



Memorandum

To: Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Director, National Park Service
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

From: Ryan K. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior

Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture

Subject: 2017 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership

At no time does the American public count on government more than when catastrophic events, like wildfires, occur. The greatest losses during the 2016 wildfire season involved the fatalities of 15 wildland firefighters who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the lives of others and the lands and resources we are entrusted to manage. The 2016 wildfire season was one of the costliest on record, with a single wildfire in California costing more than \$260 million to contain. The 2017 wildfire season is already upon us with early season fires breaking out in Colorado, the southeast, and the southern plains. Continued drought in some regions coupled with an increase in dry fuels, has the potential for elevated fire activity for much of the country. As a result, we anticipate the 2017 wildfire season to be another challenging year in terms of both fire activity and costs.

The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture will improve the way that both Agencies manage wildfires by ensuring that all of our firefighting assets are utilized in the most efficient way possible. It is critical that firefighters have the right tools, resources, and flexibility to allow them to do their jobs safely and effectively. We look forward to working with leaders in both Agencies along with our state and local partners to explore opportunities to improve our operational efficiency and take advantage of the firefighting infrastructure and assets that are currently in place. We will also continue to integrate science and technology into all of our firefighting and to capitalize on other advancements to better inform and support our firefighting capabilities.

As in the past, wildfire risk in 2017 will be highly dependent upon both weather and human factors. The drought potential remains elevated in some areas of the southeast and central plains. We fully evaluate risks with a broad perspective for both planned and unplanned ignitions while considering the people we serve and landscapes we protect. In accordance with the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, we seek to create resilient landscapes, and fire-adapted communities, all while providing safe, and efficient wildfire response.

The protection of firefighters and public safety is the single, overriding priority in every fire management decision and activity. Setting priorities among protecting public communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be done based on human health and safety, values to be protected, and the costs of protection. We will also ensure that tribal trust lands are managed sustainably with tribes for generations to come.

Our implementation of Federal wildland fire policy follows direction set forth in the "Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, 2009." At the heart of this policy, as with all firefighting actions, is an emphasis on firefighter and public safety. Specifically, this policy establishes 17 priority actions that form the basis for firefighting resource and asset prioritization and allocation decisions by the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group, the various Geographic Multi-Agency Coordinating Groups, local coordinating groups, and each manager of United States Forest Service and Interior units.

As in past years, we ask you to communicate and emphasize these priorities to your managers, fire staff, and all employees, and to remember the basic tenets of wildland fire management:

- Be prepared with a well-trained, qualified workforce and a clear, up-to-date plan for responding to wildfires;
- Remain committed to "*stop, think and talk*" before "*acting*" in any circumstance that feels like it may represent unnecessary exposure;
- Stress cooperation and communication between agencies, bureaus, states, tribes, partners, and interested members of the public; and
- Actively participate in incident briefings and utilize a review/lessons-learned process to improve and praise actions.

We expect agency administrators and fire managers in all of your agencies to adhere to the following guidance:

- Firefighter and public safety is a core value that governs every decision and activity;
- Understand and embrace the guiding principles set forth in the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy;
- Understand your roles and responsibilities and ensure your staff understand and implement their responsibilities;
- Be engaged—reach out to your interagency partners and stakeholders to ensure they are also appropriately involved;
- Collaborate to set realistic expectations and develop practical, risk-informed decisions and approaches;
- Learn from others and share what you learn;
- Carry out our respective Departments' policies on equal opportunity and create a work environment that is not intimidating, hostile, or offensive;
- Involve your chain of command at the earliest opportunity; and
- Keep the public informed.

Our success will be defined by how well we meet our obligations and how efficiently we use our resources and the management tools available to us. By keeping our employees and the public safe from harm or loss, by effectively suppressing unwanted fire, and by doing everything we can to improve the health of our landscapes, we will be successful.

Thank you for your leadership, engagement, continued commitment, and service in preparing for and protecting our Nation against the unwanted impacts of wildfire while managing for the health of our landscapes.