



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
Washington, DC 20240

October 1, 2021

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Memorandum

To: All Regional Directors  
Attention: Agency Superintendents  
Regional Fire Management Officers

From: Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs 

Subject: Leaders Intent Regarding Travel for Training for the 2021-2022 Training Season

Training provides a mission critical foundation for safety and operational effectiveness in response to managing wildland fires. During the past several training seasons, many training deliveries were cancelled or postponed due to the government furloughs (FY 18 and 19) or the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020. Since then, the training community has made significant strides in developing tools to support virtual delivery including posting materials to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Training Catalog (<https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/training-courses>) and the Wildland Fire Learning Portal (WFLP) (<https://wildlandfirelearningportal.net/>) while also establishing guidelines for in-person training where appropriate to meet the most current safety guidelines established by the CDC and local agencies.

To ensure the BIA Branch of Wildland Fire Management (BWM) has the capacity to respond to wildland fires effectively and appropriately, the BIA Office of Trust Services (OTS) is authorizing travel for training to be categorized as mission critical.

The recommendation to categorize training and its development as mission critical is not intended to imply a departure from the advancements made in distance learning during the 2020-2021 training season. Rather, it's encouraged to continue to provide safe and effective distance learning opportunities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs OTS, and BWM, strongly encourages regional fire personnel to continue to utilize and develop distance learning products within the WFLP. Also, to continue utilizing risk management protocols in the controlled environment of the classroom to pursue safe, creative, and innovative solutions to overcome the challenges presented by COVID-19 for training activities currently deemed most suitable for in-person.

Cancelling planned training at the local, geographic, and national levels has long-term implications, including a reduced number of highly qualified, knowledgeable, and skilled responders within the workforce. This will ultimately impact the safety, efficiency, and

effectiveness of our fire management organizations and our ability to manage fire on the landscape. Fire management organizations cannot exist without training as a critical mission key to workforce development.

Potential ramifications of additional cancellations include:

- Backlog of students in required training courses.
- Lack of qualified responders in positions with a required training prerequisite.
- Delayed skill development of firefighters at all levels of fire management organizations.
- The increased transfer of risk from fuels treatments programs to suppression efforts.
- Agency Administrators/line officers unable to meet qualifications.
- Lack of completions at the Wildland Firefighter Apprentice Program (WFAP).

Examples of NWCG courses requiring in-person attendance include engine operator, leadership 380-580, command and general staff 420-520, and many of our aviation and unmanned aircraft courses and refreshers.

Please distribute to all BIA and Tribal fire management units as appropriate.

For additional information, please contact Garth Fisher, BWFM Training Program Manager, [garth.fisher@bia.gov](mailto:garth.fisher@bia.gov), (208) 387-5315.