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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

Subject: 2024 Support for Wildland Fire and Other Incident Response

On July 18, the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, raised the national preparedness level (PL) to PL5—the highest on the PL scale of 1–5. This move indicates the ongoing severity of wildfires across several geographic areas in the United States, a substantial commitment of firefighting resources, and the potential for continued severe wildfire activity.

So far this year, we have seen the number of acres burned exceed the 10-year average for this time of year. Abnormally high temperatures and below normal precipitation throughout much of the West, along with the rapid drying of fine fuels, have increased wildfire potential in many areas of the country. The most recent Predictive Services seasonal outlook indicates that above normal fire potential is likely through September.

The move to PL5 indicates the potential for a long, challenging fire year. All available hands are needed to support the interagency response effort. On May 1, 2024, I signed the All-Hands Support for Year-Round Wildland Fire Management memorandum encouraging all Bureau and Office heads to support those non-wildland fire management employees who have expressed an interest in acquiring training and filling wildland fire incident response roles. This supplemental workforce support is critical to increasing overall interagency capacity to meet incident response needs during periods of high wildfire activity. The safety of our wildland firefighters is the highest priority, and steps should be taken to help ensure employee health and well-being, particularly in light of the move to PL5.

With the recent move to PL5, I am asking employees with incident qualifications and wildland fire credentials to consider making themselves available for wildfire assignments. Managers across the Department of the Interior (Department) should prioritize incident response to the degree that it does not affect work that is deemed essential to executing law enforcement operations, protecting national security, or carrying out critical time-sensitive work. This supplemental capacity is essential to maintaining effective wildfire operational response and supporting our Federal, Tribal, State, and local partners. Employees who are interested in
obtaining wildland firefighter qualifications or supporting response efforts in another capacity should coordinate with their supervisors, local fire management officers, or fire training officers.

We are also entering the peak of hurricane season. Any hurricane that makes landfall has potential to create significant damage and disruptions, requiring a large Federal response, including the Department’s support. Similar to my call for support for our wildland fire management mission, I am also requesting that managers and supervisors consider making personnel with incident qualifications available for non-wildfire incident response.

Supporting our Nation’s wildland firefighters and reducing wildfire risk to communities continue to be among my top priorities as Secretary. These priorities are explicitly linked; we cannot tackle the Nation’s wildfire risk without a robust and well-cared-for wildland fire workforce. We are committed to furthering our workforce reform effort, which includes a permanent wildland firefighter pay solution and staffing organizations to ensure adequate rest for our firefighters. These efforts provide the foundation we need to tackle the Nation’s wildfire crisis and keep our firefighters, the public, and communities safe.

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