



Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology

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Firefighter's Group Calls for Scientific Analysis and Citizen Involvement in Forest Service Fire Management Planning Bush Administration's Policy Makes Fire Plans Violate Laws

Press Statement by Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph.D. Executive Director, Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)

Eugene, Oregon -- **Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)** issued a statement on December 6, 2007 calling on the Bush Administration to allow the U.S. Forest Service to comply with the Nation's environmental laws and include scientific analysis and citizen involvement in fire management planning on the National Forests.

"The Bush Administration's general contempt for ecological science and fear of informed public involvement in government affairs is exacting a high price when it comes to fire management planning in the National Forests," said Timothy Ingalsbee, executive director of Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE). "Wildland firefighters are put at unnecessary risk, taxpayers are billed for billions of dollars in questionable fire suppression costs, and public lands are degraded from ecologically inappropriate firefighting actions caused by flawed Forest Service fire management plans that exclude local community knowledge and ignore the best available fire science."

The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the Ten-Year Comprehensive Wildfire Strategy require fire management plans (FMPs) for every area on federal land containing burnable vegetation. Federal Courts in California ruled in 2006 that the FMPs of the Six Rivers and Sequoia National Forests violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because they did not include scientific analysis, a range of alternatives, or public input in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In response, the Bush Administration ordered the Six Rivers and Sequoia FMPs to be withdrawn, thereby evading the Court's order. However, these two National Forests are now operating without FMPs. Since none of the National Forests utilize NEPA processes to develop their FMPs, they are equally vulnerable to similar legal challenges.

"The Bush Administration's top-down, secretive approach to fire planning shuts out citizens knowledgeable about the local values at risk of wildfire damage, and ignores decades of advances in fire ecology research," said Timothy Ingalsbee. "Wildland firefighters are citizens, too, but unless they are part of the handful of staff tasked to write FMPs, they have to stand silent on the sidelines along with the rest of the public. Dedicated fire managers in the Forest Service are being 'bound and gagged' by the Bush Administration's policy that prevents managers from working with citizens as fully informed partners in fire planning."

Typically, the FMPs are written by a Fire Management Officer with assistance by a few staff. There is no interdisciplinary team involvement or environmental analysis on the effects of fire management strategies presented in the FMP. As a major federal action with significant effects upon the human/natural environment, fire management legally requires NEPA processes that involve public input, but the Bush Administration has thwarted all efforts to get the Forest Service to comply with the law in FMPs. Federal agencies are currently working on a dramatic change in fire management policy that will make FMPs even more critical in determining the "Appropriate Management Response" to wildfire ignitions.

"The need to get Forest Service Fire Management Plans to comply with NEPA is as much about democracy as it is about ecology," said Timothy Ingalsbee of FUSEE.

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