

1 **Chapter 1**  
2 **Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Doctrine**  
3 **Overview**

4 **Scope**

5 The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* states,  
6 references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S.  
7 Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park  
8 Service (NPS), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) fire and fire aviation  
9 program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout  
10 this handbook. This handbook attempts to reference policy, rather than  
11 paraphrase policy to limit duplication.

12 The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* is intended to  
13 comply with and support the *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland*  
14 *Fire Management Policy* (January 2001) and the *Guidance for Implementation*  
15 *of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* (February 13, 2009) and other  
16 existing Federal policy.

17 **Purpose**

18 The *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* provides fire  
19 and fire aviation program management direction for BLM, USFS, FWS, NPS,  
20 and BIA managers. Employees engaged in fire management activities will  
21 continue to comply with all agency policies. Other references, such as the  
22 National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) *Incident Response Pocket*  
23 *Guide* (PMS 461) provide operational guidance.

24 **Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**  
25 **(January 2001)**

26 The *Review and Update of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* (pp.  
27 21-22) established the following guiding principles as fundamental to the  
28 successful implementation of the *2001 Federal Fire Policy*. For reference, the  
29 full 2001 policy document is available at  
30 <https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/policy>.

- 31 1. **Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire**  
32 **management activity.**
- 33 2. **The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural**  
34 **change agent will be incorporated into the planning process.** Federal  
35 agency land and resource management plans set the objectives for the use  
36 and desired future condition of the various public lands.
- 37 3. **Fire management plans (FMP), programs, and activities support land**  
38 **and resource management plans (LRMP) and their implementation.**
- 39 4. **Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management**  
40 **activities.** Risks and uncertainties relating to fire management activities  
41 must be understood, analyzed, communicated, and managed as they relate

- 1 to the cost of either doing or not doing an activity. Net gains to the public  
2 benefit will be an important component of decisions.
- 3 5. **Fire management programs and activities are economically viable,**  
4 **based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource**  
5 **management objectives.** Federal agency administrators are adjusting and  
6 re-organizing programs to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. As part of  
7 this process, investments in fire management activities must be evaluated  
8 against other agency programs in order to effectively accomplish the overall  
9 mission, set short- and long-term priorities, and clarify management  
10 accountability.
- 11 6. **FMPs and activities are based upon the best available science.**  
12 Knowledge and experience are developed among all wildland fire  
13 management agencies. An active fire research program combined with  
14 interagency collaboration provides the means to make these tools available  
15 to all fire managers.
- 16 7. **FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental**  
17 **quality considerations.**
- 18 8. **Federal, State, Tribal, local, interagency, and international**  
19 **coordination and cooperation are essential.** Increasing costs and smaller  
20 work forces require that public agencies pool their human resources to  
21 successfully deal with the ever-increasing and more complex fire  
22 management tasks. Full collaboration among Federal agencies and between  
23 the Federal agencies, and international, State, Tribal, and local  
24 governments, and private entities results in a mobile fire management  
25 workforce available for the full range of public needs.
- 26 9. **Standardization of policies and procedures among Federal agencies is**  
27 **an ongoing objective.** Consistency of plans and operations provides the  
28 fundamental platform upon which Federal agencies can cooperate, integrate  
29 fire activities across agency boundaries, and provide leadership for  
30 cooperation with State, Tribal, and local fire management organizations.

31 **2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**  
32 *The 2001 Review and Update of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
33 (pp. 23-25) established the following policies:

- 34 1. **Safety**  
35 Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All FMPs and activities  
36 must reflect this commitment.
- 37 2. **Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability**  
38 The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve  
39 ecosystem sustainability, including interrelated ecological, economic, and  
40 social components.
- 41 3. **Response to Wildland Fire**  
42 Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into LRMPs and  
43 activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to  
44 wildland fires is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the  
45 fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely

- 1 consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and  
2 cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate  
3 management response to the fire.
- 4 **4. Use of Wildland Fire**  
5 Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and,  
6 as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role.  
7 Use of fire will be based on approved FMPs and will follow specific  
8 prescriptions contained in operational plans.
- 9 **5. Rehabilitation and Restoration**  
10 Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and  
11 sustain ecosystems, public health, and safety, and to help communities  
12 protect infrastructure.
- 13 **6. Protection Priorities**  
14 The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting  
15 priorities among protecting human communities and community  
16 infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural  
17 resources will be based on the values to be protected, human health and  
18 safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an  
19 incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.
- 20 **7. Wildland Urban Interface**  
21 The operational roles of the Federal agencies as partners in the wildland  
22 urban interface (WUI) are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction,  
23 cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural  
24 fire suppression is the responsibility of Tribal, State, or local governments.  
25 Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities  
26 under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual  
27 responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some Federal agencies  
28 have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they  
29 administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist State and  
30 local governments with structural protection.)
- 31 **8. Planning**  
32 Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved FMP. FMPs  
33 are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed  
34 fires based on the area's approved LMP. Fire management plans must  
35 provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies,  
36 tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected, and public health  
37 issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of  
38 the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
- 39 **9. Science**  
40 Fire management plans and fire programs will be based on a foundation of  
41 sound science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our  
42 scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors.  
43 Information needed to support fire management will be developed through  
44 an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be  
45 made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the  
46 development of LMPs, FMPs, and implementation plans.

1 **10. Preparedness**

2 Agencies will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire  
3 management programs in support of LRMPs through appropriate planning,  
4 staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

5 **11. Suppression**

6 Wildland fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and  
7 public safety, benefits, and values to be protected consistent with resource  
8 objectives.

9 **12. Prevention**

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

12 **13. Standardization**

13 Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms,  
14 training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-  
15 be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire  
16 management activities.

17 **14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination**

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

22 **15. Communication and Education**

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

28 **16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles**

29 Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained,  
30 certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program  
31 locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with  
32 operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire  
33 programs, as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be  
34 held accountable for making employees available.

35 **17. Evaluation**

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

41 **Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy**  
42 **(February 13, 2009)**

43 On February 13, 2009, the Fire Executive Council (FEC) approved *Guidance for*  
44 *the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*. This  
45 guidance provides for consistent implementation of the *1995/2001 Federal Fire*

- 1 *Policy*, as directed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.” (Page 3, *Guidance*  
2 *for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* [February 13,  
3 2009]).
- 4 For reference, the complete 2009 guidance is available at  
5 <https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/policy>.
- 6 The following guidelines should be used to provide consistent implementation  
7 of Federal wildland fire policy:
- 8 1. Wildland fire management agencies will use common standards for all  
9 aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective  
10 collaboration among cooperating agencies.
  - 11 2. Agencies and bureaus will review, update, and develop agreements that  
12 clarify the jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and  
13 responsibilities among local, State, Tribal, and Federal fire protection  
14 entities.
  - 15 3. Responses to wildland fire will be coordinated across levels of government  
16 regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.
  - 17 4. Fire management plans will be intergovernmental in scope and developed  
18 on a landscape scale.
  - 19 5. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs  
20 in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
    - 21 a. **Wildfires** – Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared  
22 wildfires.
    - 23 b. **Prescribed Fires** – Planned ignitions.
  - 24 6. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives  
25 and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.  
26 Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying  
27 social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental  
28 jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.
  - 29 7. Management response to a wildland fire on Federal land is based on  
30 objectives established in the applicable LMP/RMP, and/or the FMP.
  - 31 8. Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the  
32 lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to  
33 firefighter and public safety.
  - 34 9. Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document  
35 wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational  
36 assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and  
37 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.
- 38 *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*  
39 (February 13, 2009), page 7.

#### 40 **Definitions**

41 Key policy definitions selected from appendix A of the *Guidance for*  
42 *Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* as updated by  
43 Fire Management Board (FMB) Memorandum 19-004, issued October 11, 2019.

- 1 **Initial Response:** The initial decisions and actions taken in reaction to a  
2 reported incident.
- 3 **Initial Attack:** An aggressive action to put the fire out by the first resources to  
4 arrive, consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.
- 5 **Prescribed Fire (see also “Wildland Fire”):** A wildland fire originating from a  
6 planned ignition in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to  
7 meet specific objectives.
- 8 **Suppression:** All the work to extinguish a fire or limit wildland fire spread.
- 9 **Wildfire:** A wildland fire originating from an unplanned ignition, such as  
10 lightning, volcanos, unauthorized and accidental human caused fires, and  
11 prescribed fires that are declared wildfires.
- 12 **Wildland Fire (includes wildfires and prescribed fires):** Any non-structure  
13 fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels.

#### 14 **Other Definitions**

- 15 **Extended Attack:** Actions taken on a wildfire that has exceeded the initial  
16 response.
- 17 **Extended-attack Incident:** An incident that exceeds the capability of the initial  
18 attack resources and/or organization to successfully manage the incident to  
19 conclusion.

#### 20 **Fire Operations Doctrine**

##### 21 **Purpose of Fire Operations Doctrine**

22 Fire operations doctrine states the fundamental principles on the subject of fire  
23 operations. This doctrine establishes a particular way of thinking about fire  
24 operations and provides a philosophy for leading firefighters in fire operations, a  
25 mandate for professionalism, and a common language. Fire operations doctrine  
26 does not consist of procedures to be applied to specific situations so much as it  
27 sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application.

##### 28 **The Nature of Fire Operations**

29 Fire is a complex, dynamic, and often unpredictable phenomenon. Fire  
30 operations require mobilizing a complex organization that includes  
31 management, command, support, and firefighting personnel, as well as aircraft,  
32 vehicles, machinery, and communications equipment. While the magnitude and  
33 complexity of the fire itself and of the human response to it will vary, the fact  
34 that fire operations are inherently dangerous will never change. A firefighter,  
35 utilizing the best available science, equipment, training, and working within the  
36 scope of agency doctrine and policy can still suffer serious injury or death.

##### 37 **Wildland Fire Operations Risk Management**

38 The primary means by which accidents are prevented in wildland fire operations  
39 is through aggressive risk management. This safety philosophy acknowledges

1 that while the ideal level of risk may be zero, a hazard-free work environment is  
2 not a reasonable or achievable goal in fire operations. Through organized,  
3 comprehensive, and systematic risk management, fire personnel will determine  
4 the acceptable level of risk that allows for safety yet still achieves fire operations  
5 objectives. Risk management is intended to minimize the number of injuries or  
6 fatalities experienced by wildland firefighters.

7 **Fire Preparedness**

8 Fire preparedness is the state of being ready to provide an appropriate response  
9 to wildfires based on identified objectives. Preparedness is the result of activities  
10 that are planned and implemented prior to fire ignitions. Preparedness requires  
11 identifying necessary firefighting capabilities and implementing coordinated  
12 programs to develop those capabilities. Preparedness requires a continuous  
13 process of developing and maintaining firefighting infrastructure, predicting fire  
14 activity, implementing prevention activities, identifying values to be protected,  
15 hiring, training, equipping, prepositioning, and deploying firefighters and  
16 equipment, evaluating performance, correcting deficiencies, and improving  
17 operations. All preparedness activities should be focused on developing fire  
18 operations capabilities and on performing successful fire operations.

19 **Fire Operations Command Philosophy**

20 It is essential that our philosophy of command support the way we conduct fire  
21 operations. First and foremost, in order to generate effective decision making in  
22 fire operations, and to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire, commander  
23 intent must be lucid and unambiguous, and lines of authority must be clearly  
24 articulated and understood. Subordinate commanders must make decisions on  
25 their own initiative based on their understanding of their commander's intent. A  
26 competent subordinate commander who is at the point of decision may  
27 understand a situation more clearly than a senior commander some distance  
28 removed. In this case, the subordinate commander must have the freedom to  
29 take decisive action directed toward the accomplishment of operational  
30 objectives. However, this does not imply that unity of effort does not exist, or  
31 that actions are not coordinated. Unity of effort requires coordination and  
32 cooperation among all forces toward a commonly understood objective. Unified,  
33 coordinated action, whether between adjacent single resources on the fireline or  
34 between the highest command level and the most subordinate firefighter, is  
35 critical to successful fire operations.

36 **Fire Leadership**

37 Leadership is the art of influencing people in order to achieve a result. The most  
38 essential element for success in the wildland fire service is good leadership.  
39 Good leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for wildland  
40 firefighters working to accomplish difficult tasks under dangerous, stressful  
41 circumstances. Leaders often face difficult problems to which there are no  
42 simple, clear-cut, by-the-book solutions. In these situations, leaders must use  
43 their knowledge, skill, experience, education, values, and judgment to make

1 decisions and to take or direct action—in short, to provide leadership. All  
2 firefighters, regardless of position, must provide leadership.

3 **Fire Suppression**

4 The purpose of fire suppression is to protect values at risk of loss by putting the  
5 fire out in the safest, most effective, and efficient manner. Every firefighter,  
6 whether in a management, command, support, or direct suppression role, should  
7 be committed to maximizing the safe, effective, and efficient engagement of  
8 capable firefighters in suppression action.

9 **Principles of Suppression Operations**

10 Wildland fire leaders implement command decisions and maintain unity of  
11 action by using the common principles of suppression operations to improve  
12 decision making and firefighter safety. The principles of Risk Management;  
13 Standard Firefighting Orders and Watch Out Situations; Lookouts,  
14 Communication, Escape Routes, Safety Zones (LCES); and the Downhill  
15 Checklist guide our fundamental fire suppression practices, behaviors, customs,  
16 and are mutually understood at every level of command. These principles are  
17 not absolute rules and require judgment in application.

18 **Principles of Fire Suppression Action**

19 The principles of fire suppression action provide a framework for developing  
20 fire suppression strategy and for conducting fire suppression operations. Again,  
21 these are not absolute or immutable rules. These five principles provide a  
22 consistent set of considerations with which to evaluate decisions, plans, and  
23 actions in different situations.

24 1. **Objective**

25 Objectives direct every fire suppression operation toward a clearly defined,  
26 attainable end state.

27 2. **Speed and Focus**

28 Speed is rapidity of action. Focus is the convergence of appropriate  
29 resources at the desired position to initiate action. Speed and focus results in  
30 increased likelihood of successful suppression actions.

31 3. **Positioning**

32 Positioning of fire suppression resources ranges from single resource  
33 offensive or defensive reactions to changing fire conditions, to prepositioning  
34 of multiple resources based on predicted activity and values at risk.  
35 Positioning should always be undertaken with speed and focus in mind and  
36 with sufficient time for positioning to occur before operations begin.  
37 Positioning using strategic and opportunistic movement increases the  
38 effectiveness of fire suppression resources.

39 4. **Simplicity**

40 Simplicity provides clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders.  
41 Simplicity contributes to successful actions, maximizing effectiveness and  
42 minimizing confusion.



1 **5. Safety**

2 Safety is fundamental to successful suppression action. Safety not only  
3 contributes to successful actions; it is indispensable to them.

4 **Cost-Effective Fire Operations**

5 Maximizing the cost effectiveness of any fire operation is the responsibility of  
6 all involved, including those that authorize, direct, or implement those  
7 operations. Cost effectiveness is the most economical use of the suppression  
8 resources necessary to accomplish mission objectives. Accomplishing fire  
9 operations objectives safely and efficiently will not be sacrificed for the sole  
10 purpose of “cost savings.” Care will be taken to ensure that suppression  
11 expenditures are commensurate with values to be protected, while understanding  
12 that other factors may influence spending decisions, including the social,  
13 political, economic, and biophysical environments.

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