

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, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs 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 Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs 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.

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

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 (FMPs), programs, and activities support Land and Resource Management Plans 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

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

31 **2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**

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

- 34 1. **Safety**
35 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All FMPs and activities
36 must reflect this commitment.
- 37 2. **Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**
38 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve
39 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and
40 social components.
- 41 3. **Response to Wildland Fire**
42 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource
43 management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency
44 boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and
45 legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs,

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

1 **10. Preparedness**

2 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire
3 management programs in support of land and resource management plans
4 through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and
5 management oversight.

6 **11. Suppression**

7 Wildland fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and
8 public safety, benefits and values to be protected consistent with resource
9 objectives.

10 **12. Prevention**

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

13 **13. Standardization**

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

18 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

19 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use,
20 restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be
21 conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and
22 partners.

23 **15. Communication and Education**

24 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
25 management policies and practices through internal and external
26 communication and education programs. These programs will be
27 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
28 information among all affected agencies and organizations.

29 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

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

36 **17. Evaluation**

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

42 **Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**
43 **(February 13, 2009)**

44 On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved Guidance for
45 the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. This

1 Guidance provides for consistent implementation of the 1995/2001 *Federal Fire*
2 *Policy*, as directed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.” (Page 3, *Guidance*
3 *for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* [February 13,
4 2009]).

5 For reference, the complete 2009 Guidance is available at
6 <https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/policy>.

7 The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation
8 of federal wildland fire policy:

- 9 1. Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all
10 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective
11 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
- 12 2. Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that
13 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and
14 responsibilities among local, state, tribal, and federal fire protection entities.
- 15 3. Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government
16 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
- 17 4. FMPs will be intergovernmental in scope and developed on a landscape
18 scale.
- 19 5. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs
20 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
 - 21 a. **Wildfires** – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared
22 wildfires.
 - 23 b. **Prescribed Fires** – Planned ignitions.
- 24 6. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives
25 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.
26 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying
27 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental
28 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
- 29 7. Management response to a wildland fire on federal land is based on
30 objectives established in the applicable Land/Resource Management Plan
31 (L/RMP), and/or the Fire Management Plan.
- 32 8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the
33 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to
34 firefighter and public safety.
- 35 9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document
36 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational
37 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and
38 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

39 *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*
40 (February 13, 2009), page 7.

1 Definitions

2 Key policy definitions selected from appendix A of the *Guidance for*
3 *Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* as updated by
4 FMB Memorandum 19-004, issued October 11, 2019.

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

7 **Initial Attack (IA):** An aggressive action to put the fire out by the first
8 resources to arrive, consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be
9 protected.

10 **Prescribed Fire:** A wildland fire originating from a planned ignition in
11 accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific
12 objectives. See also: Wildland Fire.

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

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

17 **Wildland Fire:** Any non-structure fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels.
18 Includes Wildfires and Prescribed Fires.

19 Other Definitions

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

22 **Extended Attack Incident:** An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial
23 attack resources and/or organization to successfully manage the incident to
24 conclusion.

25 Fire Operations Doctrine

26 Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine

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

33 The Nature of Fire Operations

34 Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire
35 operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes
36 management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as aircraft,
37 vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the magnitude and
38 complexity of the fire itself and of the human response to it will vary, the fact
39 that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never change. A firefighter,

1 utilizing the best available science, equipment, training, and working within the
2 scope of agency doctrine and policy can still suffer serious injury or death.

3 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

4 The primary means by which we prevent accidents in wildland fire operations is
5 through aggressive risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that
6 while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard-free work environment is not
7 a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized,
8 comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we will determine the
9 acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for safety yet still achieve fire
10 operations objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of
11 injuries or fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

12 **Fire Preparedness**

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

24 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

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

41 **Fire Leadership**

42 Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most
43 essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership.
44 Good leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for wildland

1 firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful
2 circumstances. Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no
3 simple, clear-cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use
4 their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make
5 decisions and to take or direct action — in short, to provide leadership. All
6 firefighters, regardless of position, must provide leadership.

7 **Fire Suppression**

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

13 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

14 The primary means by which we implement command decisions and maintain
15 unity of action is through the use of common principles of suppression
16 operations. These principles guide our fundamental fire suppression practices,
17 behaviors, and customs, and are mutually understood at every level of
18 command. They include Risk Management; Standard Firefighting Orders and
19 Watch Out Situations; Lookouts, Communication, Escape Routes, Safety Zones
20 (LCES); and the Downhill Checklist. These principles are fundamental to how
21 we perform fire suppression operations and are intended to improve decision
22 making and firefighter safety. They are not absolute rules. They require
23 judgment in application.

24 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

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

30 1. **Objective**

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

33 2. **Speed and Focus**

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

37 3. **Positioning**

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

1 4. **Simplicity**

2 Simplicity provides clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders.
3 Simplicity contributes to successful actions, maximizing effectiveness and
4 minimizing confusion.

5 5. **Safety**

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

8 **Cost-Effective Fire Operations**

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

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