



# Office of Wildland Fire Tribal Consultation



March 17, 2015

## Tribal Comments and Response – Risk Based Wildland Fire Management

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### Consultation Summary

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The Department of the Interior, Office of Wildland Fire (OWF) initiated tribal consultation on October 14, 2014 regarding the development of Risk Based Wildland Fire Management (RBWFM). Tribal consultation was initiated through a Tribal Leader Letter signed by the OWF Director with an enclosure describing RBWFM. Supplemental information was provided in response to tribal requests for more detail surrounding data and values used to inform RBWFM, and the consultation period was extended from December 3, 2014 to January 9, 2015. OWF also participated in two conference calls for tribes to provide input and ask questions about RBWFM, hosted by the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC). The OWF has received written comments from 10 Indian tribes and the ITC.

The main comments are provided below, along with a response.

### Comments and Response

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**Comment: RBWFM inadequately acknowledges the Federal Trust Responsibility and the government-to-government relationship.**

**Response:** Federal law and policy guides a government-to-government relationship with Indian tribes. Through regular and meaningful consultation, collaboration, and communication with Indian country on RBWFM, the OWF respects the tribal sovereignty, honors the trust relationship, learns about tribal values, and can make informed decisions about the best possible course of action. OWF will continue to seek regular and meaningful engagement with Indian country.

**Comment: RBWFM fails to account for tribal values; tribal communities live on the land they manage; tribes are dependent on natural resources for social, economic, and cultural subsistence, unlike bureaus; there are numerous values unique to each tribe; datasets lack tribal perspectives; fire intensity should not be limited to greater than 4' flame lengths, but include all flame lengths.**

**Response:** OWF believes that the set of eight values characterized during RBWFM consultation represents the values identified in the comments. The set of values and the RBWFM model are based on work developed by the fuels task teams, which included tribal representation, in 2013. The teams' results were further analyzed and enhanced with national datasets by an OWF team. Datasets and models used for RBWFM have been tested, documented, and will be available for bureaus, tribes, and stakeholders.

Based on tribal input and further discussion within the Department of the Interior wildland fire management program, we have updated and revised the proposed values along with the definition of Wildfire Intensity.

- The values captured in Developed Areas and Infrastructure reflect the relationship between tribes and the lands in which they live. This set of values has the biggest single influence on results of RBWFM.
- In response to tribal comments the values in RBWFM have been revised to add Forest Areas to the national value set in consideration of the social and economic value of tribal timber, forest foods and medicines.
- The Riparian Areas value provides additional recognition of tribal resources through inclusion of tribal watersheds, fish and wildlife habitat, and many areas of cultural significance and traditional use.
- Threatened and Endangered Species habitat serves as a surrogate of ecosystem health, fish and wildlife habitat, in addition to important areas for species listed under the Endangered Species Act.
- Wildfire Intensity, represented by Flame Intensity Length, includes all flame lengths rather than just those greater than 4 feet.

**Comment: Broad based allocation models don't work; new models are developed without beta testing or consultation with tribes.**

**Response:** The RBWFM approach establishes a two-tier approach to allocations. Using the three principal characteristics of likelihood, intensity, and consequences to calculate national level distribution of risk, funding will be allocated to each bureau. Those bureaus allocate funds to regional and unit-level entities based on more specific bureau-specific criteria that reflect the individual mission requirements of the bureau. Bureaus will manage and account for the funding through use of Strategic Business Plans. This approach differs significantly from the Hazardous Fuels Priority Allocation System used in the past for distributing hazardous fuels program funds by ranking all projects. This approach is similar to the current basis for allocating preparedness funding on a national level, using a workload and economic model. However the data and analysis supporting those allocations dates back to the late 1990s and is no longer a reliable measure of the relative needs of each bureau's wildland fire management program. The RBWFM approach provides strategic risk-based approach to formulate and allocate budgets for preparedness and fuels programs across the bureaus. OWF continues to develop and evaluate RBWFM, and will use an adaptive management process as we implement this version of RBWFM and develop future versions.

**Comment: FSim model puts programs that manage forests at a disadvantage.**

**Response:** The FSim (large fire simulator) model is peer-reviewed, published in a variety of scientific venues, and has passed extensive scrutiny. Of the fire modeling systems capable of producing wildfire likelihood, FSim is particularly well-suited for a comprehensive hazard and risk assessment. FSim is suitable because it simulates all significant wildfires, it incorporates the effects of fire suppression on wildfire containment, it addresses the variability of fuel moisture, wind speed and direction, and it simulates wildfire occurrence on an annualized basis.

**Comment: Bureau specific values have remained within the overall departmental allocation process while specific tribal values will be considered in the Strategic Business Plans, introducing a favorable bias towards bureaus.**

**Response:** Values used in the RBWFM approach are addressed above and are not bureau specific. The Strategic Business Plan concept creates a framework for each bureau to establish a multi-year approach to use preparedness and fuels management funding to manage and reduce risk as defined by the three factors of likelihood, intensity, and consequence. The plans will describe how bureaus allocate and manage preparedness and fuels funds to meet their mission and priorities while also ensuring consistency with overall Departmental strategic goals, policies, and priorities. Each bureau plan will reflect its unique mission requirements and will provide each bureau with the flexibility to describe and implement their programs.

**Comment: BIA and tribes receive inadequate wildland fire funding.**

**Response:** RBWFM is a process designed to support wildland fire program budget requests and to best allocate the funding provided by the Congress to address the areas of highest risk within the Department.

**Comment: Tribes have expressed a clear commitment to furthering tribal participation in RBWFM.**

**Response:** We welcome an ongoing dialogue with Indian country on RBWFM, to continue explaining the approach as it develops and is implemented, and to receive input. Recently, we sent a tribal leader letter outlining 2015 OWF wildland fire management priorities in an effort to improve the early notification of potential actions that may affect tribes. We are working to facilitate face-to-face meetings through web-based forums, conference calls, and intertribal meetings. Meanwhile, OWF will continue its participation on the quarterly Intertribal Timber Council fire sub-committee calls and the Annual National Indian Timber Symposium.

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## Point of Contact

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