

Appropriate Management Response Summary for the Northern Rockies

Final v. 7_21_07

Introduction

All unplanned wildland fire ignitions require an Appropriate Management Response (AMR). The AMR, which can range from aggressively suppressing a wildland fire to managing an incident as a wildland fire use event, is guided by the strategies and objectives outlined in the unit Land and Resource Management Plan reflecting land and resource values, management goals and objectives. The unit fire management plan (FMP) outlines fire management activities and procedures to accomplish those objectives. The objective of a wildland fire use project is to obtain resource benefits, whereas a wildfire is to be extinguished at the most efficient cost.

The Appropriate Management Response is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, land and resource and fire management objectives, resource availability, the circumstances under which the fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, protection priorities, values to be protected, and cost effectiveness.

The following are guiding principles for Appropriate Management Response:

- Our response to wildfires in the Northern Rockies involves actions and expenditures that are commensurate with the values at risk and are consistent with agency policy, land management plans and fire management plan direction.
- Agency administrators will be prepared prior to fire season to make informed decisions on the appropriate management response.
- We will develop greater opportunities, through appropriate planning and by reducing barriers, for our agency administrators to accomplish resource objectives through wildland fire use.
- We will work closely with our partners and public in advance of fire season to build understanding of the expectations of appropriate management response.
- Long-term plans will be developed with partners. Document collaboration and communication with partners.
- Initial attack requires a planned, rapid and focused response with appropriate forces. AMR emphasize managing risk to provide firefighter and public safety.
- If initial attack is unsuccessful, we will ensure that the transition process to a more complex situation remains cohesive and forthright.
- Incident commanders will assess risk and hazards and communicate mitigation measures to firefighters and fire managers.
- Incident commanders and fire managers will be decisive in establishing clear and attainable objectives that are consistent with leader's intent and direction.

What is Appropriate Management Response?

AMR is any specific action taken in response to a wildland fire suitable to meet protection OR fire use objectives described in the fire management plan.

MANAGE WILDLAND FIRE			
APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			
Perimeter Control	Point Protection	Monitor	
Contain and control the edge of a fire for least possible acres burned	Protect individual high value areas adjacent to or within a fire perimeter	Reduce exposure to firefighters; keep cost commensurate to values at risk. Achieve resource benefits through wildland fire use	

What Appropriate Management Response is not.

- Not new—building on what we have successfully done
- Not “Let Burn”
- It’s not just a cost issue

Why the Appropriate Management Response?

The Appropriate Management Response does not replace, supercede, or give emphasis to any particular fire management strategy or tactic. Instead, AMR is intended to include all available strategies and tactics, encouraging consideration of a wider spectrum of management options from which to make a calculated response based on the circumstances of a particular fire at a particular time with particular characteristics. Use of this concept dispels the interpretation or belief that there is only one way to respond to each set of circumstances.

Not only is fire suppression very expensive, but once a commitment to a plan is made, it is often very difficult to change. Increasingly, a few very large or long duration fires that are likely to burn until weathered out are still being managed with a more or less conventional suppression objective emphasizing perimeter control. Those fires demand and get a sizeable part of the national fire suppression resource capability. A shortage of critical resources is a common occurrence today. That situation has a substantial and counterproductive effect on the ability to appropriately manage “the next fire”, whether it is a lost opportunity for successful initial attack or the ability to make the right commitment of resources to a higher priority incident occurring after “the last fire”.

Implementing AMR

The Appropriate Management Response may be different in time, as well as place. Appropriate decisions will be made about a fire based on policy, land, resource, and fire management goals and objectives. A decision to manage a fire with a certain strategy today may not be the same decision that would have been made yesterday, or might be made tomorrow.

Wildland fire incident management decisions will be made in the context of what we are protecting or enhancing. Significant benefits are possible if managers consider the following guidance:

- Each unit should adapt current fire management units (FMU) described in FMPs to protection and response strategies (WUI identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans will be incorporated) similar to those suggested in the following example for Section III, Wildland Fire Management Strategies, of the Interagency Fire Management Plan.

Those are described as:

- AMR 1 – Highest Level Protection Response
- AMR 2 – Response based on Values at Risk
- AMR 3 – Wildland Fire Use Management Option

In following the intent of the first bullet we need to be careful not to go beyond the permissions allowed under current land and resource management plans with fire management direction documents in FMPs. A map of FMUs will be produced for the geographic area as information is identified. That map will allow local units, agency administrators and the Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination Group to identify and prioritize protection priorities for initial response and provide a framework for the type of extended action that will occur on wildfires that escape initial action. The map will also help reference wildland fire use opportunities and decisions. It will further be used as a communication tool for both internal and external audiences to help change expectations for fire management and accept different outcomes. This is not a decision document; it is a tool to help prioritize work.

- Decisions for the initial response to a wildfire should have the goal of a decisive outcome to protect specific values in the fire environment. Initial actions in response to a wildfire should be as aggressive as possible, unless there is concern that those actions cannot mitigate issues about firefighter and public safety or are not cost effective.
- As currently provided for in approved land and resource management plans and unit fire management plans, each unit should begin or increase opportunities in the wildland fire use program, allowing agency administrators the choice to manage unplanned wildland ignitions for resource benefits when appropriate.
- All wildland fires that escape initial and extended action should develop a long term risk analysis and management strategy when appropriate. The plan should describe and identify the values to be protected and at risk, means to protect those values in a safe and cost effective manner, and hold the fire area to the boundary of the selected alternative in the WFSAs. The long term plan does not replace the WFSAs but provides a long term strategy of how to implement the selected alternative. When the Planning Needs assessment chart in the Wildland Fire Use Implementation Reference Guide indicates a Stage III should be completed, a long term plan should be considered. Other

considerations should be resource availability and whether the strategy and tactics implemented to meet the initial objectives are working.

- On Forest Service fires, as the Stratified Cost Index (SCI) performance measure becomes available, evaluations will be completed on large fires (>300 acres) to provide real-time decision support to agency administrators and incident managers.
- On Forest Service fires, when Regional Forester representatives are required, support teams for long duration fires will provide that role. Letters of expectations from the Regional Forester to the unit line officer and support team leader will be completed. The Regional Forester will have the discretion to have additional representation if needed.

The geographic area will monitor periodic fire management costs and accomplishments for individual wildfires and fire use events and provide feedback to agency administrators. Monitoring will allow evaluation and understanding of the effectiveness of strategies and utilization of resources, and provide a basis for concurrence and adjustments to incident priorities.

Appendices

Appendix A – Long Term Implementation Plan

Appendix B – Mitigation Strategies for Smoke Impacts

Appendix C – Communication Plan

Appendix D – Cost Containment

Appendix E – Support Team for Long-Duration Wildfire Plans

Appendix A

Long Term Implementation Plan

Use the appropriate WFSA to identify values to protect, costs allowed, and the geographic area delineated in the selected alternative. To maintain flexibility, a suggested format to implement a long term plan should consider addressing the following items based upon the needs assessment of the specific event. The level of analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the event.

- Identify objectives of long term plan
- Assess risk on values to protect, hazards identified and probability of event occurring (see Wildland Fire Use Implementation Procedures Reference Guide)
- Weather conditions and long-term risk assessment
- Identification of values to protect
- Action to protect values
- Resources needed to manage the fire
- Contingency actions
- Information plan
- Estimated costs
- Wildland fire relative risk assessment (see Wildland Fire Use Implementation Procedures Reference Guide)
- Signatures of agency administrator and incident commander

Appendix B

Specific Mitigation Strategies for the Appropriate Management Response to Mitigate the Impacts of Smoke from Wildland Fire

The most important mitigation measure for smoke is establishing and maintaining effective communications and relationships with our state regulatory partners, and taking their inputs under consideration. State regulators receive numerous calls from the public during fire season, so by keeping them informed about fire occurrence, fire management priorities, and appropriate management responses, they will be better able to address the current fire situation as it pertains to public health and safety.

Specific steps to establish and maintain effective relations with state agencies include:

- Inclusion of state regulatory agencies on MAC conference calls.
- Provide on-scene briefings to state air quality agency personnel, which may include aerial observation of a fire and its smoke production and dispersion when appropriate.
- The placement of near real time smoke monitors in sensitive areas so state regulators can be better informed about actual smoke conditions.
- Make daily ICS-209 Incident Status Summary reports for large fires available through the Northern Rockies Geographic Area Morning Report (summarizing all fire activity) to state regulatory agencies to provide individual and cumulative fire activity and fire status information.

It is also essential to keep the public informed concerning current and projected smoke conditions. In pre-event communications with the public in which AMR is discussed, the potential for smoke production and mitigation planning and actions should be included.

When and where wildland fire use is the appropriate management response for a particular fire, existing procedures will be followed for providing information to state regulatory agencies in Idaho and Montana.

In Idaho, maps of areas where wildland fire use may be implemented are provided to DEQ in advance of fire season, and a contact person is identified for each national forest if more information is needed. For specific incidents, DEQ will monitor the 209 reports for any significant changes in fire growth or complexity, and have the ability to contact the appropriate local dispatch center for specific information. DEQ is also contacted directly when a Stage III analysis is completed for any wildland fire use event, and is also provided information on fire locations and the locations of potential smoke impacts.

In Montana, the major open burn permit requires Montana DEQ to be notified when the Stage II analysis is completed on any fire. Montana DEQ also has the option to request maps of areas where wildland fire use may be implemented as the appropriate

management response. Montana DEQ routinely monitors the 209 reports for changes in fire growth or complexity.

Wildland fire 209 information is automatically imported into Blue Sky Rains, which can be used by fire and air quality managers and state air quality regulatory agencies to predict smoke trajectories on an hourly basis.

The Exceptional Events Rule, promulgated by EPA in March 2007, allows states, at their discretion, to petition EPA to exclude PM or ozone monitoring data adversely affected by natural events, including wildfires and wildland fire use events. EPA, after reviewing data submitted by states, retains final discretionary authority to exclude affected data.

Fire management can assist states by addressing smoke impacts as part of the AMR process, and by providing states detailed information about the fire that they can use to justify their exceptional event request.

Appendix C

Northern Rockies Appropriate Management Response Communication Plan - 2007

A comprehensive communication plan has been completed for utilization on all units. This is a summary of that plan.

Summary

Our work can range from aggressively suppressing a wildfire threatening values we need to protect, to monitoring a fire in areas where natural processes are encouraged or where the values at risk do not warrant a costly fire suppression investment.

Resource management plans govern our actions, reflecting land and resource values and management goals. Local fire management plans outline fire management options in any given area and list procedures to accomplish those options.

Fire protection priorities affect management options, including resource availability and the selection of strategies and tactics.

We want to do what makes sense, what is efficient and effective. We base our plans and actions on an understanding of risks to firefighters and the public, and the values that lie in the path of the fire.

Background

Fires are burning larger and larger areas in the Northern Rockies and costing more and more to suppress. Over the decades, federal fire policy has changed as conditions have changed. We must focus our efforts on protecting the most important values, and allowing fires to burn where their effects reduce risk and contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of the ecosystems in which they occur.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans developed with individual counties and Wildfire Hazard Assessments and Mitigation Plans developed for the reservations, are important tools for identifying values to be protected and the agencies and entities that share the responsibility for fire protection and implementing the appropriate management response in the wildland urban interface.

In determining the appropriate management response, fire managers should consider:

- Risks to firefighters and public health and safety
- Land, resource, and fire management objectives and priorities
- Weather and fuel conditions that influence where and how a fire burns
- Threats to values we want to protect
- Fire management options, including the availability of resources and effectiveness of strategies and tactics

- Probability of success and consequences of failure
- The cost of our actions compared to the value of what's threatened
- Smoke impacts on human health and welfare
- Development of a long term plan to describe the management goal, objectives, situational triggers, and action responses.

In determining an AMR strategy, we have the following options, which may be implemented singly, in steps, or concurrently:

- Perimeter control—contain and control the edge of the fire. If applied to the whole fire this work tries to keep the fire as small as possible.
- Point protection—protect high-value sites and areas near the edge of the fire.
- Confine—take advantage of terrain and natural conditions to stop the fire in areas where we have a better chance of ensuring the safety of firefighters
- Monitor—where values or threats are low, keep track of the fire while keeping down both costs and danger to firefighters.

Key Messages

- We manage all fires. Some will burn in an area we define, some we suppress.
- We have a wide array of fire management tools available to us to apply when and where, and to the degree needed to accomplish our objectives.
- We will define a long-term management goal and develop a plan with objectives for every appropriate management response where the initial action is not expected to be the final action.
- We plan for ways to manage the fire into the future.
- Fire in the West is inevitable: it is never a question of “if”, but always a question of “when” and “under what circumstances.”
- Fire has played an important role for thousands of years in shaping the landscape of North America.
- The risk of large fires has increased dramatically in the last century. There is more wood and other vegetation to burn and conditions are drier more often.
- More people are living in and near increasingly fire-prone forests and grasslands, adding to the values that are threatened by fire.
- We can not afford the expense or long term disruption to natural ecosystems by trying to put out all fires everywhere, nor should we try.

- In some areas we need fire to resume its role on the landscape. This requires us to make informed choices based on management direction and conditions.
- In some cases we need to keep fire away from important, high-value areas. This requires us to prioritize and use our resources deliberately.
- We will decide fire management strategies that make sense in close consultation with affected interests.

Appendix D

Cost Containment

As part of the Northern Rockies normal operating procedures, the incident management teams have agreed to develop an attachment to the WFSA/WFIP validation process that will integrate the cost containment factors into our decision making processes. Required cost containment factors to address include:

- accountability
- sufficient and reliable information (situational awareness)
- social/political factors
- risk management
- strategic and tactical decisions

The most applicable aspects of the factors above will be included in the daily ICS-209 Incident Status Summaries to ensure accurate and timely information is shared with all. At the Northern Rockies Geographic Area level, 209s will be monitored to ensure that the strategic objective(s) are being met within a planned and reasonable cost. At the end of an incident management team assignment, a summary of the cost containment factors will be included in the close-out package and discussed with the hosting agencies.

COST CONTAINMENT FACTORS

Cost Containment Factors	Decisions, Discussions and Remarks
Accountability	
Situational Awareness	
Social/Political Factors	
Risk Management	
Strategic and Tactical Decisions	

For Forest Service fires, the Stratified Cost Index will be used as criteria for monitoring the efficiency of management decision and actions.

LARGE FIRE COST CONTAINMENT REVIEW OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS:

Sufficient and Reliable Information

Do the agency administrators and ICs believe they have all of the necessary information to make timely and prudent decisions? If not, why not? What information is missing that would help them better manage the fire? If so, where and how did they obtain this information?

Social Factors

What are the socio-political factors driving actions and, therefore, costs at this fire?

Can/were the socio-political factors satisfied? If so, how? If no, why?

Quantify any costs associated with mitigating these concerns.

Risk Management

To what values did this fire pose a threat?

What was the thought process for identifying and balancing the threat level with acceptable costs?

How did the IMT and the AA quantify the decisions they made to manage the threats?

How was the risk shared between the general public, local, state and federal agencies?

How would the decisions change if these were appropriated funds for which AAs/ICs were held accountable?

Tactical Decisions

What specific actions did the IMT and AA take to control costs in the three highest cost areas of personnel, contracts and aircraft?

Specifically, what effect did IMT actions have on overall fire costs? Which actions were within their control and which were dictated by others (AA, politicians, etc.)?

How did AA direction impact overall fire costs?

Accountability

Appropriate use of resources – to include funds, equipment, people.

Appendix E

Support Team for Long Duration Plans

Consider the following positions for the support team:

- Technical specialist that have skills in long duration wildland fires. For example, past or current experiences as agency administrator, incident commander, FUMA, operations section chief, long term analyst, incident information officer, etc.
- The Northern Rockies Coordinating Group will maintain a list of possible resources available to provide support for development of long duration wildfire plans. This is not intended to be an overhead team; it is support that will help the agency administrator make the AMR decision. Once the decision is made, then the appropriate management organization will be put in place for the situation.