

# MANAGING WILDLAND FIRE: FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

Excerpts from the National Interagency Teleconference  
Broadcast on April 8, 1998

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

"...more emphasis on up-front planning that's going to be expected through implementation of the new policy."

Lynn Sprague, Regional Forester in California:

"We have been directed to implement the Policy and we are...It is the responsibility of all agency administrators to make sure that this happens on their units, on their watch."

Kirk Rowdabaugh, Director of Fire Management for the Arizona State Land Dept.:

"Interagency cooperation relates to every aspect of our job, whether it's strategic planning or building a fireline...Wildland fire doesn't stop at administrative or political boundaries and neither do our fire management responsibilities."

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

"The Fire Policy gives us the flexibility to be creative and innovative. There's no one textbook solution to the challenges that face us. The Policy does place a much greater emphasis on up-front planning. In fact, without good planning, your flexibility will be extremely limited...And the up-front planning must be done together with your local, state, and other federal partners."

Keith Beartusk, Area Director to the BIA:

"It comes right back to planning. It will take land use plans to recognize the value of wildland fire, and fire management plans that recognize that the public needs sustainable protection and our firefighters deserve a safe working environment."

Kirk Rowdabaugh, Director of Fire Management for the Arizona State Land Dept.:

"Planning is the key."

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

"Everything we do in fire management is tied to what our plans say, from our land use plans to our fire management plans...We have to have good plans in order to...avoid crisis decision-making."

Lynn Sprague, Regional Forester in California:

"As agency administrators, it's up to us to make sure we make the best possible use of evolving scientific knowledge and work with our neighbors through our agency planning processes..."

Tina Gromo, moderator for the teleconference:

Question: "Who has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the Fire Policy is implemented?"

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

Answer: "Everybody in the line management of fire has the responsibility. Everyone from the line officer to the firefighter to the administrator. Everybody in that line has that responsibility."

Lynn Sprague, USFS Regional Forester in California:

"It is absolutely essential that agency administrators (and) line officers get totally engaged in this Fire Policy, and how we incorporate that into our total management responsibilities."

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

"One of the things the new Policy has done for us is to increase the amount of funding available...There's about \$50 million in the Forest Service budget and about \$33 million in the Interior Department budget for implementation of this Policy, particularly the Hazardous Fuels Reduction component of it."

Lynn Sprague, USFS Regional Forester in California:

"The Policy is pretty clear on this: we're dealing with how do we integrate fire and fuels treatment into our total landscape planning and management."

Skip Ladd, Assistant Regional Director for USFWS:

"That prescribed burning (and) natural resource management take a co-equal role with fire suppression is an important concept...That up-front planning can identify the very specific objectives that are desired to maintain a healthy ecosystem, maintain high quality fish and wildlife habitats, maintain a healthy water quality. Those kinds of things are important and if those can be laid out up-front in a good planning document, then that's where dollars are going to be targeted."

Becki Heath, Leavenworth District Ranger, Wenatchee National Forest:

"I'm excited about our Interagency direction and the new Fire Policy."

Barry Welch, Assistant Area Director for the BIA:

"The key to building a foundation for safety begins with preparedness, responsiveness, and accountability...You can never be overprepared or prepared too early...You must be prepared before a crisis hits, and when it comes to wildland fire, preparedness means planning...Policy implementation is dependent on getting your planning done."

Becki Heath, Leavenworth District Ranger, Wenatchee National Forest:

"We must build community and partnership relationships and a strong culture for safety prior to an incident."

Announcer:

"Planning is key to implementing Fire Policy on the ground. Good planning is the cornerstone of all Nine Guiding Principles and all 13 Policies contained in this report. Land and Resource Management Plans must give direction for wildland fire management. Plans must identify opportunities to use fire to achieve resource management objectives and analyze the potential impacts, both positive and negative of fire use or exclusion. All land, resource, and fire management planning must be done across agency boundaries and include early involvement of adjacent land managers...And of course the public must be a

key player from the earliest stages of planning if we're to have the benefit of their input and support, which is critical to the success of our land management programs. We must ensure that a fire management plan is developed and continuously updated for all areas subject to wildland fire...The Plan and Project must also meet NEPA requirements before the Project begins."

Announcer:

"What does the Fire Policy say our options are in managing wildland fire? The answer is: what do our plans say? If we don't have a plan, our only option is aggressive initial attack. The Fire Policy gives us a full range of options from aggressive initial attack to monitoring. Limitations that are dictated by laws, regulations, other policies, local conditions, and social concerns are documented during the planning process. The plan, its parameters, and existing conditions determine the range of options available when a management response must be selected. An appropriate management response considers both protection and fire use objectives, and must be based on values to be protected. Appropriate management response could be aggressive suppression on one portion of a wildland fire, and monitoring on another portion of the same fire. So, what does the Fire Policy say our options are for managing wildland fire? The answer is: what does our plan say?"

Tina Gromo, moderator for the teleconference:

"Good planning is critical to your wildland fire management program."

Arch Wells, Chief Forester of the BIA:

"Implementation of this Policy must be driven by land and resource management planning...The affected public must be involved in development of the land use plans and associated fire management plans for maximum ownership, cooperation (and) coordination through understanding and participation."

Arch Wells, Chief Forester of the BIA:

"The role of wildland fire is an essential ecological process and necessary inevitable agent of change that. That it be incorporated into our planning process is absolutely necessary. So, there are three primary levels of planning that involve the role of fire. One, the overall land use or natural resource plan. Underneath that and integrated into that is the fire management plan...Then the action plan...Follow the NEPA process...Good plans result in sound, efficient decisions. The bottom line is this: without approved quality fire management plans, the only option available is total suppression with associated risks, costs, and unplanned resource loss."

Sheryl Maddux, USFS District Ranger from Tennessee:

"Many units do not have adequate fire input into their land management planning process. Reasonable direction for the use of fire is missing. Correcting these omissions should be one of our highest priorities. Until each plan is revised or amended, a manager will be limited in his or her options on the use of fire to gain resource benefits. Resource managers must establish solid, quantifiable objectives based upon the best available science. These objectives should be spelled out as completely as possible in the land management plan. This will provide direction for the prescribed fire and fire use programs."

Sheryl Maddux, USFS District Ranger from Tennessee:

"Without an approved fire management plan that complies with NEPA, smoke management and public involvement, we only have one management option for wildfire and that is total suppression. Agency administrators need to take an active role in developing a common understanding of fire management plans both to agency employees and to the affected public. The public must be brought along throughout the planning process and their input, both positive and negative, must be addressed. This is a prime opportunity for agency administrators to explain and provide positive support for the new Fire Policy and the fire management plan or program on their unit...The Policy gives the manager the increased latitude to manage all wildland prescribed fires in a manner that will increase the health of ecosystems, reduce the cost and damage to wildfires, and increase the level of safety both (to) firefighters and the public. Our Fire Policy will be successful if we work together."

Rick Coleman, USFWS in Washington D.C.:

"Teamwork is vital to successful planning. By including land managers and neighbors and stakeholders and resource specialists and fire specialists and the public, we gather all those important perspectives necessary to write the best fire management plan...Resource management specialists and the public need to help the fire staff develop the fire management plan...Agency administrators and staff specialists should not be shy about working with any group."

Jim Hubbard, Colorado State Forester:

"...more up-front planning is going to be necessary...We have to have a fire management plan, as you've heard. It is essential. We have to define appropriate response. If we don't, we don't have any options. That's a critical element."

Tina Gromo, moderator for the teleconference:

"Planning is the key to managing resources by managing fire."

Earl Peterson, Florida State Forester:

"It behooves us to see we have a good basic fire management plan. This is key."

Bill Paleck, Superintendent, North Cascades National Park:

"Different areas and different agencies are going to have different priorities...Hopefully, a good planning program will establish the rationale behind those priorities...We need the quality planning to guide us in our efforts wherever we are."

Anonymous caller:

Question: "To what extent should we be using prescribed fire in plant associations which are not fire dependent?"

Earl Peterson, Florida State Forester:

Answer: "It's best for those communities where they are fire-dependent...If they're fire-dependent, it is (a) must. If they're fire-tolerant, it is a do-able thing."

Robert Stanton, Director of the National Park Service:

"I would like to reinforce that Fire Policy...All agencies will develop fire management plans to build and maintain a close link between fire and land resource management...Fire

management plans and activities must be based on the best available science...Fire management plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations. This means that fire management plans will balance desired objectives with other societal needs...Full collaboration among federal agencies and with states, local, and private entities are essential to program implementation."

Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs:

"If wildland fire management is not fully integrated into your resource management program, it should be! Wildland fire is an inseparable ingredient in sound resource management. The policies embraced in the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review require stronger ties to land and resource management plans, and provide you with a greater opportunity to manage for long-term health of the land."

Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs:

"More and more people are interested in the health of our land. They recognize the increasing value of our natural resources and they want to have a say in how we manage them. They are demanding a place at the table, and the time and place to bring them to the table is right up-front, during your planning process. You've heard a lot today about getting your planning done, your land management plans, your fire management plans, and your operational and project plans. Without them, your hands are tied. Your only option when a fire starts is to put it out, even though that may not be the best option for the long-term health of the resources."

Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs:

"We simply must take the risks that are involved in moving away from a business-as-usual approach in fire management...Let me emphasize that (the) buck stops here. If you don't know what the December 1995 Fire Policy report says, now is the time to find out. This document is policy! Your agency accepts it and supports it. You have been given the mandate, the tools, and the funding structure. The rest is up to you. If you're waiting for someone to tell you to move forward, this telecast is your wake-up call."

Elaine Marquis-Brong, California BLM:

"It's extremely critical (that) people are working at the local level with all of their cooperators and members of the public to help educate and inform them."

Elaine Marquis-Brong, California BLM:

"Fire Planning is a must tied to the Fire Policy. That includes NEPA. The NEPA process is an extremely important process not only for the effects of fire, but the effects of accumulated fuels on the ecosystem and what impacts and tradeoffs (there) are. I'm going to say it (NEPA) is an integral part of the Fire Land Policy."