

Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

Effective Date: 01/18/2017

Series: Public Lands

Part 620: Wildland Fire Management

Chapter 4: Wildfire Response

Originating Office: Office of Wildland Fire

620 DM 4

4.1 **Purpose.** This chapter provides policy, objectives, and requirements for the Department of the Interior (DOI) Wildfire Response program.

A. The purpose of the Wildfire Response program is to protect human life, property, and other values to meet objectives established in land and resource management plans.

B. Wildfire Response consists of all activities conducted from the time a wildfire is reported until the fire is determined to be extinguished and the documentation is completed and filed.

4.2 **Scope.** The policy in this chapter applies to all DOI bureau/office activities involving wildfire response.

4.3 **Policy.**

A. It is the policy of DOI to make informed, risk-based decisions, for effective response on every wildfire. Initial response actions, including pre-positioning of fire response assets, will be risk-based and conform to policy and land and resource management plan objectives and take into consideration risk to life, prevailing and anticipated conditions, and the ability to accomplish objectives.

B. The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resource will be based on human health and safety, the values to be protected, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.

4.4 **Objectives.** The objectives of DOI's Wildfire Response program are to:

A. Coordinate wildfire response with Federal, State, and local laws.

B. Make risk-based decisions and take actions commensurate with the values of the

DOI protected and managed lands and resources.

C. Provide effective wildfire responses to meet bureau/office missions; protect lives, and communities, while conserving natural resources, and restoring ecological health.

D. Disseminate current information on wildfire activities and conditions to interested parties.

E. Incorporate individual and organizational resilience, learning, adaptation, and accountability principles in all wildfire response practices.

4.5 Program Requirements. To ensure consistent implementation of Federal wildland fire policy bureaus/offices must adhere to the following guidelines:

A. Bureaus/offices must use common standards for all aspects of their fire management programs to facilitate effective collaboration among cooperating agencies.

B. Bureaus/offices must review, update, and develop agreements that clarify jurisdictional inter-relationships and define the roles and responsibilities among local, State, Tribal, and Federal fire protection entities.

C. Responses to wildland fire must be coordinated across all levels of government regardless of the jurisdiction at the ignition source.

D. Fire management planning must be intergovernmental in scope and developed on a landscape-scale.

E. Wildland fire is a general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Wildland fires are categorized into two distinct types:

(1) Wildfires. Unplanned ignitions or prescribed fires that are declared wildfires; and

(2) Prescribed Fires. Planned ignitions.

F. A wildland fire may be managed concurrently for one or more objectives. Objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives.

G. Management response to a wildland fire on Federal land conforms to objectives established in the applicable land and resource management plan, the relative risk to associated resource values, and the fire management plan.

H. Initial action on human-caused wildfire is to suppress the fire at the lowest cost with the fewest risks to firefighter and public safety.

I. Managers must use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

4.6 **Handbooks.** Technical or detailed instructions, or information on specific activities that supplement general policies and procedures in this chapter are set forth in one or more Departmental Handbooks pursuant to 620 DM 1.1 A (3). The Handbooks are available at <http://elips.doi.gov>.