



Fire Executive Council

Briefing Paper

Date: 02/08/2008

Prepared by: AMR Task Group

Topic: Modifying Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Policy

Goal: **A) Permit a full spectrum of fire management response on federal lands (from aggressive suppression to less intensive management) commensurate with current and predicted risk, values to be protected, availability of management resources, and land management objectives.**

B) Bring our internal organizations and external public and partners to a common understanding of Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

Background: In November 2006, the USDA OIG found that the Forest Service could strengthen the cost-effectiveness of its fire fighting without sacrificing safety by increasing wildland fire use to reduce forest vegetation and underbrush that may fuel future fires. Current policies put in place by Bureau Directors and Forest Service Chief in 2003 may unnecessarily restrict the application of wildland fire use and full spectrum of suppression response commensurate with risk, values to be protected, and land management objectives. Appropriate Management Response (AMR), the current terminology for the full spectrum of response options to unplanned wildland fires, is not well understood, and inconsistently implemented.

A task group has been assigned by the NWCG to develop recommendations and timeframes for a phased modification of the *Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2003)*. Federal Agency Heads, after consultation with partners, will agree on policy modifications for discussion and final decision at the March WFLC call.

Key Points: Three phased approach to address barriers in the current policy guidance that restrict application of the full spectrum of response options to unplanned wildland fires on Federal lands. **Phase 1** – examines the existing policy guidance and provides recommendations on changes and/or modifications that can be made by the 2008 western wildland fire season. Implementation of the modifications will proceed on a selective basis due to the recognition that necessary training and application procedures are still under development. **Phase 2** – Expands the knowledge and understanding of the implementation and assessment process for the full spectrum of response to unplanned wildland fire across the county by the beginning of CY2009. Examine the feasibility of unplanned human caused ignitions being appropriate to achieve resource benefits. **Phase 3** – Implement the findings of the human caused ignitions feasibility study.

Current Status: Proposed changes to the following operational statements from the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy were delivered to WFLC at the February meeting in order to prepare for a decision on a WFLC conference call next month. If WFLC and FEC concur new guidance will be finalized

and allow phased implementation this summer, once requirements (planning, training, data assessment, communication, etc.) are met and decision support tools are available..

1. Only one management objective will be applied to a wildland fire. Wildland fires will either be managed for resource benefits or suppressed. A wildland fire cannot be managed for both objectives concurrently. If two wildland fires converge, they will be managed as a single wildland fire.
 - **Proposed Modifications:** Modify to permit any wildland fire or any combined wildland fires to be managed for one or more objectives based on the Land/Resource Management Plan objectives.
 - **Discussion:** Within current policy guidance three distinct types of wildland fire have been defined and include **wildfire, wildland fire use** and **prescribed fire**. **Wildfire** - An unplanned, unwanted wildland fire, including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped wildland fire use events, escaped prescribed fire projects, and all other wildland fires where the objective is to put the fire out. **Wildland Fire Use** - The application of the appropriate management response to naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas outlined in Fire Management Plans. **Prescribed Fire** - Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements (where applicable) must be met, prior to ignition.

The AMR Task Group proposes modifying this to have two distinct types of wildland fire differentiated by whether the ignition is planned or unplanned. A wildland fire initiating from a planned ignition is known as prescribed fire. A wildland fire initiating from an unplanned ignition is known as a wildfire.

2. Once a wildland fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives.
 - **Proposed Modifications:** Modify to permit any wildland fire or any combined wildland fire to be managed for one or more objectives based on the Land/Resource Management Plan objectives as an event moves across the landscape and fuels and weather conditions change.
 - **Discussion:** This modification would allow wildfire (unplanned ignition) to move across the land growing in size and moving into different landscapes to meet the objectives set in the land/resource management plan by permitting federal land managers the option to adjust response actions taking place on a fire while maintaining firefighter and public safety, using available resources effectively and efficiently and considering biophysical, social and legal constraints to include fire cause, current and predicted weather, current and potential fire behavior, fire effects, impacts of smoke, values to be protected, management priorities, cumulative effects of the fire, and cost effectiveness.

As an example we could have a fire start next to a community and as it spreads it moves away from the community and into fire adapted landscape where a Land Management permits wildand fire to achieve resource objectives.. In this case we would take actions along the fire perimeter or adjacent to the values at risk in the community to mitigate the threat and then manage the remaining perimeter to recognize ecological, fuels reduction, or other objectives as set in the land/resource plan.

3. The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis process is used to determine and document the suppression strategy from the full range of responses available for suppression operations. Suppression strategies are designed to meet the policy objectives of suppression.
 - **Proposed Modifications:** Modify to permit migration from WFSA to Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) that examines the full range of responses in single system.
 - **Discussion:** The Wildland Fire Decision Support process will be used to analyze and establish management objectives and guide subsequent management actions for a prescribed fire that is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed.

4. Wildland fire use is the result of a natural event. The Land/Resource Management Plan, or the Fire Management Plan, will identify areas where the strategy of wildland fire use is suitable. The Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is the tool that examines the available response strategies to determine if a fire is being considered for wildland fire use.
 - **Proposed Modifications:** Modify to permit migration from WFIP to Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) that examines the full range of responses in single system.
 - **Discussion:** See discussion in statement 3, above.

5. When a prescribed fire or a fire designated for wildland fire use is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed, the fire will be declared a wildfire. Once a wildfire, it cannot be returned to a prescribed fire or wildland fire use status.
 - **Proposed Modifications:** Modify to permit reassessment of current considerations and managed as any other wildfire (see item 1 & 2).
 - **Discussion:** If a prescribed fire exceeds criteria set in the prescribed fire plan it will be declared a wildfire and actions taken to bring in back within prescription criteria. If initial actions are unsuccessful, the appropriate management response will be developed to maintain firefighter and public safety, using available resources effectively and efficiently and considering biophysical, social and legal constraints to include fire cause, current and predicted weather, current and potential fire behavior, fire effects, impacts of smoke, values to be protected, management priorities, cumulative effects of the fire, and cost effectiveness.

Next Steps: WFLC members will consult with their constituents, and other WFLC members, in preparation for a final decision regarding the above proposed modifications at the March call.

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