

NIFC News

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National Wildfire Preparedness Moves to Highest Level

Boise – The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) today increased the national fire Preparedness Level (PL) to its highest point, PL-5.

The PL ranges from one, indicating minimal activity, to five, which signals very high activity.

NMAC, which consists of top federal and state fire managers, sets the national PL. The raised level reflects a high degree of wildfire activity, a major commitment of fire resources, and the probability that severe conditions will continue for at least a few days.

To date, 31,986 wildfires have burned 3.4 million acres in the United States this year. While both of those figures roughly represent only about 60% of the ten-year average, wildfire activity has escalated in recent days after thunderstorms, many with little or no moisture, moved across parts of California, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, sparking hundreds of new fires.

“The decision to move to Preparedness Level 5 reflects the complexity facing our federal and non-federal fire managers,” said Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. “This has been a difficult and tragic season, including the loss of 30 of our nation’s firefighters. We have an experienced and skilled group of national, regional and local fire managers who will make the tough decisions necessary to respond to the current workload. We depend on everyone to do their part to make our communities and homes defensible against fire and to follow the instructions of local authorities.”

This is the fifth time that PL-5 has been reached in the last ten years. PL-5 indicates fire suppression resources are becoming scarce, but Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said cooperation among agencies helps ease the strain.

“During periods of high wildfire activity, when assets are stretched thin, federal, tribal, state and local partners work together to prioritize wildfires so that those threatening life, property and valuable natural and cultural resources receive assets as quickly as possible,” he said. “Professional wildfire managers adapt their strategies and tactics based on the assets that they receive and do the very best they can to suppress unwanted wildfires effectively and efficiently.”

During PL-5, further assistance from the military, beyond what is already in use, and international resources may be considered and requested, but no decisions have been made concerning those steps.

The fire forecast for most of the West shows a general continuation of hot and dry weather into the fall.

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