supports:**
  - Applicable experience in prescribed fire, wildfire, all-hazard or other incident oversight may also be considered in lieu of other guidelines.
  - Management oversight of a moderate to high complexity prescribed fire program, providing for a workforce with appropriate training and equipment, NEPA compliance and project planning, social/political considerations, smoke management, public information, etc.

- **Demonstrated Ability:** Successful evaluation by a supervisor or coach (including feedback from FMO/Fire Staff/Director) that the candidate has
demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an
Agency Administrator on large complex fires in the core competencies, and
other elements that may be relevant.

Evaluation Process

- Every trainee will receive an evaluation from a certified Agency
  Administrator or coach using the Agency Administrator Task Book
  identified in the Line Officer/Agency Administrator’s Desk Reference for
  Fire Program Management.
- Individuals involved in a shadow assignment should receive creditable
  experience through documentation.

Creditable work experiences to achieve and maintain certification levels:
- Coaching/Shadow assignments.
- Assignments as member of a prescribed fire implementation organization.
- Acting Agency Administrator/Representative assignments on prescribed
  fires.

Training opportunities to achieve and maintain core competencies:
- Upper levels of fire leadership and fire management courses;
- Function as the Agency Administrator in sand table exercises and training
  simulations;
- Participate in prescribed fire and fire management training such as RX-410
  and RX-510;
- Act as a member or leader for a team assigned to review a Declared
  Wildfire or Violation of Air Quality Standards;
- Attendance/Participation in RT-300, Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Refresher
  training;
- Participate in prescribed fires and/or attend prescribed fire training; and
- Participate in other leadership and/or decision-making training.

Currency
Currency is reviewed annually by the Certifying Official for frequency of
demonstrated exercise of Core Competencies. To maintain currency, an Agency
Administrator will as a minimum, engage in the review and approval of
prescribed fire plan(s) at least once within a three-year period which may
include coaching assignments.

Guidance on the Selection of Coaches
Coaches can be a current or former Agency Administrator/Representative. The
Regional Forester determines the level of certification for which a coach is
qualified.

Criteria for individuals serving as Coaches are as follows:
- Must be a “Moderate” or “High” level Agency
  Administrator/Representative commensurate with the complexity level of
the prescribed fire project being managed. Present and past Agency
Administrators can serve as coaches, including retirees that were
qualified/experienced; and
• Must be willing and able to serve as a Coach.

Specific Fire Management Staff Responsibilities for Fire Operations at the Field Level

Preparedness

• Use sound risk management practices as the foundation for all aspects of fire and aviation management.
• Ensure that only trained and qualified personnel are assigned to fire and aviation duties.
• Develop, implement, evaluate, and document fire and aviation training program to meet current and anticipated needs.
• Establish an effective process to gather, evaluate, and communicate information to managers, supervisors, and employees. Ensure clear concise communications are maintained at all levels.
• Ensure fire and aviation management staffs understand their roles, responsibilities, authority, and accountability.
• Develop and maintain effective communication with the public and cooperators.
• Regardless of funding level, provide a safe, effective, and efficient fire management program.
• Organize, train, equip, and direct a qualified work force. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) must be provided for incumbents who do not meet new standards. Establish qualification review process.
• Take appropriate action when performance is exceptional or deficient.
• Ensure fire and aviation policies are understood, followed, and coordinated with other agencies as appropriate.
• Ensure that adequate resources are available to implement fire management operations.
• Provide fire personnel with adequate guidance, training, and decision-making authority to ensure timely decisions.
• Develop and maintain agreements, annual operating plans, and contracts on an interagency basis to increase effectiveness and efficiencies.
• Develop, maintain, and annually evaluate both the FMRS and Spatial Fire Planning in WFDSS to ensure accuracy and validity.
• Ensure budget requests and allocations reflect preparedness requirements from the program of work and support objectives from the LRMP.
• Develop and maintain current operational plans (e.g., dispatch, pre-attack, prevention).
• Ensure that reports and records are properly completed and maintained.
• Ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability in planning and expenditures.
• Assess, identify, and implement program actions that effectively reduce unwanted wildland fire ignitions and mitigate risks to life, property, and resources.

• Work with cooperators to identify processes and procedures for providing fire adapted communities within the wildland urban interface.

Wildfire Response

• Provide for and personally participate in periodic site visits to individual incidents and projects.

• Utilize the Risk Complexity Assessment to ensure the proper level of management is assigned to all incidents.

• Ensure incoming personnel and crews are briefed prior to fire and aviation assignments.

• Coordinate the development of Published Decisions within WFDSS with local unit staff specialists for all fires that escape initial attack.

• Ensure effective transfer of command of incident management occurs and safety is considered in all functional areas.

• Monitor fire activity to anticipate and recognize when complexity levels exceed program capabilities. Increase managerial and operational resources to meet needs.

• Complete cost recovery actions when unplanned human-caused fires occur.

• Ensure structure exposure protection principles are followed.

• Ensure all misapplications of wildland fire chemicals are reported and appropriate consultation conducted as needed (see Chapter 12).

• Ensure 5% assessment of fires less than 300 acres that had aerial fire retardant used and have avoidance areas as a result of the record of decision for the nationwide aerial application of fire retardant on National Forest System land is completed and documented for misapplication reporting.

• Ensure all assessments of impacts to threatened and endangered species or cultural resources are conducted by trained and qualified resource personnel.

Safety

• Ensure completion of a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) or Risk Assessment (RA) for fire and fire aviation activities, and implement applicable risk mitigation measures.

• Ensure work/rest and Length of Assignment guidelines are followed during all fire and aviation activities. Deviations are approved and documented.

• Initiate, conduct, and/or participate in fire management related reviews and investigations.

• Monitor fire season severity predictions, fire behavior, and fire activity levels. Take appropriate actions to ensure safe, efficient, and effective operations.
Prescribed Fire

- Ensure a written, approved burn plan exists for each prescribed fire project.
- Prepare and implement all prescribed fire plans in accordance with the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide (PMS 484) available at https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/484.
- Ensure that the Prescribed Fire Burn Boss assigned to each project is qualified at the appropriate level as determined by project complexity (see the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide at https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/484 for specific guidance).
- Responsibility for prescribed fires in patrol/mop-up status may be assigned to the unit Duty Officer (see below) until declared “out.” The DO may assign either a Burn Boss or Incident Commander at a level commensurate with expected activities to coordinate on-site actions (e.g., ICT5 for 1 engine to patrol). In the event that elements of the burn plan other than patrol/mop-up (e.g., holding or contingency) become necessary, then an appropriately qualified Burn Boss will be assigned to continue implementation of the approved burn plan.
- Review and update all prescribed fire plans as necessary to comply with policy or procedures and submit to agency administrator for review and approval.
- Submit amendments to prescribed fire plans to the agency administrator for approval.
- If more than one year has elapsed since approval, a prescribed fire plan will be reviewed to ensure assumptions are still valid and conditions have not changed, updated as necessary, and resubmitted to the agency administrator for approval.

Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) Duty Officer

Each Forest or Grassland Fire Management Officer or Assistant Fire Management Officer will perform the duties of a FAM Duty Officer (DO) for their unit, or will provide a delegated DO, during any periods of predicted or actual incident activity. Individuals performing as DO must have the approval of the unit’s Agency Administrator and meet the minimum NWCG qualifications as identified in the FS-FAQG Chapter 4.
https://www.fs.fed.us/fire/publications/FSFAQG_Chapter4_Dec2016.pdf

The required duties for all DOs are:
- Serve as the unit’s primary contact with Dispatch for both on and off-unit assignments.
- Monitor unit incident activity for compliance with Forest Service risk management practices.
- Coordinate and set priorities for unit suppression actions and resource allocation.
- Keep Agency Administrators, suppression resources, and information officers informed of the current and expected situation.
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- Plan for and implement actions required for future needs.
- Document key decisions and actions.

DOs will perform the above duties in addition to any unit specific duties assigned by the unit’s Agency Administrators or fire managers through a delegation of authority or unit operating plan.

In the event that the DO is required to accept an incident assignment, the outgoing DO must transition with another qualified and approved DO.

Use of District/Zone DOs is intended to manage span of control. When assigned to the DO role, DOs will not concurrently perform any ICS command or operational functions directly connected to an incident.

DO staffing levels may vary based on locally determined metrics such as fire danger, local area Planning Level, predicted incident activity, prescribed fire implementation, and/or span of control.

Fire Management Position Requirements
The Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standard (IFPM) and Forest Service Fire Program Management Standard (FS-FPM) will be used in conjunction with specific agency requirements when filling vacant fire program positions, and as an aid in developing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for employees.

Structure Exposure Protection Principles

Mission and Role
A significant role of the Forest Service is to manage natural resources on public land, and management of wildfire is a primary mission in that role. Wildland firefighter training, tools, and personal protective equipment are based on the wildland environment. This does not prevent using wildland tactics in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) when risks are mitigated. Wildland firefighter training for the WUI, however, is centered on the concepts of preventing wildfire from reaching areas of structures and/or reducing the intensity of fire that does reach structures. Fire suppression actions on structures that are outside federal jurisdiction, outside the scope of wildland firefighting training, or beyond the capability of wildland firefighting resources are not appropriate roles for the Forest Service.

Forest Service leadership will express clear and concise “leader’s intent” to ensure structure protection assignments are managed safely, effectively, and efficiently. Leaders are expected to operate under existing policies and doctrine under normal conditions. Where conflicts occur, employees will be expected to weigh the risk versus gain, and operate within the intent of Agency policy and doctrine.
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Strategic Principles

- The Forest Service actively supports creation of Firewise and Fire Adapted Communities and structures that can survive wildfire without intervention. We support the concept that property owners have primary responsibility for reducing wildfire risks to their lands and assets.
- The Forest Service will actively work toward applying Firewise concepts to all Forest Service owned structures, facilities, and permitted use to serve as a model to publics and communities.
- The Forest Service will apply strategy and tactics to keep wildfires from reaching structures, as prudent to do so, considering risk to firefighters and publics, fire behavior, values at risk including natural resources, availability of firefighting resources, and jurisdictional authorities.
- The use of wildland tactics in the WUI, when risks are mitigated, will be based on the objectives of preventing wildfire from reaching areas of structures and/or reducing the intensity of fire that does reach structures.
- Structure protection will be limited to the use of standard wildfire response tactics including the use of standard equipment, fire control lines, and the extinguishment of spot fires near or on the structure when safe and practical.
- The Forest Service will be proactive in developing agreements with interagency partners to clarify its structure protection policy.
- The Forest Service structure protection role is based on the assumption that other Departments and agencies will fulfill their primary roles and responsibilities. The Forest Service will not usurp individual, local, or state responsibility for structure protection.
- Prior to task implementation, a specific structure protection role briefing will be accomplished.

Tactical Applications

Structure Protection Definition

Actions taken in advance of a fire reaching structures or other improvements are intended to safely prevent the fire from damaging or destroying these values at risk. For the Forest Service, structure protection involves the use of standard wildland fire suppression tactics and control methods; including the use of standard equipment, fire control lines, and the extinguishing of spot fires near or on the structure when safe and practical.

USFS Role

As documented in a Forest Service doctrinal principle, “Agency employees respond when they come across situations where human life is immediately at risk or there is a clear emergency, and they are capable of assisting without undue risk to themselves or others.” This principle serves as a foundational basis for the roles employees play in structure protection.
Pursuant to this “structure protection” policy provided above, Forest Service personnel may engage support from other cooperators in structure protection activities when 1) requested by local government under terms of an approved cooperative agreement or 2) when operating within a unified command. The agency is permitted, without agreement, to render emergency assistance to a local government in suppressing wildland fires, and in preserving life and property from the threat of fire, when properly trained and equipped agency resources are the closest to the need, and there is adequate leadership to do so safely. The agency will NOT routinely provide primary emergency response (medical aids, fire suppression, HAZMAT, etc., as identified on “run cards” or preplanned dispatch scenarios) nor will the agency supplant the local government responsibility to do so.

The contents of a cooperative agreement will clearly define the responsibilities of partners. Regarding structural fire protection, typical Forest Service responsibilities in the case of mutual aid, initial attack, extended attack, or large fire support include:

- To provide initial attack through extended attack actions consistent with application of wildland fire strategy and tactics.
- To supply water in support of tribal, state or local agencies having jurisdictional responsibility for the fire. This would include the use of water tenders, portable pumps, hose, tanks, and supporting draft sites.
- To assist or supply foam or chemical suppressant capability with engines or aerial application.
- To assist local authorities in the event of evacuations.
- To assist local authorities by assessing (triaging) structures for defensibility from wildfire.
- To coordinate with local authorities on actions taken by Private Structure Protection Companies.

As such, there should not be an expectation that the Forest Service will:

- “Wrap” or set up and administer sprinklers around privately owned structures.
- Remove fuels immediately surrounding a structure such as brush, landscaping, or firewood.

As addressed above, the Forest Service will apply strategy and tactics to keep wildfires from reaching structures, as prudent to do so, considering risk management for firefighters and publics, fire behavior, values at risk including natural resources, availability of firefighting resources, and jurisdictional authorities.

The Forest Service shall not:

- Take direct suppression actions on structures other than those that tactically reduce the threat of fire spread to them.
• Enter structures or work on roofs of structures for the purpose of direct suppression actions.

In consideration of Forest Service owned or leased structures outside of structure fire protection areas these same policies apply. The use of Firewise principles and aggressive fire prevention measures will be employed for Forest Service structures at every opportunity.

If a Forest Service structure is determined to be at risk, “wrapping” or other indirect protection methods for the structure can be authorized by the Agency Administrator. Documentation of these decisions needs to be placed in the fire documentation package and the unit files. Any employee engaged in “wrapping” or other indirect methods of protection operations will be thoroughly briefed and trained in correct safety and personal protection equipment procedures, especially if the use of ladders or climbing on the structure is necessary. In any case, the Forest Service holds that no structure is worth the risk of serious injury to an employee in an attempt to protect that structure or facility from fire.

Local Government Role

Local government has the responsibility for emergency response, including structure protection, within their jurisdiction. This responsibility is usually found within the fire agencies’ charter and is substantiated by tax dollar revenue (sales and/or property tax).

Cost

Local governments assume the financial responsibility for emergency response activities, including structure protection, within their jurisdictions. Local government will order resources deemed necessary to protect structures within their jurisdiction. Local agencies will not be reimbursed for performing their responsibilities within their jurisdiction.

Tactical Operating Principles

When engaging in structure protection activities, as defined above, Forest Service personnel will apply the following principles:

• The first priority for all risk-decisions is human survival, both of firefighters and the public.

• Incident containment strategies specifically address and integrate protection of defendable improved property and wildland values.

• Direct protection of improved property is undertaken when it is safe to do so, when there are sufficient time and appropriate resources available, and when the action directly contributes to achieving overall incident objectives.

• Firefighter decision to accept direction to engage in structure protection actions is based on the determination that the property is defendable and the risk to firefighters can be safely mitigated under the current or potential fire conditions.
• A decision to delay or withdraw from structure protection operations is the appropriate course of action when made in consideration of firefighter safety, current or potential fire behavior, or defensibility of the structure or groups of structures.

• Firefighters at all levels are responsible to make risk-decisions appropriate to their individual knowledge, experience, training, and situational awareness.

• Every firefighter is responsible to be aware of the factors that affect their judgment and the decision-making process, including: a realistic perception of their own knowledge, skills, and abilities, the presence of life threat or structures, fire behavior, availability of resources, social/political pressures, mission focus, and personal distractions such as home, work, health, and fatigue.

• An individual’s ability to assimilate all available factors affecting situational awareness is limited in a dynamic wildland urban interface fire environment. Every firefighter is responsible to understand and recognize these limitations, and to apply experience, training and personal judgment to observe, orient, decide, and act in preparation for the “worst case.”

• It is the responsibility of every firefighter to participate in the flow of information with supervisors, subordinates, and peers. Clear and concise communication is essential to overcome limitations in situational awareness.