

CHAPTER 3 — 2001 FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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. Many federal agencies conduct programs and activities not directly tied to management of lands, but which have programs or activities that support or otherwise affect federal wildland fire management activities. These Guiding Principles and policy statements guide the direction and implementation of those programs as well, to ensure consistency, coordination, and integration of wildland fire management programs and related activities throughout the federal government.

Each agency should adopt the 2001 Federal Fire Policy as agency policy through applicable directives, manuals, and other systems as appropriate. All handbooks, guides, workbooks, and other documents associated with wildland fire management are to reflect the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

Non-federal agencies are encouraged to adopt and use the 2001 Federal Fire Policy in planning and implementing their fire management activities to promote coordination, cooperation, and efficiency.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following Guiding Principles are fundamental to the successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire 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 gains to the public benefit will be an important component of decisions.
5. ***Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives.*** Federal agency administrators are adjusting and reorganizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of this process, investments in fire management activities must be evaluated against other agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall mission, set short- and long-term priorities, and clarify management accountability.
6. ***Fire Management Plans and activities are based upon the best available science.*** Knowledge and experience are developed among all wildland fire management agencies. An active fire research program combined with interagency collaboration provides the means to make these tools available to all fire managers.
7. ***Fire Management Plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.***
8. ***Federal, State, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and cooperation are essential.*** Increasing costs and smaller work forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire management tasks. Full collaboration among federal agencies and between the federal agencies and international, State, tribal, and local governments and private entities results in a mobile fire management work force available for the full range of public needs.
9. ***Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an ongoing objective.*** Consistency of plans and operations provides the fundamental platform upon which federal agencies can cooperate, integrate fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for cooperation with State, tribal, and local fire management organizations.

2001 FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY

1. SAFETY

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

2. FIRE MANAGEMENT AND ECOSYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

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

3. RESPONSE TO WILDLAND FIRE

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

4. USE OF WILDLAND FIRE

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

5. REHABILITATION AND RESTORATION

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

6. PROTECTION PRIORITIES

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

7. WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE

The operational roles of federal agencies as partners in the Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, State, or 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 State and local governments with full structural protection.)

8. PLANNING

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a program to manage

wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's approved land management plan. Fire Management Plans must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.

9. SCIENCE

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

10. PREPAREDNESS

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

11. SUPPRESSION

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

12. PREVENTION

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

13. STANDARDIZATION

Agencies 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.

14. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

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

15. COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

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

16. AGENCY ADMINISTRATOR AND EMPLOYEE ROLES

Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and

nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

17. EVALUATION

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

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The following strategic Implementation Actions are key for the effective implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The bolded statements provide broad objectives or results for agency managers to accomplish. The narrative statement following each bolded statement is designed to explain and clarify, not provide specific additional tasks. Monitoring and evaluation of implementation should focus on accomplishment of the broad objectives or results over time. These Implementation Actions are the highest priority. This list is not intended to exclude other strategic and tactical actions necessary to implement the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

1. FIRE MANAGEMENT AND ECOSYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

a. Develop a comprehensive, interagency strategy for fire management to help achieve ecosystem sustainability.

The relationship between fire management activities and other efforts to achieve ecosystem sustainability is unclear. The USDA Forest Service developed a cohesive strategy to accelerate fuels management on those public lands at high risk for significant negative impacts on ecological and human values. The Interior land management agencies have developed strategies to increase fuels management efforts. All of these efforts can be strengthened by the inclusion of other federal and State agencies involved in national fire management efforts (USGS, EPA, FEMA, NOAA, DOD, DOE) as we address long-term restoration of watersheds and landscapes. Implementation of these existing strategies must be emphasized to accelerate treatments. Further, these strategies must be coordinated with partners and other federal land management agencies.

b. Fire Management Plans and land management plans will appropriately incorporate mitigation, burned-area rehabilitation, and fuels reduction and restoration activities that contribute to ecosystem sustainability.

There is a need to more effectively and directly integrate fire management activities with other natural resource goals. For example, comprehensive restoration plans, addressing both short-term and long-term needs, should be designed for

implementation. Since noxious and invasive weeds are a significant problem in many fire-dominated ecosystems, rapid response strategies should be established.

2. RESPONSE TO WILDLAND FIRE

Base responses to wildland fires on approved Fire Management Plans and land management plans, regardless of ignition source or the location of the ignition.

The management response to fires, regardless of source, must be based on the approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans, based on the land management objectives of the area, guide the appropriate response through criteria and prescriptions. Determination of appropriate response will include an evaluation of such factors as risks to firefighter and public health and safety, weather, fuel conditions, threats, and values to be protected. Fires in areas without approved Fire Management Plans, or with Fire Management Plans that are not consistent with the 2001 Federal Fire Policy, must be suppressed. Guidance for the development of strategic and operational plans, workforce training and qualifications, resource allocation and dispatch protocols, and other activities necessary to prepare for and respond to wildland fires are to be consistent across agencies and not based on the ignition source or location of the fire. Agency directives, manuals, handbooks, guides, and similar documents should be revised as necessary. Since 1995 the budget structures for the Department of the Interior and USDA Forest Service fire management programs have been revised so that source of ignition is no longer a factor in response decisions. However, additional administrative or legal barriers may continue to make it difficult to implement a single response system. Agencies should act to eliminate or minimize these barriers to facilitate effective implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

A flow chart depicting what action will be taken after an ignition, regardless of source, is provided in Appendix F.

3. WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE

a. Accelerate and expand ongoing efforts, such as the FIREWISE program, to increase public awareness of the risks of building and living in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Although public recognition and understanding of the Wildland Urban Interface has markedly improved since 1995, communities and homeowners are still falling short of taking sufficient action to mitigate fire risks.

b. Accelerate and expand efforts to identify Wildland Urban Interface areas that lack formal structural fire protection, and encourage States and local communities to form rural fire departments where none exist.

Federal agencies have no legal authority on private land. Therefore, this effort must be coordinated through State and local governments and with individual homeowners.

4. PLANNING

Complete, or update, Fire Management Plans for all areas with burnable vegetation.

Fire Management Plans, based on underlying land use or resource management plans, are the principal foundation for implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. High priority must be placed on completing Fire Management Plans. Agencies such as the Departments of Defense and Energy that previously did not endorse or follow the 1995 Federal Fire Policy should begin development of Fire Management Plans. In some cases agencies may need to update, amend, or otherwise revise underlying land management plans. However, the existence of obsolete land management plans should not be reason for failure to complete or update Fire Management Plans. The land managing agencies should continue to work with other agencies to ensure that Fire Management Plans consistently address the effects of fire management activities on public health and on environmental quality.

5. SCIENCE

- a. **Continue to develop science programs to provide the foundation for land and Fire Management Plans and activities. These programs must address the land and fire management information needs of land managers, conduct basic and applied research, transfer information to end users, and ensure that appropriate results are applied and implemented.**

The Joint Fire Science Program has made good initial efforts to meet fuels management information needs of fire managers. However, a broader effort is required to support all the science-related Action Items in the 1995 Report, and to implement the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. Science activities should cover restoration and rehabilitation programs and the social dimensions of fire management. A partnership between managers and research scientists is needed to develop clear procedures for identifying information needs. Since not all future information needs can be anticipated, fire science programs should include both basic and applied research, and address local as well as broad, nationwide needs. Critical to fire science program success are mechanisms to ensure that the information is transferred to land and fire managers in a usable form. Similarly, managers must ensure that land and Fire Management Plans and actions actively incorporate and apply the new information.

- b. **Develop coordinated databases for federal fire information that support fire program development and implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.**

Systems to collect essential wildland fire data and information should be developed and implemented to support internal and external program needs. While each agency is responsible for collecting and reporting data, consistent systems, reporting thresholds and criteria, data fields, and terms are essential to assure the reliability and credibility of the information for its intended use. Other information sources related to wildland fires (such as the wildland fire information collected by the National Fire Incident Reporting System) should be reviewed to determine whether that information (a) is applicable and appropriate for program needs, and (b) can and should be linked to programmatic databases.

6. WORKFORCE AND ORGANIZATION

a. Develop an interagency strategy for wildland fire workforce management.

A national, interagency workload analysis is needed to determine the future workload and workforce skills mix necessary to accomplish the full range of fire management activities. Demographic information about the current organization should be used, along with initial attack requirements identified through agency fire planning activities, to help develop this strategy.

b. Review the structure of fire management and fire suppression organizations.

Federal agencies, in cooperation with non-federal partners, need to review the structure of their operational fire management organizations to ensure efficient, interagency implementation of the full range of fire management activities. Of principal concern are organizations to manage large fires and organizations to accomplish prescribed fire and other fuel treatment activities. These reviews will require a common approach among fire management agencies.

7. FUNDING

Provide full funding for fire management and associated programs to ensure successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

The individual fire management agencies, the Administration, and the Congress must work to develop and adopt annual budgets for fire management preparedness, fuels management activities, scientific support, post-fire stabilization and rehabilitation, and support for State and local cooperators. Continued levels of funding to support all aspects of the fire management, fuels management, and related activities will be required in Fiscal Year 2002 and future years in order to continue to implement the Report to the President and the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. Analyses by the two Departments indicate that funding for all aspects of fire management, fuels management, and related activities needs to grow substantially. Implementation of the Report to the President will substantially increase planning, environmental review, and Endangered Species Act consultation workloads, requiring increased funding for agencies and organizations with those program responsibilities.

Adequate funding for agencies not historically considered fire management agencies is also critical. Those with land management responsibilities—the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and Bureau of Reclamation—do not have specific, stable, adequate funding sources to implement the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. Agencies with supporting programs, such as the National Weather Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Geological Survey, may require additional funding to support implementation of fire management, fuels management, and related activities.

Finally, increased federal support for non-federal organizations through programs such as the State and Private Forestry Program of the USDA Forest Service and programs in the Department of the Interior to support rural fire districts is critical to ensure that cooperating fire organizations are able to implement fire policy consistently.

8. COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Develop a national, interagency communication and education program to enhance understanding of the fire management mission for both internal and external audiences.

A national, interagency communication and education program requires that all federal fire agencies, along with their partners and cooperators, design consistent messages and strategies to communicate those messages. Both internal (all levels of the agencies) and external (public, non-federal organizations) audiences should be targeted. Agencies should develop and implement a communication and education program in a joint, collaborative manner.

9. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

a. Establish a mechanism for coordinated interagency and interdisciplinary oversight of implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

Successful implementation of 2001 Federal Fire Policy requires coordination, consistency, and agreement among five traditional fire management operating agencies in two Departments, requires fire managers to forge new working relationships with other disciplines within those agencies, and requires the inclusion of agencies not traditionally integrated into wildland fire management activities. Although some interagency groups and committees exist to help facilitate coordination, they do not include the full range of affected programs and often lack authority to resolve differences.

A new mechanism for coordinated interagency and interdisciplinary implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy is necessary to lead the broad array of agencies and programs in the future. The principal functions of such a mechanism would be to:

- provide a forum for raising and resolving issues across agency and disciplinary lines;
- provide strategic direction and leadership for overall implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy;
- provide oversight and evaluation of program effectiveness and success; and
- provide a focal point for consolidating and articulating funding and workforce requirements necessary to implement the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

This mechanism must include the following features:

- include all agencies with fire management or directly related programs;
- ability to bring skills and resources together to reach common agreement on interagency and interdisciplinary matters;
- authority, either directly or through access to senior agency managers, to resolve differences in a timely manner.

This mechanism could be based on a number of different models for cross-agency leadership and coordination. However, dedicated personnel responsible for this function are essential.

b. Expand the regular and ongoing participation in fire management program management and implementation to all federal agencies with fire-related capabilities and responsibilities.

Fire management has traditionally been the province of the USDA Forest Service and the four principal land management agencies of the Department of the Interior. However, many other agencies also have varying degrees of land management, regulatory, or other fire-related responsibilities, capabilities, and interests. These include (but are not limited to) the Departments of Defense and Energy, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the endangered species management programs of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. The participation and integration of these agencies in the fire management program needs to be expanded at both the senior policy level and the operational level through participation, as appropriate, in such organizations as the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, and Geographic Area Coordinating Groups.

c. Improve coordination among all federal, State, tribal, and local organizations.

Successful implementation of all aspects of fire management activities requires improved coordination among federal agencies and a variety of State, tribal, and local organizations. Many non-federal organizations, such as State regulatory bodies, have not usually been included in planning and program development activities. Other organizations with operational roles, such as State and local emergency management agencies, have not been integrated into fire suppression activities. Coordination can be improved through existing organizations such as Geographic Area Coordinating Groups and Multi-Agency Coordinating Groups. In other cases, new or ad hoc methods of coordination may be appropriate.

d. Standardize and implement operational policies and procedures.

Develop and use, to the maximum extent possible, standardized operational procedures for wildland fire management agencies. Establish and implement a clear, concise system of accountability based on standard job performance requirements.

e. Develop a national plan for weather services that provides products, standards, and services to support the full range of responses required by both federal and State wildland fire management agencies.

A national plan should be developed that articulates the weather products, standards, and services needed to support the entire spectrum of wildland fire responses, and the best means of meeting these requirements. The plan should specifically address recommendations from the NWCG, the action items of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy, and support for meteorological services for State, tribal, and local organizations involved in wildland fire management. The plan should resolve the issue of providing non-federal organizations with meteorological services needed to support the full range of fire management responses.

The Office of the Federal Coordinator for Meteorology is uniquely qualified to develop such a plan. That office can establish a process for coordinating with fire management agencies and the NWS, and develop a plan that lays out options to assure that adequate weather services are available to both federal and non-federal fire management agencies.

10. EVALUATION

Establish clear mechanisms for evaluating the 2001 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation.

Evaluation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation will require clear performance measures, mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data, and the tracking of accomplishments. All of these should be developed and used on an interagency, interdisciplinary basis.

The underlying 2001 Federal Fire Policy should be evaluated on a 3 to 5 year cycle, without waiting for specific fire events as has happened in the past.

Evaluation of policy implementation should include both headquarters and field organizations and activities, and their effectiveness in meeting the performance measures. Evaluations should be linked to each agency's existing program and project evaluation process. However, the interagency, interdisciplinary aspects of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy may require supplemental or unique evaluation activities.

11. 1995 FEDERAL FIRE POLICY ACTION ITEMS

Complete implementation of Action Items recommended from the 1995 Report in accordance with the 2001 Federal Fire Policy and the Implementation Actions in this Review and Update.

The 1995 Report contained over 80 specific Action Items to implement the recommended policy. Many of these have been completed and have been incorporated into normal agency fire management programs and activities. Many have been partially implemented. A few have not been implemented and a few others, upon further review and analysis, are no longer appropriate or relevant. In general, implementation has been least successful when consistency and compatibility across agencies was required or when integration of fire with other disciplines was required. Appendix E contains a detailed listing of each Action Item and the status of implementation. Included is a recommendation for future action. Continued attention to full implementation of the concepts and principles of the great majority of the Action Items from 1995 remains critical for implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. In many cases, the specific language of an Action Item is less important than accomplishing the overall objective of the item. The recommended future action for each item in Appendix E includes discussion about aspects requiring special attention as well as noting areas in common with other Implementation Actions in this Review and Update.

