Chapter 1
Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Doctrine Overview

Scope

The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook. This handbook attempts to reference policy, rather than paraphrase policy to limit duplication.

The 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 BLM, USFS, FWS, NPS, and BIA managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will continue to comply with all agency policies. Other references, such as the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Response Pocket Guide (PMS 461) provide operational guidance.


The Review and Update of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (pp. 21-22) established the following guiding principles as fundamental to the successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. For reference, the full 2001 policy document is available at https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/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.
3. Fire management plans (FMP), programs, and activities support land and resource management plans (LRMP) and their implementation.
4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities. Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate...
CHAPTER 1 FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY & DOCTRINE OVERVIEW

to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.

5. **Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives.** Federal agency administrators are adjusting and re-organizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process, investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set short- and long-term priorities, and clarify management accountability.

6. **FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science.** Knowledge and experience are developed among all wildland fire management agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire managers.

7. **FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.**

8. **Federal, State, Tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and cooperation are essential.** Increasing costs and smaller work forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full collaboration among Federal agencies and between the Federal agencies, and international, State, Tribal, and local governments, and private entities results in a mobile fire management workforce available for the full range of public needs.

9. **Standardization of policies and procedures among Federal agencies is an ongoing objective.** Consistency of plans and operations provides the fundamental platform upon which Federal agencies can cooperate, integrate fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for cooperation with State, Tribal, and local fire management organizations.

**2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

The *2001 Review and Update of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (pp. 23-25)* established the following policies:

1. **Safety**

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

2. **Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**

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

3. **Response to Wildland Fire**

   Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into LRMPs and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely

Release Date: January 2023
consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and
cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate
management response to the fire.

4. **Use of Wildland Fire**

Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and,
as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.
Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific
prescriptions contained in operational plans.

5. **Rehabilitation and Restoration**

Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and
sustain ecosystems, public health, and safety, and to help communities
protect infrastructure.

6. **Protection Priorities**

The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting
priorities among protecting human communities and community
infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural
resources will be based on the values to be protected, human health and
safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an
incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

7. **Wildland Urban Interface**

The operational roles of the Federal agencies as partners in the wildland
urban interface (WUI) are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction,
cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural
fire suppression is the responsibility of Tribal, State, or local governments.
Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities
under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual
responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some Federal agencies
have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they
administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist State and
local governments with structural protection.)

8. **Planning**

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs
are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed
fires based on the area’s approved LMP. Fire management plans must
provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies,
tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and public health
issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of
the area, and environmental laws and regulations.

9. **Science**

Fire management plans and fire programs will be based on a foundation of
sound science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our
scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors.
Information needed to support fire management will be developed through
an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be
made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the
development of LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.
10. **Preparedness**
   Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of LRMPs through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

11. **Suppression**
   Wildland fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected consistent with resource objectives.

12. **Prevention**
   Agencies will work together and with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

13. **Standardization**
   Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.

14. **Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**
   Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and partners.

15. **Communication and Education**
   Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.

16. **Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**
   Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire programs, as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

17. **Evaluation**
   Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency priorities.

---

**Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

(February 13, 2009)

Policy, as directed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.” (Page 3, Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy [February 13, 2009]).

For reference, the complete 2009 guidance is available at https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/policy.

The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation of Federal wildland fire policy:

1. Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective collaboration among cooperating agencies.

2. Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and responsibilities among local, State, Tribal, and Federal fire protection entities.

3. Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.

4. Fire management plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed on a landscape scale.

5. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
   a. **Wildfires** – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared wildfires.
   b. **Prescribed Fires** – Planned ignitions.

6. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.

7. Management response to a wildland fire on Federal land is based on objectives established in the applicable LMP/RMP, and/or the FMP.

8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to firefighter and public safety.

9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

---

**Definitions**

Initial Response: The initial decisions and actions taken in reaction to a reported incident.

Initial Attack: An aggressive action to put the fire out by the first resources to arrive, consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.

Prescribed Fire (see also “Wildland Fire”): A wildland fire originating from a planned ignition in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific objectives.

Suppression: All the work to extinguish a fire or limit wildland fire spread.

Wildfire: A wildland fire originating from an unplanned ignition, such as lightning, volcanos, unauthorized and accidental human caused fires, and prescribed fires that are declared wildfires.

Wildland Fire (includes wildfires and prescribed fires): Any non-structure fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels.

Other Definitions

Extended Attack: Actions taken on a wildfire that has exceeded the initial response.

Extended-attack Incident: An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial attack resources and/or organization to successfully manage the incident to conclusion.

Fire Operations Doctrine

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

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

Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management
The primary means by which accidents are prevented in wildland fire operations is through aggressive risk management. This safety philosophy acknowledges
that while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard-free work environment is not a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized, comprehensive, and systematic risk management, fire personnel will determine the acceptable level of risk that allows for safety yet still achieves fire operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

Fire Preparedness
Fire preparedness is the state of being ready to provide an appropriate response to wildfires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the result of activities that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions. Preparedness requires identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and implementing coordinated programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness requires a continuous process of developing and maintaining firefighting infrastructure, predicting fire activity, implementing prevention activities, identifying values to be protected, hiring, training, equipping, prepositioning, and deploying firefighters and equipment, evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving operations. All preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire operations capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

Fire Operations Command Philosophy
It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commander intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander’s intent. A competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective. Unified, coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the fireline or between the highest command level and the most subordinate firefighter, is critical to successful fire operations.

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

Fire Suppression

The purpose of fire suppression is to protect values at risk of loss by putting the fire out in the safest, most effective, and efficient manner. Every firefighter, whether in a management, command, support, or direct suppression role, should be committed to maximizing the safe, effective, and efficient engagement of capable firefighters in suppression action.

Principles of Suppression Operations

Wildland fire leaders implement command decisions and maintain unity of action by using the common principles of suppression operations to improve decision making and firefighter safety. The principles of Risk Management; Standard Firefighting Orders and Watch Out Situations; Lookouts, Communication, Escape Routes, Safety Zones (LCES); and the Downhill Checklist guide our fundamental fire suppression practices, behaviors, customs, and are mutually understood at every level of command. These principles are not absolute rules and require judgment in application.

Principles of Fire Suppression Action

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

1. Objective

Objectives direct every fire suppression operation toward a clearly defined, attainable end state.

2. Speed and Focus

Speed is rapidity of action. Focus is the convergence of appropriate resources at the desired position to initiate action. Speed and focus results in increased likelihood of successful suppression actions.

3. Positioning

Positioning of fire suppression resources ranges from single resource offensive or defensive reactions to changing fire conditions, to prepositioning of multiple resources based on predicted activity and values at risk. Positioning should always be undertaken with speed and focus in mind and with sufficient time for positioning to occur before operations begin. Positioning using strategic and opportunistic movement increases the effectiveness of fire suppression resources.

4. Simplicity

Simplicity provides clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders. Simplicity contributes to successful actions, maximizing effectiveness and minimizing confusion.
5. **Safety**

Safety is fundamental to successful suppression action. Safety not only contributes to successful actions; it is indispensable to them.

**Cost-Effective Fire Operations**

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