New Direction
In
Wildland Fire Management

National Land Use Planning Conference
Portland, OR

3/4/09

Wildland Fire Management

BLM 5-Year Average:

3,000 Fires/Year
2 Million Acres Burned/Year

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WFLC Decisions – March 2008

- The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) approved proposed modifications to the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire management Policy (2003)

- Every wildland fire will be assessed following a decision support process that examines the full range of responses. The system currently being developed and prototyped is known as Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS)
- BLM Direction was issued via FA IM-2009-011.

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Implementation Strategy Revisions:

- Eliminate “Wildland Fire Use” as a type of fire
- Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:
  1. Wildfires - Unplanned ignitions or planned ignitions that are declared wildfires.
  2. Prescribed Fires - Planned ignition
- Eliminate the term “Appropriate Management Response”

Modifications to Fire Policy Implementation Strategy

OBJECTIVES

2003

Only one management objective will be applied to a wildland fire.
Wildland fires will either be managed for resource benefits or suppressed.
A wildland fire cannot be managed for both objectives concurrently

Once a wildland fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives

New

Management response to a wildfire is based on objectives established in the Land/ Resource Management Plan and the Fire Management Plan. A wildfire may be managed for one or more objectives.

Modifications to Fire Policy Implementation Strategy

PRESCRIBED FIRE

2003

When a prescribed fire or a fire designated for wildland fire use has been declared a wildfire, it cannot be returned to prescribed fire or wildland fire use status

NEW

A prescribed fire that is declared a wildfire may be managed for one or more objectives like any other wildfire.

Modifications to Fire Policy Implementation Strategy

HUMAN CAUSED FIRES

2003

Suppress all human caused fires. Cannot manage human caused fires for resource benefits

New

The initial management response on all unplanned human caused wildfires is suppression. If initial suppression actions are unsuccessful, the fire may be managed as any other wildfire.

Modifications to Fire Policy Implementation Strategy

DECISION SUPPORT

2003

The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) process is used to determine and document the suppression strategy from the full range of responses available for suppression operations. Suppression strategies are designed to meet thee policy objectives of suppression

New

Use the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) to guide and document wildfire management decisions

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What do these changes mean to BLM?

- More flexibility in managing fire on the landscape
- Greater tie to resource objectives in RMPs and Fire Management Plans
- Need to engage the public to clearly establish fire management expectations

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Land Use Planning Handbook Direction (H-1601-1)

- *Existing direction:*
  - …"identify the geographic areas that are suitable for wildland fire use, provided conditions are appropriate".
  - …"identify the geographic area where wildland fire use is not appropriate …. and where suppression action would be taken".

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Need to Modify RMPs??

- No immediate need to change RMP language
- WFU terminology can be changed as a maintenance action
- Fires in areas identified for “suppression” still need to be suppressed
- Fires is areas identified as suitable for “wildland fire use” can be managed to achieve resource benefits
- Consider plan amendments to expand management options in suppression areas, if appropriate
- Address operational details in FMPs

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Public Involvement

- RMPs were developed with public involvement and decisions cannot be changed without it.
- If public understanding and expectations (based on RMP decisions) are that we will suppress fires in a certain area, we need to do so.
- If now we want to use fire to achieve resource benefits, then we need to involve the public in that decision.

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If the RMP identifies areas such as these as suppression areas, especially if we've identified targets for fire size, then we would need to modify those decisions before we could manage a wildlife for resource benefits.

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Tailor fire response to fire and resource objectives

- Utilize FRCC
- Tie to vegetation management objectives
  - For example, reduce juniper encroachment on sage-steppe sites
- Tie to objectives for other programs
  - Protection of historic structures from fire
  - Maintain habitat for wildlife

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Next Steps:

- Revise the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2003) – *this should be released in March 2009*
- Revise internal policies and guidance (manuals and handbooks)
- Issue follow-up IM's, as needed
- Begin implementation for 2009 fire season

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Questions?

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