



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Washington, DC 20240

MAY 31 2018

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Memorandum

To: All Regional Directors
From: Acting Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Subject: 2018 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership

The Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke have sent a memorandum to wildland fire leadership highlighting the importance of inter-departmental collaboration to increase firefighter, public, and community safety this year. 2017 was one of the most challenging years on record for wildfire activity, stressing the need for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to work together in managing this year's fires.

2018 wildfires are already providing challenges for several regions within Indian Country. Unusually large wildfires in Oklahoma forced tribal communities to evacuate and stay indoors due to smoke, and Minnesota and Arizona have had increased fire activity. Several regions are experiencing long-term drought and extreme weather conditions that requires long-term severity funding for additional resources.

As leaders in Indian Country, we need to engage in our fire management programs to support fire managers in adhering to the policies of DOI, BIA, and the "2009 Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy."¹ This includes applying the following principles:

- Every agency administrator, every fire manager, every fireline supervisor, and every firefighter is responsible for ensuring established guidelines and safety practices are known, observed, and practiced. We will report unsafe practices, share our lessons-learned, and hold ourselves accountable.
- During wildfires, agency administrators and incident managers make choices to minimize risk and focus on areas where firefighters can be the most effective.
- Managers and firefighters must understand, analyze, communicate and manage wildfire risks and uncertainties as they relate to the cost of either doing, or not doing, an activity.
- Increasing costs and limited resources require us to be diligent in paying attention and providing oversight for wildfire spending and cost controls. Working together can be more effective than as individual agencies and can support each other in times of need.
- Partnerships at local, regional, and national levels help us be more effective fire managers, and are essential for interagency coordination and cooperation.

Thank you for your continued leadership and service to Indian Country.

Attachments:

1. USDA/DOI 2018 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership Memorandum

¹<https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/fire-policy>



MAY 10 2018

Memorandum

To: Chief, U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Director, National Park Service
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture

Ryan K. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior

Subject: 2018 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership

As predicted, 2017 was one of the most challenging fire years on record. The rate and intensity of wildfires stretched our firefighting capabilities, greatly affecting many communities, impacting lives, and damaging natural resources. However, the greatest losses were those of the 14 wildland firefighters who sacrificed to protect the lives of others and the lands and resources we are entrusted to manage. Our Nation saw more than 71,000 wildfires burn more than 10 million acres of Federal, State, Tribal, and private lands. The Federal Government spent \$2.9 billion - the largest amount ever - on suppression operations. A combined 75 days were spent at Preparedness Levels 4 and 5, the second highest number of days at those levels since 1990.

As we begin the 2018 fire year, we want to remind everyone that the protection of firefighters and public safety is the single, overriding priority in every fire management activity and decision that we make. Federal wildfire policy is set forth in the "Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, 2009." One of the fundamental principles underlying this guidance is the emphasis on firefighter and public safety in every aspect of wildland fire management. It is essential that all firefighting personnel understand the guiding principles and policies contained in this document and recognize the importance of maintaining a safe work environment in all operational aspects of the program.

A commitment to firefighter safety requires a workplace where all members of the firefighting community can focus on the mission and have strong trust relationships with their colleagues and partners. To that end, harassment of any kind by any member of the firefighting community will

simply not be tolerated. Both the Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture (Departments) are pressing forward with fundamental changes that are intended to improve each organization's culture. We will compel greater accountability on the part of the entire workforce that promotes a healthy culture throughout both organizations.

Both Departments will continue to collaborate with all Federal, Tribal, State, and local partners to share firefighting resources and assets in a coordinated response to manage wildfires. In carrying out these responsibilities, the protection of Tribal trust assets is vital to ensuring that trust lands are managed sustainably for generations to come. It is essential that firefighters have the right tools, resources, and flexibility that allow them to do their jobs safely and effectively. As we continue to explore opportunities to improve efficiencies, we will look to integrate technology, such as the use of unmanned aircraft systems, into our operations and capitalize on other advancements to promote firefighter safety, support planning, and protect communities.

Thank you for your continued leadership and service to our Nation. Carrying out our stewardship responsibilities in a safe, coordinated, and responsible manner is key to the success of the Wildland Fire Management program.