

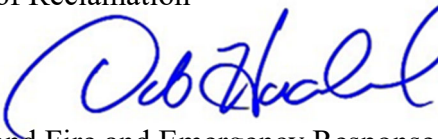


THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JUL 15 2021

Memorandum

To: Director, Bureau of Land Management
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Director, National Park Service
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Director, U.S. Geological Survey
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

From: Secretary of the Interior 

Subject: 2021 Support for Wildland Fire and Emergency Response

On July 14, 2021, the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group raised the National Wildfire Preparedness Level (PL) to 5, only the third time in the past 20 years that the Nation has reached PL 5 by mid-July. This move reflects the on-going severity of wildfires across multiple geographic areas of the United States and a substantial commitment of firefighting resources on a national level.

The western United States continues to contend with severe drought and record high temperatures that are the direct result of climate change. Eight western States are experiencing “exceptional drought” conditions and nearly the entire West is in some measure of drought. Currently, there are large uncontained fires burning in every western geographic area. Furthermore, the fire outlook continues to reflect warmer and drier conditions leading to the high potential for significant wildfire activity for the remainder of the summer and into the fall.

These extreme conditions and circumstances follow a challenging fire year in 2020 that saw a record number of acres burned and a record number of firefighters deployed to incidents. Additionally, many of your staff volunteered this past spring to support the national COVID-19 vaccination effort and others assisted our partners in Australia in 2019 and 2020 in responding to that country’s bushfires. I am extremely proud of this commitment and grateful for the contributions made to our Nation’s emergency response efforts both here and internationally.

With a significant portion of the fire year still ahead of us, it is important that we remain vigilant in all aspects of firefighter safety. This includes taking the necessary precautions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Please remind your staff to pace themselves appropriately throughout the season so that they can do their jobs effectively, and most of all, safely at every turn. Equally important, please make sure that your staff is aware of the support that is available for mental health and wellbeing coordinated by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s Mental Health Subcommittee (<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/mental-health-subcommittee>).

The early move to PL 5 is indicative of another long and challenging summer, and therefore essential that we maintain our focus and support for wildland fire operations. We are also in hurricane season, which is predicted to be above normal this year. Any hurricane that makes landfall has the potential to require a large response by the Department of the Interior (Department), necessitating that we be prepared to support the Federal response effort.

At this time, employees with red cards should consider making themselves available for wildland fire assignments. Additionally, I am asking that all Department supervisors support the wildland fire management program and qualified employees who request fire response assignments. This support is critical to maintaining an effective operational response and coordination with our Federal, Tribal Nation, State, and local partners.

For my part, I am working with the Biden-Harris administration to do everything that I can to support the wildland firefighting workforce, including addressing pay, retention, and recruitment issues, and taking steps to support the urgent need to reduce wildfire risk. By investing substantially more in our workforce and efforts to address climate change, improve climate resiliency, and promote science we stand a better chance of meeting the demands of the current wildfire crisis and keeping firefighters, the public, and communities safe.

Thank you for your service, leadership, and commitment to the American people and our Nation's public lands.