FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

POLICY & PROGRAM REVIEW

FINAL REPORT

DECEMBER 18, 1995

U .S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

U .S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Additional copies of this report may be obtained from

the Bureau of Land Management's Office of Fire and Aviation

at the

National Interagency Fire Center

Attn: External Affairs Office -

3833 South Development Avenue

Boise, Idaho 83705-5354

(208) 387-5150

or

(208) 387-5457

THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM

To:

Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management

Chief, USDA Forest Service

Director, National Park Service

Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Director, National Biological Service

Subject: Federal Wildland Fire Policy

We are pleased to accept and endorse the principles, policies, and recommendations in the attached

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review Report . These principles and

policies provide a common approach to wildland fire by our two Departments. We look forward to

the endorsement of these principles and policies by our Federal partner agencies, including the

Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Defense, so that we have a truly

Federal approach to wildland fire. We invite our partners in Tribal, State, and local governments

to endorse these principles and policies in order to promote an integrated, intergovernmental

approach to the management of wildland fire.

The principles and policies of the Report reiterate the commitment all of us have made to firefighter

and public safety. No resource or property value is worth endangering people; all of our actions

and our plans must reflect this commitment. Our second priority is to protect resources and

property, based on the relative values to be protected. We must be realistic about our abilities to

fight severe wildfire. As natural resource managers we must make prudent decisions based on

sound assessments of all the risks. Good management reduces the likelihood of catastrophic fire

by investing in risk- reduction measures ; good management also recognizes when nature must take

its course. The principles and policies of the Report, along with the recommended actions, will

improve our collective ability to be better wildland fire risk managers.

The philosophy, as well as the specific policies and recommendations, of the Report continues to

move our approach to wildland fire management beyond the traditional realms of fire suppression

by further integrating fire into the management of our lands and resources in an ongoing and

systematic manner, consistent with public health and environmental quality considerations . We

strongly support the integration of wildland fire into our land management planning and

implementation activities. Managers must learn to use fire as one of the basic tools for

accomplishing their resource management objectives.

Y OF)y

\~ ~ F

USA

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

By this memorandum we are directing that you assume the responsibility for the implementation of

the principles, policies, and recommendations in the Report. Implementation should be a matter of

high priority within your bureaus and should:

ï¿½

Be consistent with the nine Guiding Principles contained in the Report .

ï¿½ Occur on a joint, interagency basis wherever possible to ensure the
consistent application of policy.

ï¿½ Involve a broad spectrum of program areas, including resource
managers, agency administrators, scientists, and planners, as well as the

wildland fire management staffs.

ï¿½

Address local, interagency, integrated planning as a critical means of

ensuring that on-the-ground implementation is as effective as possible.

ï¿½ Coordinate with other Federal agencies, including the Federal
Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency,

the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the

Department of Defense.

ï¿½

Ensure coordination with Tribal, State, and local partners .

ï¿½ Recognize the results of the wildland-urban interface project sponsored
by the Western Governors Association.

We request that you prepare a joint, integrated strategy for implementing the Report by no later

than March 1, 1996. At a minimum this strategy should describe the priorities, timeframes,

responsibilities, leadership, and the participation of other Federal agencies and non-Federal

partners and cooperators. Each of you should designate a senior official, with the authority to

ensure implementation, to work in concert with the two Departments to guide overall

implementation of the Report.

We recognize that complete implementation of all of the recommendations will take some time .

Priority should be placed on educating and informing employees of the philosophy, principles, and

policies of the Report and on examining how quickly and efficiently we can update resource and

land management plans to incorporate wildland fire considerations.

REPORT RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE BY THE SECRETARIES:
Dr. Charles Philpot. Co-Chair
Director, Pacific Northwest Research Station
USDA Forest Service
Dr Ann Bartuska
Director, Forest Pest Management
USDA Forest Service
Dale Bosworth
Regional Forester In

ountain Region
USDA Forest S
Douglas
Director, Office of Hazard & Fire Programs Coord.
DOI / Office of the Secretary
Rick Gale
Deputy Chief Ranger
DOI / National Park Service
Lester. Rosenkrance
Director, National Office of Fire & Aviation
DOI / Bureau of Land Management
	1
W gt donk'I
Station Leader, Yosemite F f d Station
DOI / National Biological Service
Gi a/
Rich Przywarty j Sally Shaver
Chief, Operations Division, Office of Meteorology Director, Air Quality Strategies & Standards Division
Department of Commerce / National Weather Service

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
udia Schechter, Co-Chair
erector, Operations - Policy, Management & Budget
DOI / Office of the Secretary
Keith Beartusk
Assistant Area Director, Billings Area Office
DOI / Bureau of Indian Affairs
Stan Coloff
Physical Scientist.,
DOI / National Biological Service
Mike Edrington
Director, Aviation & Fire Management
Pacific Northwest Region
USDA Forest Service
Dr. Mary Jo Lavin
Director, Fire & Aviation Management
USDA Forest Service
Dr. Robert Stree
Assistant Director, Refuges & Wildlife
DOI / U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
CONCURRENCE WITH RECOMMENDATION FOR ACCEPTANCE:
C,arn~e H Bro~n

Vc
1
Administrator
U. S. Fire Administration
Richard Krimm
Assistant Director, Response & Recovery
Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

POLICY & PROGRAM REVIEW

FINAL REPORT

TABLE O F CONTENTS
Executive Summary	_.	III
Introduction	
1
Guiding Principles and Policies	
4
Topic Area Discussions
Role of Wildland Fire in Resource Management	.... /
UseofWildland Fire	_

.	13
Preparedness and Suppression	17
Wildland/Urban Interface Protection	21
Coordinated Program Management	29
Appendix IReferences	35
Appendix IL Work Groups	39
FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

T

he challenge of managing wildland fire in the

United States is increasing in complexity and mag-

nitude. Catastrophic wildfire now threatens millions of

wildland acres, particularly where vegetation patterns

have been altered by past land-use practices and a century

of fire suppression. Serious and potentially permanent

ecological deterioration is possible where fuel loads exceed

historical conditions. Enormous public and private values

are at high risk, and our nation's capability to respond to

this threat is becoming overextended. The goals and

actions presented in this report encourage a more

proactive approach to wildland fire to reduce this threat .

The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture,

together with Tribal governments, States, and other

jurisdictions, are responsible for the protection and

management of natural resources on lands they admin-

ister. Because wildland fire respects no boundaries,

uniform Federal policies and programs are essential .

And, as firefighting resources become increasingly

scarce, it is more important than ever to strengthen

cooperative relationships.

The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and

Program Review was chartered by the Secretaries of the

Interior and Agriculture to ensure that Federal policies

are uniform and programs are cooperative and cohesive .

This report addresses five major topic areas, presents nine

guiding principles that are fundamental to wildland fire

management, and recommends a set of thirteen Federal

wildland fire policies. While unique agency missions

may result in minor operational differences, having, for the

first time, one set of "umbrella" Federal fire policies will

enhance effective and efficient operations across adminis-

trative boundaries and improve our capability to meet the

challenges posed by current wildland fire conditions.

Public input and employee review have provided

the foundation upon which many of the policy and

program goals and actions contained in this report are

based. Initially, broad policy and program issues were

presented for comment . These initial comments sharp-

ened the focus and were used in preparing a draft

report The draft was then made available for both

internal and external comment . More than 300

comments were received and used in preparing these

final policy and program conclusions.

Following are some of the key points made in

this report:

ï¿½ Protection of human life is reaffirmed as the first
priority in wildland fire management . Property and

natural/cultural resources jointly become the second

priority, with protection decisions based on values to

be protected and other considerations.

ï¿½

Wildland fire, as a critical natural process, must be

reintroduced into the ecosystem. This will be accom-

plished across agency boundaries and will be based

upon the best available science .

ï¿½

Agencies will create an organizational climate that

supports employees who implement a properly planned

program to reintroduce wildland fire. ï¿½

Where wildland fire cannot be safely reintroduced

because of hazardous fuel build-ups, some form of

pretreatment must be considered, particularly in

wildland/urban interface areas.

ï¿½

Every area with burnable vegetation will have an

approved Fire Management Plan.

ï¿½ Wildland fire management decisions and resource
management decisions go hand in hand and are based

on approved Fire Management and land and resource

management plans- At the same time, agency adminis-

trators must have the ability to choose from the full

spectrum of fire management actions - from prompt

suppression to allowing fire to function in its natural

ecological role .

ï¿½

All aspects of wildland fire management will be

conducted with the involvement of all partners;

programs, activities, and processes will be compatible .

ï¿½ The role of Federal agencies in the wildland/urban
interface includes wildland firefighting, hazard fuels

reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and

technical assistance. No one entity can resolve and

manage all interface issues; it must be a cooperative

effort. Ultimately, however, the primary responsibility

rests at the State and local levels.

ï¿½

Structural fire protection in the wildland/urban

interface is the responsibility of Tribal, State, and

local governments.

FEDERAL WILOLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

iv

ï¿½

The Western Governors' Association will serve

as a catalyst to involve State and local agencies and

private stakeholders in achieving a cooperative

approach to fire prevention and protection in the

wildland/urban interface .

ï¿½

Federal agencies must place more emphasis on

educating internal and external audiences about how

and why we use and manage wildland fire.

ï¿½

Trained and certified employees will participate

in the wildland fire program, others will support the

program as needed. Administrators are responsible and

will be accountable for making employees available .

ï¿½

Good data and statistics are needed to support fire

management decisions . Agencies must jointly establish

an accurate, compatible, and accessible database of

fire- and ecosystem-related data.

The success of the actions recommended in this

report depends upon four things: Every agency adminis-

trator must ensure that these policies are incorporated into

all actions. Fire professionals must work with agency

administrators to make the policies work on the ground .

Managers and staffs must actively implement the recom-

mendations and work with their constituents to ensure

success. And every employee of every agency must be

committed to follow through on the ground.

Finally, agencies and the public must change their

expectation that all wildfires can be controlled or

suppressed. No organization, technology, or equip-

ment can provide absolute protection when unusual

fuel build-ups, extreme weather conditions, multiple

ignitions, and extreme fire behavior come together to

form a catastrophic event .

To effect the recommended changes and to achieve

the consistent Federal policies reflected in this report,

the Steering Group recommends that all agencies be

directed to develop implementation plans that include

actions, assignments, and time frames .

I N T R O D U C T 1 O N

T

he Federal wildiand fire management community

has, for many years, been a leader in interagency

communication and cooperation to achieve mutual

objectives. While many policies and procedures are

similar among the agencies, some significant differences

may hinder efficient interagency cooperation . Because

it is prudent to manage consistently across agency

boundaries, uniform cooperative programs and policies

are critical to efficient and effective fire management .

Policies and programs must incorporate the wisdom

and experience of the past, reflect today's values, and be

able to adapt to the challenges of the future. They must

be based on science and sound ecological and economic

principles and, above all, must form the basis for

suppressing and using fire safely

While continual improvements are inherent in

the fire program, the events of the 1994 wildfire season

created a renewed awareness and concern among the

Federal land management agencies and our constituents

about the impacts of wildfire. As a result of those

concerns and in response to specific recommendations

in the report of the South Canyon Fire Interagency

Management Review Team (IMRT), the Federal Wild-

land Fire Management Policy and Program Review was

chartered to ensure that uniform Federal policies and

cohesive interagency and intergovernmental fire manage-

ment programs exist. The review process was directed by

an interagency Steering Group whose members represent-

ed the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, the

I',S. Fire Administration, the National Weather Service,

the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the

Environmental Protection Agency The Steering Group

received staff support from a core team representing the

Departments of Agriculture and the Interior. During

the review process, the core team gathered input from

teams of internal and external subject-matter experts

tsce Appendix II).

The Federal agencies referenced throughout this

report arc the five principal fire/land management

agencies, including the Forest Service (FS) under the

Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Land

Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS),

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Indian

Affairs (BIA) under the Department of the Interior .

The term "Federal wildland" as used in this report

recognizes that Indian trust lands are private lands held

in trust by the government and that Tribes possess a

Nationhood status and retain inherent powers of self

government . It is also recognized that, in addition to

the five principal Federal land management agencies

that have participated in this review, the Department

of Defense and other Federal entities also manage a

significant amount of wildland and may choose to

adopt the fire management strategies and policies

contained in this report.

Early in this review process, internal and external

ideas were sought and broad program management

issues were identified. The review was announced and

input was requested in the Federal Register on January 3,

1995. At the same time, letters were sent to approximately

300 individuals and organizations across the nation and

employee input was sought through internal communica-

tions within the Departments of the Interior and Agricul-

ture. Subsequently, Steering Group members met with

national stakeholders, the Western Governors' Association,

and employees to get additional, more focused input; they

incorporated input resulting from the Environmental

Regulation and Prescribed Fire conference held in Tampa,

Florida, in March 1995; and they individually continued

to network with their constituents.

The draft report was published in its entirety in the

Federal Register on June 22, 1995, and a 30-day public

comment period was announced. Copies of the report

were mailed to a greatly expanded audience, including

those who commented early in the review process.

The full report was also available on Internet . At the

end of the 30-day comment period, the Steering Group

had received a significant number of requests to allow

additional time for comments . In response to those

requests, the comment period was reopened, closing

for a second time on September 25, 1995 . In total,

308 comments were received on the draft report . An

independent contractor completed a content analysis

of the comments; the resulting report and individual

responses were used in the preparation of this report .

A number of related reviews and studies form a

broad foundation of technical, professional, and

scientific assessment upon which the recommended

policies, goals, and actions contained in this report are

founded, including:

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

1

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

ï¿½

Final Report on Fire Management Policy ; USDA/

USDI-May 1989.

ï¿½

Rural Fire Protection in America : A Challenge for the

Future, National Association of State Foresters- 1991 .

ï¿½

Oversight Hearing: Fire Suppression, Fire Preven-

tion, and Forest Health Issues and Programs; Commit-

tee on Agriculture and the Committee on Natural

Resources, House of Representatives - October 4, 1994.

ï¿½

Report of the National Commission on Wildfire

Disasters; Sampson, Chair - 1994.

ï¿½

Western Forest Health Initiative Report, USDA

Forest Service -1994.

ï¿½ Fire Management Strategic Assessment Report;
USDA Forest Service - 1994.

ï¿½

Fire Management and Ecosystem Health in the

National Park System; USDI National Park Service-

September 1994

ï¿½

Report of the Interagency Management Review

Team, South Canyon Fire; USDI/USDA - October 1994.

ï¿½

Bureau of Land Management Fire and Aviation

Programwide Management Review Report, USDI BLM -

April 1995.

Communication and collaboration are highlighted

throughout this report. The planning, implementation,

and monitoring of wildland fire management actions

will be done on an interagency basis with the involve-

ment of all partners. The term "partners," as used in

this report, is all encompassing, including the Federal

land management and regulatory agencies ; Tribal gov-

ernments ; Department of Defense; State, county, and

local governments; the private sector, and the public.

We believe there is no option to this renewed emphasis

on public participation. Although initially time

consuming, this approach will lead to a long-term

payoff, including an increase in public safety, reduced

costs and losses, and a wider acceptance of the impor-

tant role that wildland fire plays in the management of

our public lands.

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

10

EDUCATION

For many people, fire remains a fearsome, destructive

force that can and should be controlled at all costs .

Smokey Bear's simple, time-honored only you" fire

prevention message has been so successful that any

complex talk about the healthy, natural role of fire and

the scientific concepts that support it are often lost by

internal and external audiences . A comprehensive

message is needed that clearly conveys the desired

balance of avoiding fires with adverse effects while

simultaneously increasing ecologically beneficial fire .

The ecological and societal risks of using and

excluding fire have not been adequately clarified and

quantified to allow open and thorough discussions

among managers and the public . Few understand that

integrating fire into land management is not a one-time,

immediate fix but a continual, long-term process . It is

not an end in itself but rather a means to a more

healthy end_ Full agency commitment to internal and

external information and education regarding fire and

other ecological processes is needed. Adaptive and

innovative fire and land management is severely limited

when agency employees and the public misunderstand

or remain skeptical about the role of fire .

THE TASK

The task before us - reintroducing fire - is both

urgent and enormous- Conditions on millions of acres

of wildlands increase the probability of large, intense

fires beyond am' scale yet witnessed . These severe fires

will in turn increase the risk to humans, to property,

and to the land upon which our social and economic

well-being is so intimately intertwined.

RECOMMEND A T I O N S :
P L A N N I N G

GOALS

ï¿½ Fire management goals and objectives, including the
reintroduction of fire, are incorporated into land man-

agement planning to restore and maintain sustainable

ecosystems. Planning is a collaborative effort, with all

interested partners working together to develop and

implement management objectives that cross jurisdic-

tional boundaries.

Clearly defined fire management goals, objectives,

and actions are developed and updated in comprehen-

sive Fire Management Plans. The use of fire to sustain

ecosystem health is based on sound scientific principles

and information and is balanced with other societal

goals. including public health and safety, air quality,

and other specific environmental concerns

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will:

ï¿½

use a compatible fire management planning system

that recognizes both fire use and fire protection as

inherent parts of natural resource management. this

system will ensure adequate fire suppression capabili-

ties and support fire reintroduction efforts .

ï¿½

develop Fire Management Plans for all areas subject

to wildland fires. These plans will:

- use information about fire regimes, current

conditions, and land management objectives

as a basis to develop fire management goals

and objectives.

- address all potential wildland fire occur-

rences and include a full range of fire

management actions.

-use new knowledge and monitoring results

to revise fire management Goals, objectives,

and actions.

-be linked closely to land and resource

management plans.

develop research programs that provide a sound

scientific basis for the integration of wildland fire into

land-use and resource management.

create a system for coordination and cooperation

among land managers and regulators that explores

options within existing laws to allow for the use of fire

to achieve goals of ecosystem health while at the same

time protecting individual components of the environ-

ment, human health, and safety. This system will:

-allow for early collaboration during the

process of developing new land management

plans and provide a mechanism for incorpor-

ating input as existing plans are implemented

or revised.

encourage land managers and regulators to

enter into agreements that set forth the actions

each will take before and during the time fire

is reintroduced in their area of responsibility

continue ongoing efforts to jointly develop compat-

ible, ecosystem-based, multiple-scale, interagency land

management plans that involve all interested parties

and facilitate adaptive management. This process will:

- fully integrate ecological concepts that

consider long-term dynamics and cross

agency boundaries.

- effectively incorporate current fire-related

information, including scientific knowledge,

risk assessment, social and economic

concerns, and public health considerations.

- ensure that existing land management

plans are revised or updated to address the

above actions.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S :
R E I N T R O D U C T 1 O N O F F I R E

GOAL

ï¿½ Based upon sound scientific information and land,
resource, and fire management objectives, wildland fire

is used to restore and maintain healthy ecosystems and

to minimize undesirable fire effects. Fire management

practices are consistent for areas with similar manage-

ment objectives, regardless of jurisdiction_

ACTIONS

Federal agencies wilt

ï¿½

expedite the decision-making process by jointly

developing criteria for evaluating ecosystem condition

by ecosystem type and for prioritizing areas for the

reintroduction of fire to meet resource objectives and

reduce hazards. This process will identify those

ecosystems.

- where fire does not need to be reintroduced

(fire is not a significant natural component, or

the fire regime has not been altered).

- where fire is unlikely to succeed (fire would

be adverse, such as areas significantly altered

by fuel accumulations and species changes) ;

determine appropriate, ecologically sound

alternatives for these areas.

- where treatment with fire is essential or

potentially effective (fire is needed to improve

resource conditions or reduce risk and

hazard).

ï¿½ j ointly implement ecosystem-based fire management
programs to accomplish resource or landscape manage-

ment objectives when consistent with land management

plans. These programs will :

- strive to maintain the long-term integrity of

the natural resources and minimize the

undesirable effects of fire.

address the highest-priority needs in

ecosystem assessment, monitoring, and

management and determine the appropriate

scope of fire use, consistent with historical fire

regimes, including extent, timing, and risks

and consequences.

- use existing tools and develop new ones to

address today's more fragmented landscapes

and to enhance our ability to manage wildland

fires of varying size and intensity

- illustrate the management actions and their

results by establishing or expanding fire

management demonstration areas . ï¿½

conduct a collaborative fire research program to

improve the predictive understanding of wildland fire

and its relationship to ecosystem dynamics and to

strengthen the technological capabilities and organiza-

tional framework necessary to sustain the role of fire in

natural ecosystems .

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

11

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

12

RECOMMEND A T 1 O N S

E D U C A T 1 O N

GOAL

Clear and consistent information is provided to

internal and external audiences about existing condi-

tions, management goals and objectives, the role of

fire in achieving these objectives. and alternatives and

consequences of various fire management strategies .

As a result, informed audiences participate fully in

the land and fire management planning processes .

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will

establish an interdisciplinary team that includes all

agencies, regulators, and other partners to design a

consistent fire-role and -use message for decision

makers and the public. This message will :

- describe and cleat IN explain issues such as

ecosystem condition, risks, consequences

(including public health impacts), and costs

in open dialogue with internal and external

constituents.

-be designed to maximize open communica-

tions and reduce polarization among conflict-

ing interests regarding the use of fire.

ï¿½

build on existing interagency efforts to develop and

implement a strategic plan that educates the general

public and agency personnel about the role of fire . As

part of this effort, agencies will.

- develop and widely transmit a clear message

about the important role of fire as a natural

process and the risks and consequences of its

use and exclusion.

- integrate this message into existing agency

communication systems, agency and partner

initiatives (such as forest health, ecosystem,

management, etc.), and all external outreach

efforts, including television, magazines,

newspapers, and public meetings.

- encourage, create, and coordinate partner-

ships to achieve consistency in messages..

build public trust, and obtain public opinion.

- develop mandatory national and regional

interagency training programs to instill in all

employees an understanding of the role of fire

in natural systems.

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

20

RECOMMEND A T 1 O N 5

PROTECT 1 O N P R I O R I T I E S

GOAL

Firefighter and public safety is the first priority

when managing wiidiand fire. Federal agencies

have established protection priorities that recognize

the relative values of property and naturakeultural

resources to be protected.

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will. ï¿½

provide first Inr lit-cligster and public safety

Once people are committed to an incident, those

resources become the highest value to be protected

and receive the highest management considerations.

ï¿½

protect property and natural/cultural resources

secondary to firefighter and public safety

base the second protection priority on the relative

values of property and naturaiicultural resources when

firchghting personnel and equipment are limited .

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

PROTECTION C A P A B I L I T Y

GOAL

ï¿½

Federal agencies maintain sufficient fire suppression

and support capability.

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will

ï¿½

use standard criteria to assess overall suppression

and support requirementss

examine and identify, on an interagency basis,

employee availability at each organizational level,

based on fire qualifications and other necessary skills

to provide needed suppression and suppor This will

include planning for both initial attack and extended

attack at the local level.

ï¿½

develop and utilize, to the maximum extent possible,

the concept of closest initial attack forces and interagency

staffing for wildland fire suppression and support,

optimizing the use of the Federal and non-Federal work

force. Qualified contractors are a component to be

considered in suppression and support planning

ï¿½

use an analysis and decision making process that

considers, on an interagency basis, existing and

potential fire severity, suppression resource commit-

ment and availability; prescribed fire activity; environ-

mental, social, and political concerns ; and other

pertinent factors.

ï¿½ develop interagency severity plans to provide
increased fire suppression capability in emergency

situations, including accessing additional resources,

pre-positioning resources, and training emergency

firefighters. ï¿½

develop a standard interagency planning, budget-

ing, and staffing process.

W I L D L A N D /URBAN INTERFACE

P R O T E C T I O N

Fire threatening homes in the wildland/urban interface . Flammable building

materials and homes surrounded by dense vegetation create a dangerous fuel

source and hazardous conditions. (Photo courtesy of National Interagency

Fire Center)

S I T U A T I O N

BACKGROUND

The wildland/urban interface is defined as the line, area,

or zone where structures and other human develop-

ment meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland

or vegetative fuels (SAF, July 1990). It is synonymous

with the term "intermix.'

In reviewing current conditions, it is evident that

wildland/urban interface fire protection and prevention is

not a new problem, nor are the recommended solutions

newly conceived. Many of the reports and recommen-

dations generated in the aftermath of the wildfires that

destroyed homes are very similar in content and sub-

stance. For example, documents created as early as 1960

and through the 1970's and 1980s all contain the same

goals, i.e.. "create a uniform hazard rating system" or

wildland fuels must be managed near structures."

The problem is not one of finding new solutions

to an old problem but of implementing known solu-

tions. Deferred decision making is as much a problem

as the fires themselves. If history is to serve us in the

resolution of the wildland/urban interface problem, we

must take action on these issues now.

To do anything less is to guarantee

another review process in the after-

math of future catastrophic fires.

CURRENT STATUS

Wildland/urban interface protection is

important to the Federal government

because Federally managed lands are

located adjacent to or among State

lands and developed private lands.

Past fire management practices have

contributed to a build-up of highly

flammable, decadent fuels on those

Federal lands that are adjacent to

private residential developments.

The result is that fire hazards and

risks, as well as the population, are

increasing in the wildland/urban

interface adjacent to many Federal lands. In these areas,

Federal wildland firefighters are .often called upon to assist

local agencies. In some cases, Federal agencies are the

only source of fire protection . Federal firefighting

resources may also be asked to provide assistance where

there is no direct threat to Federal lands, such as occurred

on Long Island, New York, in August 1995. However,

with limited amounts of money, time, equipment, and

people, a fire burning in the interface currently demands

the protection of scattered structures at the sacrifice of

natural resources elsewhere. This represents a significant

fiscal liability to the Federal treasury, State and local

governments, and insurance carriers. There are often

large unreimbursed costs to property owners as well . In

addition, Federal response in the interface creates a safety

concern, "spreading Federal firefighters thin" and placing

them in situations for which they may not be adequately

trained or equipped.

Recent fires such as the 1994 Tyee fire in Washing-

ton, the 1994 Chicken and Blackwell/Corral complexes

in Idaho, the Southern California fire siege of 1993, and

the 1991 Oakland Hills fire are clear examples of the

complexity of protecting the wildland/urban interface.

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

21

EDERAL WILULAND

IRE MANAGEMENT

22

Nearly every State has experienced wildland/urban

interface fire losses, including the Pine Barrens in New

Jersey. Piedmont in North and South Carolina. Palmetto

in Florida, and Jack Pine in the Lake States .

The interface has become a major fire problem that

will escalate as the nation moves into the 21st century.

People continue to move from urban areas to rural

areas. These new wildlandeurban immigrants give little

thought to the wildfire hazard and bring with them

their expectations for continuation of urban emergency

services. The National Fire Protection Association

(NFPA) estimates that since 1985 wildfire destroyed

more than 9,000 homes and resulted in the deaths of

many firefighters and private citizens. It is estimated

that in 1994 5250 - 5300 million of Federal wildland

fire suppression dollars were spent in protecting the

wildland/urban interface. Since fiscal year 1970, the

Federal Emergency Management Agency fFEMA) has

provided approximately S64 million in fire suppression

assistance grants to States for the suppression of fires on

publicly or privately owned forests or grasslands that

have threatened destruction that would constitute a

major disaster.

Recent reports such as the National Commission

on Wildfire Disasters Report (1993) and Fire In Rural

America (1992) document the continued expansion

from urban areas to rural areas. There is limited data to

quantify the extent of the current or projected growth

in the wildland/urban interface; however, it is clear

from recent episodes that losses will continue to

increase in the future .

Fire protection problems in the wildland/urban

interface are very complex. Complicated barriers must

he overcome to address them_ These barriers include

legal mandates, zoning regulations, fire and building

codes, basic lire protection infrastructure, insurance/lire

protection grading and rating systems.. environmental

concerns, and Fire Protection Agreements. Political,

social, and pschological tactors further complicate the

problems. There is no one simple solution. Leadership

and cooperation are essential.

The autonomy and multiple mandates of Federal

agencies contribute to inconsistent and sometimes

conflicting policies and procedures. Federal, Tribal,

State, and local agencies, as well as the private sector .

are all facing the wildland/urban interface projection

issue. Even though past reports, reviews. and mitiga-

tion plans have articulated the problems and recom-

mended solutions, mane of the problems still have not

been solved . We can no longer continue to study.. but

must have a commitment to carry out solutions.

The ability of the Federal agencies to provide

leadership for solving interface protection problems

is complicated because responsibilities extend beyond

the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

FEMA is directly responsible for providing Fire Sup-

pression Assistance Grants and, in certain cases, major

disaster assistance and hazard mitigation grants in

response to fires . Fire Suppression Assistance Grants

are provided to a State for the suppression of a forest or

grassland fire on public or private lands that threatens

to become a major disaster. The grants are provided to

protect life and improved property and may include

funds for equipment, supplies, and personnel A Fire

Suppression Assistance Grant is the form of assistance

most often provided by FEMA to a State for a fire . The

grants are cost-shared with States. FEMAs U .S. Fire

Administration (USFA) provides public education

material addressing wildland/urban interface issues,

and the USFAs National Fire Academy provides

training, primarily for structural fire service organiza-

tions. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has

regulatory responsibility concerning air quality, smoke

management, and other environmental issues . The

Department of Defense has direct suppression responsi-

bility on military reservations and may also be tasked to

provide suppression assistance .

But there is no central coordination, and there is

no single policy that clearly defines the Federal land

manager role or requires agencies to take compatible

actions in the wildland/urban interface Only the

National Park Service has specific structure protection

responsibility, and only for their facilities on their

lands. Current Federal agency mission statements

and operational policies vary and generally restrict

activity within these areas. As a result, Federal land

managers and lire personnel are uncertain about their

role Further, personnel are often inadequately trained

and equipped, but in practice they are expected to

provide assistance .

Uncertainty over the role of Federal land manage-

ment agencies in the wlldland/urban interface is a barncr

to effective lire protection. This was validated by public

comments received during the public scoping process and

from the comments received during the Draft Report

comment period for this policy review. It is also apparent

in current policies of the Federal land management

agencies. There is a dichotomy between Federal policy

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

30

ORGANIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

Each Federal agency currently maintains its own

separate fire management organization_ with qualified

employees horn other programs available as the fire

situation dictates. Federal agencies and cooperators also

share resources nationally, and, in some cases, local

interagency fire organizations exist, contract services are

used, or other innovative approaches . such as the Alaska

Fire Service, arc being developed or used to accomplish

the fire management mission_ The Federal fire work

force is currently decreasing at an uncomfortable rate .

particularly in key specialized skills. More aggressive

examination and implementation of organizational

aiternatives are hampered by the inability to measure

relative efficiencies among these alternatives

LEGAL AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Fire program activities and the increasing interconnec-

tion between fire activities and existing environmental,

public health.. and tort laws require inter-Departmental

legal and policy analysis to ensure coordination and

compliance. Consequences of prescribed fire activities,

where fire is allowed to play a natural role or is intro-

duced into the wildlands, may conflict with some

interpretations of existing laws or regulations . Cur-

rently, these differences are identified independently by

each agency and resolved on a case-by-case basis

WEATHER SUPPORT

Fire weather forecasting is a sophisticated and long-

standing tool used by fire managers . As lire behavior

prediction techniques have improved and become

paramount in wiidiand fire management, weather

support has become a critical actor. Fire weather

support is critical to firefighter and public safety and

protection of public health. Maintaining the current

capability as well as enhancing future services is

essential to managing a sale and effective fire manage-

inent program_ In addition, longer-term fires demand

forecasts beyond the six- to ten-day reliable range .

Fire weather services are provided on request by

the National Weather Service (NWS as a special

program in that agency: however, increasing demands

for weather support, especially spot fire weather

forecasts, coupled with diminished resources in the

NW S, have caused demands to exceed the existing

capability Pre-fire season predictions are often re-

quested by managers in order to prioritize workloads.

Long-range severity forecasts are commonly needed for

pre-positioning suppression forces, but they are either'

not available or are unreliable. As agencies seek to

increase the use of fire as a management tool, demands

for spot fire weather forecasts and other services could

far exceed present weather support capability

DATA MANAGEMENT

Accurate, organized, and accessible information about

natural/cultural resources and fire activities is the basis

for coordinated agency program decisions and is critical

to effective and efficient program management.

Agencies have not achieved complete consistency

in compiling, managing, and accessing fire information,

which prevents a reliable, holistic view of the Federa;

fire program. Although some data, such as historical

wildland fire patterns, response to past management

actions, resource values, prescribed fire statistics, and

hazard mapping have been collected, it is incomplete.,

difficult to use, and not portrayed consistently In

some cases, such as the wildland/uihan interface, the

types of data needed are only now being identified.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S :

ACCO U N T A B I L I T Y

GOAL

ï¿½ Agency administrators and fire program managers
conduct the fire management program in accordance

with established policies, procedures, standards, and

direction.

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will:

ï¿½

develop and utilize consistent fire management

qualification standards and specific selection criteria for

fire program managers.

ï¿½

establish job performance standards for agency admin-

istrators and fire managers that clearly reflect the com-

plexity and scope of fire management responsibilities .

ï¿½

provide consistent and adequate training for agency

administrators commensurate with their roles and

responsibilities in fire management.

ï¿½

ensure that agency administrators and fire program

managers are held accountable for conducting the fire

program in accordance with established policies,

procedures, standards, and direction.

ï¿½ ensure that trained and certified employees partic-
ipate in the wildland fire program as the situation

demands; employees with operational, administrative,

or other skills support the wildland fire program as

needed, and administrators are responsible, account-

able, and make employees available.

ï¿½ j ointly manage fire use and suppression resources
and activities to achieve accomplishment of both

programs concurrently

R E C O M M E N D A T 1 O N S :
E F F I C I E N C Y

GOAL

ï¿½

A system is developed and used to analyze the

relative efficiency of specific activities of the fire

management program.

ACTION

Federal agencies will: ï¿½

jointly develop a standard methodology for

measuring and reporting fire management efficiency

that includes commodity, non-commodity, and social

values. This methodology should specifically address,

among other considerations, the costs and benefits of

large-fire suppression.

R E C O M M END A T 1 O N S :
O R G A N I Z A T I O N A L
A L T E R N A T I V E S

GOAL

ï¿½

The wildland fire program is managed through the

most efficient and effective organization available.

ACTION

Federal agencies will

ï¿½

develop criteria to be used in evaluating alternative

fire management organizations. Some examples of

criteria include meeting land management objectives,

reintroducing fire in the ecosystem, ensuring cost

effectiveness, eflectively dealing with wildland/urban

interface fire protection, and using partnerships and

cooperative relationships

use these criteria to analyze, with cooperators, a

broad range of organizational alternatives on a national,

regional, and local basis. Examples of alternatives

include: a single Federal fire organization; contracts

with States, private sector, Tribal governments, military,

or combinations thereof; and status quo.

R E C O M M END A T I O N S
LEGAL & POLICY ANA L Y S I S

GOAL

ï¿½

Federal agencies have a clear legal foundation for

the various fire management policies and programs.

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will: ï¿½

jointly identify the legal context for reintroducing

fire into wildlands and develop options for accomplish-

ment. Options may include modifying regulations to

address ecological processes where appropriate;

exercising broader interpretations of policy; or resolving

obstacles at regional and local levels, including those on

non-Federal lands, Based on this interpretation,

develop standardized agreements or new agreements

that permit these activities. ï¿½

clarify and differentiate between agency liability and

personal liability resulting from prescribed fire, based

on legal review and interpretation of tort law. ï¿½ early in the process, involve public health and

environmental regulators in developing the most

workable application of policies and regulations.

The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture will

direct the Office of the Solicitor and the Office of the

General Counsel, in coordination with the Department

of justice and other appropriate Federal agencies, to

conduct and publish a comprehensive legal review on

wildland/urban interface fire protection to provide the

legal foundation for Federal actions. This review will

address:

ï¿½ current authority under Federal laws such as the
Organic Act, National Forest Management Act, Robert T-

Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act,

and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

31

FEDERAL WILDLAND
FIRE MANAGEMENT

32

the subjects of tort liability budget authorities .

cooperative agreements, mitigation activities, and

natural resource protection/environmental laws.

R E C O M MEN D A T I O N S

W E A T H E R S U P P O R T

GOAL

ï¿½

Sufficient fire weather resources are provided to

meet the total wildiand fire management program

needs,

ACTIONS

ï¿½

The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture,

together with the Secretary of Commerce, will assess

current and projected requirements for fire weather

products necessary to support total wildland fire

management program needs.

ï¿½

The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture,

together with the Secretary of Commerce, will evaluate

alternative methods, including non-Federal sources, to

provide weather service to the agencies' fire manage-

ment programs.

ï¿½ The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture will
seek commitment from the Secretary of Commerce to

research and develop technology to provide accurate,

long-range weather forecasts.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

D A T A MANAGEMENT

GOAL

ï¿½

Federal agencies achieve a coordinated Federal fire

information database that supports critical decisions

related to the fire management program.

ACTIONS

Federal agencies will

fire statistics and develop an easily

accessible common database_

ï¿½

jointly identify, develop, and use tools needed for

ecosystem-based fire management programs with

mechanisms to integrate fire-related databases with

other systems. These tools will include

- the collection of ecosystem-related data

such as disturbance regimes, historical fire

patterns, response to management actions,

and others.

- consistent methods to track and access

fire-use statistics and administrative costs.

- mechanisms to transfer and exchange fire

management systems information.

ï¿½

cooperate with Tribal, State, and local governments

to establish a data-collection mechanism to better assess

the nature and scope of the wildland/urban interface

fire problem.

ï¿½ take a lead role in the adoption of the National Fire
Incident Reporting System standards for all fire agencies

that operate in the wildland/urban interface and modify

existing reports to reflect wildland/urban interface fare

protection data.

ï¿½

complete a national wildland/urban interface fire

hazard scoping and mapping study in partnership with

the Western Governors' Association, Tribal, State, and

local governments, and the private sector_

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

4 0

G O R E T E A M

Tim Hartzell, Co-Chair

DOI / Bureau of Land Management Washington, DC

John Chambers, Co-Chair USDA Forest Service Washington, DC

MaryBeth Keifer, National Park Service Sequoia/Kings Canyon Nat'I Parks

Role or Wildland Fire in Resource Management Three Rivers. CA

Walt Tomascak

USDA Forest Service Northern Region

Use of Wildland Fire Missoula, MT

Joe Stutler

USDA Forest Service Invo National Forest

Preparedness and Suppression Bishop, CA

Coordinated Program Management

Mike Dietrich

Bureau of Land Management Salem District

Wildland/Urban Interface Protection Salem, OR

Pat Entwistle

Bureau of Land Management National Interagency Fire Center

Public Involvement/Support Boise, ID

Shayla Simmons

Department of the Interior Washington, DC

Gene Lessard USDA Forest Service Washington, DC

Dr. Sharon Fnedman USDA Forest Service Washington, DC

S U B J E C T - M A T T E R T E A M S

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

4 1

ROLE OF WILDLAND FIRE IN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

MaryBeth Keifer, Team Leader National Park Service Sequoia/Kings Canyon Nat'l Parks

Three Rivers, CA

Steve Botti National Park Service National Interagency Fire Center

Boise, ID

Gardner Ferry Bureau of Land Management National Interagency Fire Center

Boise, ID

Claire Hong Environmental Protection Agency Region 10

Seattle, WA

Bill Leenhouts Fish & Wildlife Service National Interagency Fire Center

Boise, ID

Gene Lessard USDA Forest Service Washington, DC

Ron Myers The Nature Conservancy Tallahassee, FL

Neil Sampson American Forests Washington, DC

Susan Sater USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region

Portland, OR

Gale Sitter Bureau of Land Management Klamath Falls District

Klamath Falls, OR

Peter Teensma Bureau of Land Management Oregon State Office

Portland, OR

Dr. Jan van Wagtendonk National Biological Service Yosemite Field Station

El Portal, CA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

John Core WESTAR Portland, OR

Randy Eardley Bureau of Land Management Boise District

Boise, ID

Jennifer Jones Bureau of Land Management Idaho State Office

Boise, ID

Rick Tholen Bureau of Land Management Idaho State Office

Boise, ID

FEDERAL WILDLAND

FIRE MANAGEMENT

USE OF WILDLAND FIRE

4 2

Walt Tomascak, Team Leader

Russ Davis

Linda Gross

Rich Lasko

John Lissow v

Dennis Macomber

Larry Mahaffey

Mark Rounsaville

Paul Tine

USDA Forest Service

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Bureau of Land Management

USDA Forest Service

National Park Service

Fish & Wildlife Service

Bureau of Land Management

USDA Forest Service

USDA Forest Service

Northern Region

Missoula, MT

Billings Area Office

Billings, MT

Kremling Resource Area

Kremling, CO

Chippewa National Forest

Cass Lake, MN

Bandelier National Monument

Los Alamos. NM

Region 1

Portland, OR

National Interagency Fire Center

Boise, ID

Southern Region

Atlanta, GA

Eastern Region

Milwaukee, WI