

Chapter 01

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Guidance Overview

Scope

Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations, states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook. This handbook attempts to quote verbatim, rather than to paraphrase, policy that is stated elsewhere. It also attempts to limit duplication of source policy when a reference will suffice. *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* is intended to comply with and support the *2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* and other existing federal policy.

Purpose

Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations provides fire and fire aviation program management direction for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will continue to comply with all agency specific health and safety policy documents. Employees engaged in fire suppression and other fire management activities will comply with standards stated in the *NWGC Incident Response Pocket Guide* (PMS 461, NFES 1077) and the *NWCG Fireline Handbook* (PMS 410-1, NFES 0065).

2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

The 2001 Federal Fire Policy comprises the following Guiding Principles and discreet policies. As a whole these guiding principles and policy statements guide the philosophy, direction, and implementation of fire management planning, activities, and projects on federal lands.

Guiding Principles of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process. Federal agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use and desired future condition of the various public lands.
3. Fire Management Plans, 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 to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net

- 1 gains to the public benefit will be an important component of
2 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
6 and reorganizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies.
7 As part of this process, investments in fire management activities must
8 be evaluated against other agency programs in order to effectively
9 accomplish the overall mission, set short- and long-term priorities, and
10 clarify management accountability.
- 11 6. Fire Management Plans and activities are based upon the best
12 available science. Knowledge and experience are developed among
13 all wildland fire management agencies. An active fire research
14 program combined with interagency collaboration provides the means
15 to make these tools available to all fire managers.
- 16 7. Fire Management Plans and activities incorporate public health and
17 environmental quality considerations.
- 18 8. Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination
19 and cooperation are essential. Increasing costs and smaller work
20 forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to
21 successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire
22 management tasks. Full collaboration among federal agencies and
23 between the federal agencies and international, state, tribal, and local
24 governments and private entities results in a mobile fire management
25 work force available for the full range of public needs.
- 26 9. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is
27 an ongoing objective. Consistency of plans and operations provides
28 the fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate,
29 integrate fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide
30 leadership for cooperation with state, tribal, and local fire management
31 organizations.

32 *(2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 21-22)*

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

36 **1. Safety**

37 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management
38 Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.

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

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

1 **3. Response to Wildland Fire**

2 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and
3 resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale across
4 agency boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological,
5 social and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances, under
6 which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and
7 public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to
8 be protected; dictate the appropriate response to fire.

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10 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**

11 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain and enhance resources
12 and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural
13 ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved Fire
14 Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in
15 operational plans.

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17 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**

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

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22 **6. Protection Priorities**

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

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31 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**

32 The operational roles of the federal agencies as a partner in the
33 Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazard reduction,
34 cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance.
35 Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state or local
36 governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire
37 protection activities under formal fire protection agreements that
38 specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding.
39 (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for
40 their facilities on lands they administer and may also enter into formal
41 agreements to assist state and local governments with structural
42 protection.)

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1 **8. Planning**

2 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire
3 Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that
4 define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the
5 area's approved Land Management Plan. Fire Management Plans must
6 provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management
7 strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and
8 public health issues; and be consistent with resource management
9 objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and
10 regulations.

11
12 **9. Science**

13 Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of
14 the best available science. Research will support ongoing efforts to
15 increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and
16 sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management
17 will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science
18 program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a
19 timely manner and must be used in the development of land
20 management plans, fire management plans, and implementation plans.

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22 **10. Preparedness**

23 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire
24 management programs in support of land and resource management
25 plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and
26 management oversight.

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28 **11. Suppression**

29 Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and
30 public safety, benefits, and all values to be protected; consistent with
31 resource objectives.

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33 **12. Prevention**

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

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37 **13. Standardization**

38 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding
39 mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational
40 procedures, values-to-protected methodologies, and public education
41 programs for all fire management activities.

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1 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

2 Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire
3 use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education
4 will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of
5 cooperators and partners.
6

7 **15. Communication and Education**

8 Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire
9 management policies and practices through internal and external
10 communication and education programs. These programs will be
11 continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of
12 information among all affected agencies and organizations.
13

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

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

24 Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of
25 evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through
26 implementation of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management
27 Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution
28 of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency
29 priorities.

30 *(2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, pages 22-24)*
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32 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

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34 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

35 Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of
36 fire operations. Doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire
37 operations. It provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire
38 operations, a mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire
39 operations doctrine does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific
40 situations so much as it sets forth general guidance that requires judgment
41 in application.
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43 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

44 Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire
45 operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes
46 management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as

1 aircraft, vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the
2 magnitude and complexity of the fire itself, and of the human response to it,
3 will vary, the fact that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never
4 change. A firefighter utilizing the best available science, equipment, and
5 training, and working within the scope of agency doctrine and policy, can
6 still suffer serious injury or death.

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8 **Fire Operations Safety**

9 The primary means by which we achieve safety in fire operations is through
10 risk management. Our safety philosophy acknowledges that although the
11 ideal level of risk may be zero, absolute safety is not a reasonable or
12 achievable goal in fire operations. Our safety philosophy maintains that
13 through organized, comprehensive, and systematic risk management, we
14 will determine the acceptable level of risk that allows us to provide for
15 safety yet still achieve fire operations objectives. Risk management is
16 intended to minimize the number of injuries or fatalities experienced by
17 wildland firefighters.

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19 **Fire Preparedness**

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

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33 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

34 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we fight
35 fire. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in
36 fire operations and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, command
37 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be
38 clearly articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make
39 decisions on their own initiative based on their understanding of their
40 commander's intent. A competent subordinate commander who is at the
41 point of decision may understand a situation more clearly than a senior
42 commander some distance removed. In this case, the subordinate
43 commander must have the freedom to take decisive action directed toward
44 the accomplishment of operational objectives.

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

8 **Fire Suppression**

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

27 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

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

39 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

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

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1 **1. Objective**

2 The principle of the objective is to direct every fire suppression
3 operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and obtainable objective.
4 The purpose of fire suppression operations is to achieve the
5 suppression objectives that support the overall management goals for
6 the fire.
7

8 **2. Speed and Focus**

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

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

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

30 **5. Safety**

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

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

1 Fire Management Objectives

2 Federal agency fire management programs should help resource managers
3 protect, maintain, and enhance federal lands in a cost effective manner.

4 Wildland fire management objectives are:

- 5 • Protect human life, property, and natural/cultural resources both within
6 and adjacent to agency administered lands.
- 7 • Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire
8 within the framework of land use objectives and Resource
9 Management Plans.
- 10 • Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional
11 intent as expressed in the annual appropriations act and enabling
12 legislation, and comply with applicable departmental manual and
13 agency policies and procedures.
- 14 • Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem
15 basis.
- 16 • Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter
17 and public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, and are
18 consistent with values to be protected and management objectives.
- 19 • Stabilize and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or
20 damaged by fire or suppression activities.
- 21 • Minimize, and where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to
22 resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland
23 fire activities.
- 24 • Promote public understanding of fire management programs and
25 objectives.
- 26 • Organize a fire staff that can apply the highest standards of
27 professional and technical expertise.
- 28 • Encourage research to advance the understanding of fire behavior,
29 effects, ecology, and management.
- 30 • Integrate fire management through all levels of the planning process.
- 31 • Prevent and investigate all unplanned human-caused fires.