



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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### NEW U.S. FIRE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED BY SECRETARIES OF INTERIOR AND AGRICULTURE

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan and Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter today directed federal officials to suppress all natural fires in national parks and wilderness areas until individual fire management plans for the areas are determined to be in compliance with new federal recommendations

The directive was one of fifteen the two cabinet members adopted from the recommendations of the federal interagency Fire Management Policy Review Team. The team was established last year to analyze U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture fire management policies in national parks and wilderness areas.

The recommendations affect fire management policies of USDI's National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs, and USDA's Forest Service

Lujan and Yeutter said many of the fifteen recommendations will require long-range planning and coordination for implementation, but that others will become effective immediately.

In addition to the recommendation to suppress for the interim all natural fires in national parks and wilderness areas, other directives to be adopted immediately include the following:

(more)

-- All wildland fires will be declared either prescribed fires or wildfires. All wildfires will be fought with appropriate suppression action.

(A prescription as it applies to a prescribed fire is a written statement of the limits under which a fire may burn in a specific geographic area. The limits include such criteria as weather conditions and fuel moisture. A prescribed fire is managed by qualified personnel in order to achieve specific resource management objectives. Prescribed fires may be started by management ignition or by natural ignition such as lightning. A wildfire is declared when a fire occurs in an area for which there is no prescription, or when a prescribed fire exceeds the prescribed conditions or geographic limits of the prescribed area.)

-- The responsible line officer will certify in writing daily that prescribed natural fires are within prescriptions, and that adequate resources are available to ensure that each prescribed fire will remain within prescribed boundaries and conditions throughout the next 24 hours, given reasonably foreseeable weather conditions and fire behavior. If these conditions cannot be met, the fire shall be declared a wildfire and suppressed.

Other review team recommendations include measures for improving interagency coordination, providing adequate staffing, training, research, equipment and funding, strengthening fire management plans, bringing those plans into compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, and measures for increasing public involvement in policy decisions.

In reviewing federal firefighting policies, the team gathered input from state and local officials, private citizens, academic experts, concessionaires and outfitters, environmental groups and business interests. Eleven public meetings were held across the country to solicit comments on the report. The public comments and the resulting findings were incorporated and submitted in a final report to the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture.

Recommendations from the final report are attached

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## FINAL REPORT OF THE FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW TEAM

May 5, 1989

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Team recommends that the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior implement the following policy and direction:

1. Existing USDI and USDA fire management policies governing wilderness and parks must be strengthened and reaffirmed to limit their application to legitimate prescribed fire programs. Clarification is needed to prevent inappropriate use of fundamentally sound policies.
2. The agencies reaffirm their policies that fires are either prescribed fires or wildfires. The agencies reject as impractical and unprofessional the practice that fires can be allowed to burn free of prescriptions or appropriate suppression action.
3. USDA and USDI agencies will periodically review fire management plans for parks and wilderness for compliance with current policy, direction, and the additional requirements recommended by this report. No prescribed natural fires are to be allowed until fire management plans meet these standards.
4. Current fire management plans must be strengthened by:
  - a. Developing joint agency fire management plans, agreements, or addendums to existing plans for those areas where fires could cross administrative boundaries. Periodic joint review of these plans should occur. These will include agreement on processes and criteria to be used to make decisions on prescribed vs. wildfire and suppression strategies and tactics.
  - b. Including a comprehensive set of criteria which will be used in deciding whether or not to allow natural ignitions to burn as prescribed fires. In addition to those criteria currently required and commonly used, the following factors will be considered:
    - (1) Energy release component.
    - (2) 1000-hour fuel or duff moisture content.
    - (3) Appropriate consideration of the national and regional fire situation, including the numbers of fires and amount of available resources to suppress them.
    - (4) Limits on numbers of fires burning in the planning unit at one time.
    - (5) Limits on projected length of active perimeter and acreage burned.
    - (6) Indicators of cumulative drought effects on fire behavior.
    - (7) Potential impacts upon visitors, users, and local communities, both on and off site.

- c. Clearly describing the decision process and factors to be addressed before a fire is declared a prescribed natural fire.
  - d. Including criteria to be used in declaring a prescribed fire a wildfire. There must be interagency agreement on these factors in areas where fire may move across administrative boundaries and shared suppression resources may be required.
  - e. Clearly identifying areas that need protection from fire, such as developments within or adjacent to wilderness and park boundaries. Fire management plans should also include actions that are to be taken, such as hazard fuel reduction or installing fuel breaks, to protect such developments or areas.
  - f. Clearly stating the management objectives being addressed by the prescribed natural fire program, including identification of specific values gained as a result of allowing natural fires to burn unsuppressed within prescribed conditions and areas.
  - g. Clearly describing the process to be used to ensure adequate public involvement and coordination with local governments in both plan development and implementation.
5. Agencies will cooperatively develop regional and national contingency plans and procedures and provide the appropriate program monitoring and direction, including curtailment of prescribed fire activities when necessary because of competition for national and regional fire suppression resources.
6. The responsible line officer or designee shall certify in writing daily that a fire is within prescription and adequate resources are available to ensure that each prescribed natural fire will remain within prescription through the ensuing 24-hour period, given reasonably foreseeable weather conditions and fire behavior. If the fire cannot be kept within prescription with available forces and funds, it shall be declared a wildfire and appropriate suppression action initiated.
7. Agencies must re-evaluate the opportunities to use management ignited prescribed fire to achieve management objectives and to complement prescribed natural fire programs. Additionally, hazard fuels must be reduced to protect selected areas, particularly developments within and adjacent to boundaries, from prescribed natural fire and high wildfire risk. Fuels will be treated along park and wilderness boundaries or internally where there are high values at risk.
8. Fire program management will be improved by establishing properly staffed regional and unit level organizations.
- a. Agencies will ensure the availability of qualified staff and knowledgeable line officers for developing, implementing, and managing prescribed fire programs.
  - b. National Park Service regional offices will establish a full-time regional fire coordinator to develop and oversee park programs in accordance with FIREPRO III, where appropriate.
  - c. Agencies will implement the concept of highly trained, well-equipped and mobile tactical teams to provide on-the-ground monitoring and management of prescribed natural fires in national parks and wilderness.
  - d. Agencies will ensure the strengthened policy is understood and implemented by all appropriate personnel.
  - e. Agency managers will assure that personnel develop a thorough understanding of the management objectives for the lands they are managing.

The National Park Service is to complete an analysis of normal fire year operations. FIREPRO III, in order to define essential minimum wildland fire program needs and to take action to meet those needs.

9. Additional interagency emphasis will be given to addressing opportunities for improving fire management programs.

- a. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) charter should be expanded specifically to include prescribed fire program coordination.
- b. The NWCG should take the lead in developing common terminology for prescribed burning programs and describing wildfire suppression alternatives.
- c. Agencies will develop joint criteria for selecting appropriate suppression tactics in wilderness and parks.
- d. Agencies will improve public and agency understanding and acceptance of using appropriate suppression tactics that meet fire management objectives and minimize the adverse impact on wilderness values and park resources.

10. Agencies will ensure NEPA compliance for fire management plans. Agencies will increase opportunities for public involvement and coordination with state and local government when revising or developing fire management plans.

1 Interpretation and public information before and during fires will be improved.

- a. Agencies will ensure that timely, accurate, and consistent information is provided for the public on the purpose, presence, and status of prescribed natural fires, as well as impacts on the community due to closed roads, trails, smoke, back country restrictions, and other effects.
- b. Interpretive and fire status messages are for different purposes, and agencies should strive to keep them separate and distinct. There should also be a distinction between the information needs for prescribed fires and wildfires.
- c. Agencies should ensure that the public is informed of the risks involved in fire management programs.
- d. Agencies will use common terminology for prescribed natural fire programs.

12. USDI and USDA will review the methods of funding prescribed fire and fire protection programs with the objective of improving interagency program effectiveness. Planning and presuppression activities should be financed by program funds rather than through emergency fund transfers and supplementals.

13. There is a need for additional research related to fire management programs.

- a. USDI and USDA will develop coordinated research programs utilizing the unique capabilities of both organizations.
- b. The feasibility of prescribed burning forests using stand replacement fire will be investigated and tested by implementing an appropriate interagency field research program.
- c. Research will be increased to improve the ability to predict severe fire behavior, conduct long-term weather forecasting, and identify past abnormal events.
- d. Efforts will be undertaken to develop and implement an expert system that integrates a wide array of fuel, topographic, weather, climatological, fire behavior, post-fire effects, and other information and readily displays such information in an interactive mode for the user at a computer terminal. This expert system would help to assure that important variables are not overlooked as decisions are made regarding long duration fires.

e. Efforts will also be undertaken to develop comprehensive data bases for park and wilderness resources and provide for state of the art analyses and display as well as an efficient, continuous monitoring system to insure timely update of information.

f. Development of additional emission factors for wildland fuels and better methods for projecting air quality impacts of prescribed and wildfires are needed, since smoke and air pollution are major considerations in deciding when to terminate prescribed natural fires and in scheduling management ignited prescribed fires.

14. If any Federal bureau engages in prescribed natural fire programs in Alaska, that bureau is responsible for adherence to the standards established as a result of these recommendations. The well-established terminology describing levels of wildfire suppression in Alaska should not be changed for the sake of conformity with the broader categories used elsewhere.

15. The agencies will cooperate fully in determining whether allegations of misuse of policy are true and take measures to ensure that any such practices not occur in the future.