

# Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

**Effective Date:** 4/10/98

**Series:** Public Lands

**Part 620:** Wildland Fire Management

**Chapter 1:** General Policy and Procedures

**Originating Office:** Office of Managing Risk and Public Safety

## 620 DM 1

1.1 **Authority.** The statutes cited herein authorize and provide the means for managing wildland fire on lands or threatening lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, or lands adjacent thereto.

- A. Protection Act of September 20, 1922 (42 Stat. 857; 16 U.S.C. 594)
- B. McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928 (45 Stat. 221; 16 U.S.C. 487)
- C. Economy Act of June 30, 1932 (47 Stat. 417; 31 U.S.C. 1535)
- D. Taylor Grazing Act of June 28, 1934 (48 Stat. 1269; 43 U.S.C. 315)
- E. O. and C. Act of August 28, 1937 (50 Stat. 875; 43 U.S.C. 1181e)
- F. National Park Service Acts as amended (67 Stat. 495; 16 U.S.C. 1b)
- G. Federal Property and Administrative Service Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 471; et seq.)
- H. Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955 (69 Stat. 66; 42 U.S.C. 1856a)
- I. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (80 Stat. 927; 16 U.S.C. 668dd through 668ee)
- J. Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of December 18, 1971 (85 Stat. 688; 43 U.S.C. 1601)
- K. Disaster Relief Act of May 22, 1974 (88 Stat. 143; 42 U.S.C. 5121)
- L. Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of October 29, 1974 (88 Stat. 1535; 15 U.S.C. 2201)
- M. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (90 Stat. 2743)
- N. Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977 (P.L. 950224, as amended by P.L. 97-258, September 13, 1982 (96 Stat. 1003; 31 U.S.C. 6301 thru 6308)
- O. Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of December 2, 1980 (94 Stat. 2371)

- P. Supplemental Appropriation Act of September 10, 1982 (96 Stat. 837)
- Q. Wildfire Suppression Assistance Act of 1989 (P.L. 100-428, as amended by P.L. 101-11, April 7, 1989)
- R. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (PL 93-638) as amended
- S. National Indian Forest Resources Management Act (P. L. 101-630 November 28, 1990)
- T. Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-413)
- U. Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 103-32)

## 1.2 Responsibilities.

A. The Secretary of the Interior, through the Directors of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS) and the Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs (BIA) is responsible for wildland fire management activities of the Department (including such activities when contracted for, in whole or in part, with other agencies or Tribes) under the statutes cited in 620 DM 1.1.

B. The Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget (PMB) is responsible for coordination of strategic level inter-bureau, inter-agency, and inter-functional wildland fire policy development and oversight. Principal responsibility for these functions within PMB lies with the Office of Managing Risk and Public Safety (MRPS). Advice and recommendations on wildland fire policy and program issues are provided to the Secretary and other policy officials.

C. The Assistant Secretaries for Land and Minerals Management, Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and Indian Affairs are responsible for wildland fire policy development and oversight within their respective bureaus; and for coordination of inter-bureau and inter-agency policy development with the Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget.

D. The Bureau Directors for BLM, FWS, NPS and the Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs have responsibility for the implementation of effective wildland fire management programs within their respective bureaus.

E. The Interior Fire Coordination Committee (IFCC) operates under the general guidance of the Directors of BLM, FWS, NPS and the Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the BIA, and the Assistant Secretary for PMB. The Committee provides the leadership and technical expertise for development of coordinated policy, programmatic and operational direction, resolution of issues as they affect Interior bureau wildland fire programs, and coordination with other functional areas. The Committee may establish working teams as needed to support its role. Membership is comprised of one person designated by the BLM, FWS, NPS, and BIA; and for policy issues, a representative from the Office of MRPS.

F. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) is the site housing the Headquarters level fire management offices of the four wildland fire bureaus of Interior. The combination of the technical expertise, working together and in conjunction with other cooperator representatives, provides a cost-effective structure to manage the fire management programs within Interior and the Nation. The USDA Forest Service is also located at NIFC.

(1) The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) is a functional group at NIFC responsible for logistic support, coordination and intelligence reporting for all wildland fire management agencies. NICC is responsible for producing the National Interagency

Mobilization Guide, which is used by all wildland fire management agencies as the operational document for moving resources to meet fire management needs; as such, the Guide is an integral part of each bureau's policy/guidance documentation.

(2) The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (MAC Group) is made up of bureau representatives located at NIFC with delegated authority from their respective bureau Directors to determine priorities, allocate or reallocate resources, develop or recommend contingency action plans and issue coordinated situation assessments.

G. National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) is comprised of federal and state representatives from governmental organizations with wildland fire management responsibilities. The charter creating NWCG was signed March 16, 1976 by the Secretary of the Interior and Agriculture. NWCG is a forum for development of recommended policies, guidelines and standards that can be of benefit to participating bureaus. Policies, guidelines or standards, if adopted by a bureau, are implemented through individual bureau directive systems.

H. Each wildland fire management bureau is responsible for taking prompt and effective action in wildland fire management programs and implementing Departmental wildland fire policies.

I. Supervisors are responsible for assuring that employees engaged in wildland fire management activities follow Departmental and bureau policy, including NWCG standards, when adopted, and the conditions of employment are consistent with provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

J. Individual employees are responsible for knowing, understanding and practicing safe fire management operations.

### 1.3 **Definitions.** (For the purposes of 620 DM)

A. Agency Administrator. The appropriate level manager having organizational responsibility for management of an administrative unit. May include Director, State Director, District Manager or Field Manager (BLM); Director, Regional Director, Complex Manager or Project Leader (FWS); Director, Regional Director, Park Superintendent, or Unit Manager (NPS), or Director, Office of Trust Responsibility, Area Director, or Superintendent (BIA).

B. Appropriate Management Action. Specific actions taken to implement a management strategy.

C. Appropriate Management Response. Specific actions taken in response to a wildland fire to implement protection and fire use objectives.

D. Appropriate Management Strategy. A plan or direction selected by an agency administrator which guide wildland fire management actions intended to meet protection and fire use objectives.

E. Bureau. Bureaus, offices or services of the Department.

F. Fire Suppression Activity Damage. The damage to lands, resources and facilities directly attributable to the fire suppression effort or activities, including: dozer lines, camps and staging areas, facilities (fences, buildings, bridges, etc.), handlines, and roads.

G. Emergency Fire Rehabilitation/Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (EFR/BAER). Emergency actions taken during or after wildland fire to stabilize and prevent

unacceptable resource degradation or to minimize threats to life or property resulting from the fire. The scope of EFR/BAER projects are unplanned and unpredictable requiring funding on short notice.

H. Fire Management Plan. A strategic plan that defines a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires and documents the Fire Management Program in the approved land use plan. The plan is supplemented by operational procedures such as preparedness plans, preplanned dispatch plans, prescribed fire plans and prevention plans.

I. Initial Action. Action taken by the first resources to arrive at a wildland fire to meet protection and fire use objectives.

J. Initial Attack. An aggressive suppression action consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.

K. Prescription. Measurable criteria which guide selection of appropriate management response and actions. Prescription criteria may include safety, public health, environmental, geographic, administrative, social, or legal considerations.

L. Prescribed Fire. Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist and NEPA requirements must be met prior to ignition. NEPA requirements can be met at the land use or fire management planning level.

M. Preparedness. Activities that lead to a safe, efficient and cost effective fire management program in support of land and resource management objectives through appropriate planning and coordination.

N. Suppression. A management action intended to protect identified values from a fire, extinguish a fire, or alter a fire's direction of spread.

O. Wildfire. An unwanted wildland fire.

P. Wildland Fire. Any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland.

Q. Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA). A decision-making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against selected safety, environmental, social, economical, political, and resource management objectives as selection criteria.

#### 1.4 **Policy.**

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

B. Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire management plans must be consistent with firefighter and public safety, values to be protected, and land, natural, and cultural resource management plans and must address public health issues. Fire management plans must also address all potential wildland fire occurrences and include the full range of wildland fire management actions. Bureau fire management plans must be coordinated, reviewed, and approved by responsible agency administrators, to insure consistency with approved land management plans.

C. Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land, natural, and cultural management plans and activities on a landscape scale, across bureau boundaries, and will be

based upon best available science. All use of fire for natural and cultural resource management requires an approved plan which contains a formal prescription.

D. Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance natural and cultural resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.

E. Bureaus will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land, natural, and cultural resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, and equipment.

F. Management actions taken on wildland fires must be cost effective, consider firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, and be consistent with natural and cultural resource objectives.

G. Bureaus will work together and with other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

H. Protection priorities are (1) human life and (2) property and natural/cultural resources. If it becomes necessary to prioritize between property and natural/cultural resources, this is done based on relative values to be protected, commensurate with fire management costs. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

I. Fire management planning, preparedness, wildland fire and prescribed fire operations, monitoring, and research will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of all partners.

J. Bureaus 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.

K. Fire management programs and activities will be based on economic analyses that incorporate commodity, non-commodity, and social values.

L. The operational role of the bureaus as a partner in the wildland/urban interface is wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire protection is the responsibility of Tribal, State, and local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural 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 Tribes, State and local governments with full structural protection.)

M. Employees who are trained and certified will participate in the wildland fire program as the situation demands; noncertified employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as needed. Agency Administrators will be responsible, and will be held accountable, to make employees available to participate in the wildland fire program.

1.5 **Objectives.** The objectives of the wildland fire management program in the Department of the Interior are to:

A. Provide for firefighter and public safety in every fire management activity.

B. Make full use of wildland fire and prescribed fire both as a natural process and as a

tool and incorporates the role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent into the planning process. Fire may also be used as a tool to maintain and restore cultural landscapes or to dispose of vegetation and debris.

C. Develop fire management plans, programs, and activities which are based on the best available science; that incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations; and support bureau land, natural, and cultural resource management goals and objectives.

D. Ensure economically viable fire management programs and activities are based on values to be protected; cost effectiveness; risk management; and land, natural, and cultural resource management objectives.

E. Initiate and maintain full international, Federal, Tribal, State, and local interagency coordination, with the involvement of all parties, to insure cooperation, and collaboration.

F. Standardize policies and procedures among Federal agencies and Tribes.

G. In cooperation with other wildland fire management agencies, develop and implement prevention strategies at the local, regional and national levels.

#### **1.6 Wildland Fire Management Strategies.**

A. Within the framework of land use objectives and plans, overall wildland fire benefits will be maximized and damages minimized giving full consideration to the following within each appropriate management response:

(1) Firefighter and public safety. No wildland fire situation, with the possible exception of threat to human survival, requires the exposure of firefighters to life-threatening situations.

(2) Implementing a protective and effective wildland fire education/prevention/trespass program.

(3) Prudent expenditure of public funds.

(4) Impact on natural and cultural resources and the environment.

(5) Integrating cooperative wildland fire management actions with other bureaus or with other qualified wildland fire management organizations.

(6) Timely emergency fire rehabilitation/burned area emergency rehabilitation (EFR/BAER) and repair of fire suppression activity damage is performed within acceptable practices consistent with bureau policies and guidelines.

B. Wildland fires, whether on or adjacent to lands administered by the Department, which threaten life, improvements, or are determined to be a threat to natural and cultural resources or improvements under the Department's jurisdiction, will be considered emergencies and their suppression given priority over other Departmental programs.

C. In all cases where wildland fires could cross boundaries between lands administered by more than one agency or landowner, appropriate cooperative documents will be prepared.

D. If a wildland fire escapes initial management action or a prescribed fire should exceed prescription, further actions will be determined to achieve land and fire management

objectives through an analysis of alternative management strategies using the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA).

E. Bureaus shall cooperate in the development of interagency preparedness plans to ensure timely recognition of approaching critical wildland fire situations; to establish processes for analyzing situations and establishing priorities, and for implementing appropriate management responses to these situations.

F. The agency administrator certifies daily that the selected management actions are appropriate and the necessary resources are available. If management actions become inappropriate or necessary resources are not available, a new appropriate management strategy will be implemented.

1.7 **Fire Trespass.** Bureaus will enforce rules and regulations concerning the unauthorized ignition of wildland fires, and aggressively pursue violations.

1.8 **Education and Prevention.** Wildland fire education and prevention is an integral part of the total wildland fire management program. Bureaus will develop and participate in interagency wildland fire education and prevention programs.

1.9 **Wildland Fire Assistance.** Bureaus will cooperate with other international, Federal, Tribal, State, or local organizations. Neighbors can be assisted if they fall under an agreement with a local organization. Formal agreements shall be made under the auspices of the appropriate authority cited in paragraph 1.1 of this chapter. These agreements may take the form of Interagency Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, Cooperative Agreements, mutual aid agreements, compacts, or contracts. Bureaus may provide assistance, when authorized by the President, to any State and local government for management of a wildland fire officially declared as a disaster. There will be no interbureau billing or reimbursement between the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Indian Affairs for personnel and other resources involved in wildland fire emergencies, fuels management, and prescribed fire projects.

1.10 **Training and Qualifications.** All personnel will meet minimum wildland fire qualification requirements which are equal to or exceed those recommended by the NWCG.

1.11 **Research.** The IFCC will manage wildland fire research funded through the Department of the Interior and Other Related Agencies Appropriations Act, and other acts funding the Departmental fire management program. Bureaus may request under the McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928, as amended, basic and applied research in wildland fire management from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture. Bureaus will forward requests to the Forest Service and provide a copy to the IFCC.

1.12 **Reports.** Bureaus will standardize wildland fire statistics and develop an easily accessible common database (e.g., Individual Fire Report).

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