

**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Forest
Service**

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OR/WA

**Bureau of Land
Management**

**United States
Department of
Interior**

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FS-Memorandum

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To: District Managers and Forest Supervisors

Subject: National Fire Plan and Fire and Aviation Management

We wanted to provide you with updated information regarding the various initiatives and direction affecting the National Fire Plan (NFP) and the Fire and Aviation program, including information discussed at the NFP Conference in New Orleans in January 2003. The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), the Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council, National Wildfire Coordinating Group, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office of Fire and Aviation, and Forest Service (FS) Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management are in various stages of producing new direction, guidance, and clarification.

Information pertaining to changes to major initiatives and/or procedures is outlined below, and a number of related documents presented at the NFP Conference are provided as attachments. In addition, the Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group (PNWCG) and State Office/Regional Office Fire and Aviation Management are working further to clarify operational procedures dependent upon actions handed down from the various national offices and groups. Please take time to review this information and share it with your staff. We will keep you updated as these are developed and issued.

POLICY

NFP We need to work on developing stronger community relationships and collaboration and developing these skills in our workforce. The 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan and the President's Healthy Forest Initiative speak directly about local collaboration. Participants should include representatives from Federal and State agencies, Tribes, local governments, landowners, community-based groups, and other stakeholders with a demonstrated commitment to achieving NFP goals. Goal three identifies developing and implementing a process for Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments to collaborate on the annual selection of ecosystem restoration projects within their respective jurisdictions.

- The expected outcomes from placing emphasis on Community Relationships and Collaboration include: Community Fire Protection Plans/Community Fire Planning would be developed in collaboration with agencies, landowners, other stakeholders, local governments and local fire defense boards. Such plans could then become the foundation for developing out-year priorities for agency funds and grants.

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- Collaboration in establishing priority areas for treatments.
 - Agency project implementation would focus on the high-risk areas as agreed.
 - Grants and agreement requests could focus on the collaboratively establish priorities.
 - These both match the proposed categorical exclusion (CE), so a CE could be used for hazardous treatment proposals.
 - Community collaboration groups could prioritize grant proposals, which the NFP Grant Team would honor, so

long as they met the Pacific Northwest criteria and funding was available.

- Early identification of community/agency priorities for treatment would result in better leveraging of other funds/grants such as Title II and Title III funds.

Fire Management Plans There is now an interagency Fire Management Plan template. Both BLM and FS are working on amendments for Chapter 50, FSH 5109.19 and Handbook 9211-1 to be completed by summer. *Expect that all units will complete updated Fire Management Plans by September 2004.*

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS

PNWCG The PNWCG is taking the initiative to clarify operational procedures for the 2003 fire season. These include clarification of the Thirtymile guidance; delegation of authority to Incident Management Teams (IMT) and Type 3-5 Incident Commanders; standardization of initial attack documentation packet; briefing formats; work/rest and fatigue; evaluation standards for IMTs; and dispatch procedures. Many of these clarifications depend upon updated National direction. Especially notable is the need for increased local collaboration with agencies and private landowners regarding fire season preparedness and National Fire Plan Grants and Community Protection. *Pre-fire season identification of local preparedness capabilities, draw down levels, local Multi-Agency Coordination Group formation and function, and addressing local landowner concerns should be on-going.*

Medical Qualification Standards In FY 2003 OR/WA BLM began implementing the Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards (MSP). This new comprehensive medical screening program is under a five-year phase-in period that began FY 2002 in the Southwest. *All Pacific Northwest Department of Interior agencies and BLM/FS integrated units will implement medical standards this year.*

Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS) ROSS is more a fire management system than a dispatch system. It puts into place for the first time an enterprise-wide decision support infrastructure related to the status of resources. Having better information on the current status of resources allows managers to conduct strategic planning and evaluate future resource requirements. Managers can run specific reports and display information in a variety of formats. By having a better handle on resource availability, the workload of supporting incident activity can be managed more effectively allowing other priority work to continue. *The interagency dispatch community in the Pacific Northwest is progressing towards a successful implementation*

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of the Ross beginning April 1, 2003. This is part of the planned rollout of the application in approximately 400 dispatch offices nationwide over the next year.

AIRCRAFT

Airtankers Eleven out of 44 Heavy airtankers are permanently grounded, including all model C130-A and PB4Ys. The contracts for the remaining 33 have been renewed, with the caveat that no airtanker will be authorized for use until the companies receive a Notice to Proceed from the Contracting Officer. Concurrently, Sandia Laboratory has been contracted to evaluate the maintenance programs of each vendor, and recommend needed enhancements for maintenance inspections for all airtankers airframes. Even though 11 of the 44 airtanker contracts were not renewed, any savings will be used for the enhanced inspection programs to make the remaining airtankers useable. There is no guarantee that it will be possible, or economically feasible, to make the remaining 33 airtankers useable. In addition, there is no projected timeframe as to when a determination will be made on the remaining 33 airtankers. *Expect the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group through the National Interagency Coordination Center to provide more direct airtanker command and control this fire season.*

Lead Planes The Blue Ribbon Panel's review of our aviation program uncovered two separate analyses that were completed to determine "safe life" hours of the BE-58P Baron lead planes. In 1983, the Beech Aircraft Corporation completed a study using 36 months of actual flight date from four FS Barons. Beech determined "safe life" to be

significantly less than the 10,000-hour “safe life” for general aviation operations. In 1987, FS engineer Ken Alderman extended the Beech study using the same methodology; adding four additional years of data and a recalculated reduced gross weight to more accurately estimate “safe life” for the entire fleet. Alderman’s report recommended maximum “safe life” limit as 6,000 hours and strongly suggested aircraft destruction and disposal upon retirement. Eleven of our 19 Beech Baron lead planes have flown over the recommended 6,000 “safe life” hours. Three of the four lead planes assigned to the Pacific Northwest have exceeded the 6,000-hour mark and are currently not authorized for use. *There is no formal or written management decision to continue operation past 6,000 hours, nor were additional fatigue test completed to extend life hours. National resolution recommendations are being drafted.*

Smokejumper Aircraft The Blue Ribbon Panel identified concerns with the single-engine performance of the Sherpa smokejumper aircraft when performing in low-level mission profiles. As a result of that concern, the Sherpa jumpships were restricted from low-level mission profiles until technical experts could evaluate the single-engine performance. In early February of 2003, the National Fixed-Wing Standardization office, with assistance from operational line pilots, finished evaluating single-engine performance of the Sherpas and found that the aircraft have an adequate margin of safety. Based on that analysis, the Sherpas were returned to full mission status. *The Pacific Northwest geographic area should experience no adverse impact of smokejumper initial attack capability.*

Helicopters The availability of helicopters continues to increase. During the 2002 fire season, there were almost 300 Type I and II helicopters on the National Call-When-Needed Helicopter Contract, an increase of almost 450% from the late 1980s. Between the FS and

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Department of Interior, there are approximately 160 exclusive-use helicopters on contract. One of the chronic problems affecting the wildland fire community has been the shortage of available Helicopter Managers during periods of high fire activity. Federal and State agencies are currently working towards several strategies that will offer solutions. We need field units to identify, train, and make available Helicopter Managers for future use. *One of the most notable changes in the management of Type I helicopters is that they will be managed nationally and moved in a similar fashion to airtankers to areas of high fire activity.*

Single Engine Air Tankers (SEAT) The numbers of SEAT aircraft available have increased over the past few years. *This coming season expect to use our SEAT capability as we have in the past with no changes in control of those aircraft. If you have SEAT aircraft in your approved Fire Management Plan, then expect those aircraft to be available for your operational program. Bureau of Land Management SEATS will be the same as last year; however, Forest Service SEATS are dependent upon final FS budget.*

TRAINING

Fire Management Leadership (FML) The *national FML course will be taught March 17-21 at Marana, Arizona.* This one-week course offers a comprehensive look at the agency administrators’ leadership role within the Fire Management Program, including the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. Several District Managers and Forest Supervisors from the Pacific Northwest are attending.

Fire Regime Condition Class Workshop A *workshop on a newly developed process for assessing fire regime condition class (FRCC) will be held in Tucson, Arizona, on March 18-20.* The process has been developed by BLM/FS ecologists. There is a high probability that use of this process will be mandatory and reflect on our ability to compete for fuels funds. Ten people from FS Region 6 and OR/WA BLM have been nominated to attend, representing a good cross-section of the different vegetation types found in the Pacific Northwest.

Wildland Fire Situation Analysis The *FS Region 6 Regional Office and OR/WA BLM State Office are sponsoring a Wildland Fire Situation Assessment training course on May 6-7 in Redmond, Oregon.* This two-day workshop course is designed to train fire and resource managers in a set of decision skills applicable to the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA). The course uses a case-study approach to guide participants through the thought processes that are part of the WFSA and provides them with a base of decision skills that can be applied to the analysis of fire

management problems.

As in the past, we ask for your continued commitment to public and fire fighter safety as we go into the 2003 fire season. We are moving into what looks to be general drought conditions throughout the West, and it is time to examine our summer preparedness in meeting our suppression workloads. We ask that all of you pay particular attention to fire fighter readiness, readiness training, and overall capability including draw down levels commensurate with our fire threats. We expect integrated readiness and suppression planning with our Federal and State Cooperators. Consider resources that could be provided by contractors and private individuals. Plan on forming Multi-Agency Coordination Groups to meet potential local needs.

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As we move closer to summer, we will keep you updated on the policy and standards Clarification issued by our national offices and interagency groups. In addition, expect further direction and clarification from the State Office/Regional Office and the PNWCG. Your continued support is crucial to our mission in achieving a safe and productive Fire and Aviation program.

/s/ Elaine M. Brong
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 USDI Bureau of Land Management

/s/ Thelma J. Strong (for)
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15 Attachment(s) (under separate cover)

- 1 - NFP: WFLC Fact Sheet (1 pp)
- 2 - NFP: WFLC Talking Points (1 pp)
- 3 - NFP: Healthy Forests Initiative Fact Sheet (1 pp)
- 4 - NFP: Healthy Forests Initiative Talking Points (1pp)
- 5 - NFP: Memorandum of Understanding for Development of a Collaborative Fuels Treatment Program Fact Sheet (1 pp)
- 6 - NFP: Memorandum of Understanding for Development of a Collaborative Fuels Treatment Program Talking Points (1pp)
- 7 - NFP: Memorandum of Understanding for Federal Wildland Fire Assistance Programs Fact Sheet (1pp)
- 8 - NFP: Memorandum of Understanding for Federal Wildland Fire Assistance Talking Points (1pp)
- 9 - WFLC NFP: Cost Account Methods - Base 8 Funding (3pp)
- 10 - WFLC NFP: BAER/ESR Funding Process (3 pp)
- 11 - 10/11/02 Interagency Memo: Alternative Approaches for Streamlining Section 7 Consultation on Hazardous Fuels Treatment Projects (16 pp)
- 12- 12/10/02 Interagency Memo: Evaluating the Net Benefit of Hazardous Fuels Treatment Projects (5 pp)
- 13 - 2/9/02 CEQ Memo: Guidance for Environmental Assessments of Forest Health Projects (3 pp)
- 14 - 1/14/03 DOI Memo: FY 2004 Fuels Treatment Program Priorities (3 pp)
- 15 - 12/16/02 Federal Register Notice: Special Rules Applicable to Public Land Hearings and Appeals...Effects of Wildfire Management Decisions (5 pp)

BLM Distribution

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