United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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U.S. Wildland Fire Service Policy Memorandum No. 2026-007

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From: Brian Fennessy, Director, U.S. Wildland Fire Service

Subject: Guidance on Designation of U.S. Wildland Fire Service Unit Fire Chiefs and Deputy Unit Fire Chiefs

Effective Date: Upon Release

Purpose: This Policy Memorandum (PM) directs the U.S. Wildland Fire Service's (USWFS's) Geographic Area Fire Chiefs (GA FCs) to establish a transitional local-level unit reporting structure and to identify individuals who will serve in key leadership roles of Interim USWFS Unit Fire Chiefs (Unit Chiefs) and Interim USWFS Deputy Unit Fire Chiefs (Deputy Unit Chiefs).

The USWFS structure is tiered from Headquarters to Geographic Areas (GAs) to Units. GA boundaries have been clearly defined, and this tier of the organization is led by GA FCs, who provide essential strategic and operational oversight. Final determinations regarding permanent Unit boundaries and configuration remain under evaluation. The USWFS is assessing factors related to workload distribution, operational demand, and programmatic alignment to determine Unit responsibilities and maintain continuity of leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Policy: During this transitional phase, and prior to finalization of permanent USWFS Unit boundaries, each Geographic Area Fire Chief (GA FC) must establish Interim Units within their respective GA and an Interim Unit reporting structure. This structure must clearly establish a chain of command, ensuring operational clarity and accountability. As part of this process, GA FCs will identify and designate USWFS personnel to serve as Interim Unit Chiefs and Interim Deputy Unit Chiefs for each Interim Unit. Within each Interim Unit, the Interim Unit Chief will be empowered to exercise the authorities outlined for Unit Chiefs in USWFS Policy Memorandum No. 2026-006, *Guidance on U.S. Wildland Fire Service Authorities During Transition*. This Policy Memorandum states that "[f]or all USWFS positions with assigned authority, the deputy position for that office holds those assigned authorities when the primary is not available"; so the Interim Deputy Unit Chief will hold the same authority as the Interim Unit Chief when the Unit Chief is not available.

GA FCs will consult with the USWFS Assistant Director, Fire Operations, as they establish both the interim reporting structure within their respective GAs and designate Interim Unit Chiefs and Interim Deputy Unit Chiefs. GA FCs must distribute finalized structures and designations to all USWFS employees within their area by May 17, 2026. To further support effective mission execution throughout fire season, GA FCs will also distribute these documents to partners across Department of the Interior (DOI) bureaus and non-DOI wildland

fire organizations. This comprehensive communication will ensure all stakeholders are informed regarding the individuals serving as USWFS interim leadership during the transition period.

USWFS Interim Unit Chiefs are encouraged to request meetings with DOI bureau managers responsible for lands in their fire Unit and local partners to answer any questions that may arise during this transitional period.

Background: Secretary's Order No. 3448, *Establishment of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service*, established a unified, national wildland fire organization charged with delivering safe, effective, and consistent fire management across the DOI through the USWFS. As we continue to build and mature this organization, it is imperative that key leadership positions are identified at all levels of the USWFS organization. The USWFS leadership at all levels will be essential to ensure coordination and successful execution of the Department's mission during fire season or any other fire emergencies.

Scope: This PM applies to the USWFS.

Authority: Secretary's Order 3448, Secretary's Order 3443, and the Department's wildland fire Authorities.

Expiration: This PM shall remain in effect until rescinded or modified.

Attachments: none