



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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OWF Policy Memorandum 2015 – 10

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

From: Jim Douglas, Director – Office of Wildland Fire

Subject: Post-Wildfire Recovery Program and Policy Changes

Purpose:

The purpose of this Policy Memorandum is to outline modifications to policy and program management for Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation programs until revisions are incorporated into the Departmental Manual and Post-Wildfire Recovery Program Handbook.

Background:

Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation programs are funded by the Wildland Fire Management appropriation to address consequences of wildfire on lands and resources.

The Emergency Stabilization (ES) Program is funded from wildland fire suppression. The principal purpose of ES funding is to prevent further degradation of natural and cultural resources and protect life and property. Emergency Stabilization is undertaken during and immediately following a wildfire to reduce the risk of resource damage caused by floods, landslides, and erosion. Landscapes that are threatened from post-fire floods or debris flows, or are susceptible to serious degradation, are assessed and treated by the ES program within the Suppression account. Funds are available immediately after control of the fire, and are available for up to one year. The total amount to be used in any one year is administratively limited to ten percent of the ten-year rolling suppression expenditure average for the Department of the Interior.

The Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) Program is funded by a line item in the wildland fire management budget. The principal purpose of BAR funding is to protect resources by repairing or improving landscapes unlikely to recover naturally to management approved conditions and to repair or replace minor assets. The BAR program funding is to initiate longer-term actions to repair damages caused by wildfire in circumstances in which natural recovery is unlikely to occur. BAR projects protect resources by maintaining proper function in watersheds and landscapes, and by beginning the recovery and restoration of fire-damaged lands. These objectives are achieved by such actions as reseeding to control invasive species, maintaining soil

productivity, rehabilitating tribal trust resources, repairing wildlife habitat, and repairing minor facilities damaged by wildfire.

In the past, project funding has been provided at the beginning of the fiscal year for fires that occurred in the prior fiscal year. All proposed projects have been ranked Department-wide against common criteria and funded in priority order. Funding has been available for up to three years. Long-term recovery and restoration activities (greater than three years) are funded and managed by bureau land and resource management programs and activities.

A number of policy and program management issues have been identified for study and resolution. The Interim and Final Reports prepared in response to Secretarial Order 3336 identify actions to address these issues. The various issues fall into four categories:

1. Policy
2. Program Management
3. Integration with Long-Term Restoration
4. Governance

Principal issues and concerns that have been identified include:

- Rating and ranking criteria for BAR projects are out of date and do not necessarily reflect all bureau mission needs and priorities; in particular current criteria do not reflect the policy articulated in Secretarial Order 3336 that protecting, conserving, and restoring greater sage-grouse habitat is a critical fire management priority for the Department and in particular: “Allocation of fire management resources and assets before, during and after wildland fire incidents will reflect this priority, as will investments related to restoration activities.”
- The current practice of providing BAR funding at the beginning of the fiscal year prevents action on early season fires, presents acquisition challenges during fiscal year rollover, and limits ability to meet late season planting windows.
- Time frames for use of funds may be inadequate to address circumstances with variable precipitation or other environmental factors.
- There is no explicit connection between ES/BAR treatments and longer term restoration activities when those activities are necessary for successful recovery.
- Program coordination between ES/BAR and other bureau resource management programs and activities has been informal and inadequate.

The program and policy changes made by this Policy Memorandum and described in the sections below address these issues and concerns by:

- Providing opportunity to extend time frame for funding ES and BAR treatments under certain circumstances
- Allocating BAR funding to bureaus at the beginning of the fiscal year based on historical acres burned to allow each bureau the discretion to utilize funds throughout the fiscal year in order to allow early season activities and reduce fiscal year rollover challenges.

- Allowing each bureau to prioritize and allocate BAR project funding using bureau-specific criteria, within overall Departmental principles and guidelines.
- Requiring that all ES and BAR project plans demonstrate linkage to long term bureau recovery and restoration programs and activities.
- Establishing an executive level fire and resources steering committee to provide ongoing policy and program direction, oversight, and evaluation.

Scope:

This Policy Memorandum applies to all DOI bureau and office activities involving post-wildfire recovery and revises the Emergency Stabilization (ES) and Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) program scope, time frames, and funding policy in 620 DM 3.

Time Frame:

This Policy Memorandum is effective immediately and remains in effect until rescinded or modified, or superseded by updates to the Departmental Manual and/or a Post-Wildfire Recovery Program Handbook.

Policy:

A. Program Scope

The Department of the Interior uses ES and BAR treatments to reduce the risk of resource damage and restore landscapes impacted by wildfire and to promote long-term restoration and recovery objectives. Development of treatments will use the best available science to ensure success and effectiveness. Bureaus will link all ES and BAR project plans to long-term restoration needs and programs and identify any future activities necessary for successful projects.

B. Funding Allocations:

(1) Emergency Stabilization

(a) Funding is authorized at the beginning of each fiscal year within the suppression allocation. The level is based on ten percent of the ten-year rolling suppression expenditure average for the Department of the Interior. The DOI authority level is then allocated to the four fire bureaus based on the rolling 10-year average of acres burned by each bureau annually, excluding Alaska.

(b) Emergency Stabilization funding authority may be redistributed among bureaus, or the overall authority increased, if conditions warrant during the fiscal year. The Director, Office of Wildland Fire (OWF), will coordinate and approve any redistribution of ES funding authority among bureaus or increase the total allocation. Requests for redistribution or increase of ES funding authority will be made in writing by Bureau Directors. Any such requests will document why the initial ES funding allocation is insufficient to meet the needs for ES projects and activities and describe management actions taken within the bureau to manage ES costs.

(c) Unused ES funding authority does not carry forward into future fiscal years.

(2) Burned Area Rehabilitation

BAR funding will be allocated to each bureau at the beginning of the fiscal year or following Congressional appropriations. Allocations among bureaus will be based on the rolling five year average of non-Alaska acres burned by each bureau, using data from the Wildland Fire Management Information System and the Fire Management Information System, after accounting for any funds to be used for administrative or program-wide costs. BAR funding that has not been expended or obligated by the end of the fiscal year will be retained by the bureau and will not be considered in the distribution of the next year funds. BAR funding that has not been expended or obligated within three years of the fiscal year in which the funds were originally allocated will be returned to the parent account and will be included in the total amount for allocation, unless the Bureau Director requests extension from OWF with a rationale for retaining the funding for up to two additional fiscal years.

C. Emergency Stabilization Project Approvals:

(1) Each bureau will establish appropriate protocols for review and approval of Emergency Stabilization projects.

(2) Project plans for Emergency Stabilization projects will demonstrate linkage to BAR projects and long-term recovery and restoration activities.

D. Burned Area Rehabilitation Project Approvals:

(1) Each bureau will develop written protocols, to include rating criteria, review and approval procedures, and internal bureau program and project oversight and monitoring, for projects using BAR funding based on Departmental guidance and criteria. These protocols will be provided to the Director, OWF.

(2) All projects must adhere to minimum standards to protect resources by repairing or improving landscapes unlikely to recover naturally to approved management conditions and to repair or replace minor assets. All projects will demonstrate linkage to long-term recovery and restoration and will be based on best available science to maximize success.

E. Time Frame for Use of Funds:

(1) Emergency Stabilization Funds:
(a) Emergency stabilization funding is provided for no more than one year plus 21 days after the ignition date of a wildfire, except as provided in Section E(1)(b).

(b) If ES treatments cannot be completed within one year, a local unit may request from the Bureau Director an extension based on factors such as climatic conditions or similar significant circumstances. The Bureau Director will adjudicate requests for an extension to complete the precluded treatments no later than December 31st of the second year following the ignition date, with notification to the OWF Director. Any funding used for extensions will be counted within the administrative authority for the affected bureau in the year the obligations take place.

(2) Burned Area Rehabilitation Funds:

Funding for burned area rehabilitation treatments is available for no more than five years following 21 days after the ignition date of a wildland fire.

F. Project Tracking, Monitoring, and Evaluation:

(1) All proposed and funded ES and BAR projects will be entered into the National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS).

(2) All funded ES and BAR projects will be monitored for consistency with project objectives.

(3) Project results and monitoring will be entered into NFPORS as those data become available. Monitoring data will be collected, analyzed and stored using protocols designed to help managers fulfill monitoring requirements that encourage cooperative, interagency data management and information sharing. As necessary, NFPORS will be modified to accommodate reporting of results and monitoring.

(4) The Office of Wildland Fire, in collaboration with the bureaus will develop standard measures and tools for monitoring ES and BAR projects and evaluating the effectiveness of treatments. Funding for development of measures or tools will be treated as a program-wide BAR expense.

G. Program Governance:

(1) Fire/Resources Executive Committee (F/REC)

(a) The F/REC will provide cohesion and consistency among bureaus and ensure effective implementation and oversight of the ES and BAR programs in the Department.

(b) The F/REC will review and provide recommendations to the Director, OWF on requests for redistribution of ES funding authority.

(c) The F/REC will be comprised of executive leadership from bureau wildland fire and resource management programs along with the Director, OWF.

(2) Interior Burned Area Emergency Response Coordinators (IBAER)

(a) The IBAER will be chartered under the F/REC to provide integrated and consistent program coordination and implementation for ES and BAR programs and coordination with long term recovery and restoration activities of the bureaus.

(b) The IBAER will provide program and policy advice and recommendations to the F/REC.

(c) The IBAER will provide advice and recommendations on ES redistribution requests and allocations of BAR funding to the F/REC.

H. Handbook:

A Departmental Post-Wildfire Recovery Programs Handbook will be developed to provide integrated and consistent minimum standards and policy for ES and BAR programs in the Department.

I. Policy and Program Review:

The policy, budget, and program approach outlined in this Policy Memorandum will be reviewed in three years from the effective date of this policy.

Contacts:

Any questions can be directed to Dick Bahr, Deputy Director, Management and Programs, Office of Wildland Fire at richard_bahr@ios.doi.gov or (208) 334-1550.

Cc: Interior Fire Executives
Interior Fire Directors