



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

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MEMORANDUM

Reference: NWCG#024-2010

To: NWCG Committee Chairs and Geographic Area Coordinating Group (GACG)

From: NWCG Chair *William Raage*

Date: April 30, 2010

Subject: Terminology Updates Resulting from Release of the *Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2009)*

The revised Implementation Guidance for Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy brought a paradigm shift in our response to federal wildfires. In order to effectively communicate this response to our internal and external audiences, we need to be consistent in our language. Consistency in terminology is essential for greater understanding by units and teams managing fires, as well as for the interested public. Terminology should reflect the use in the *Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2009)* and replace the outdated terminology in the NWCG Glossary.

To help alleviate confusion in the field, with our cooperators and partners, and with the public, those terms that changed or were deemed obsolete are listed in Attachment A of this memorandum. The attachment provides new definitions for terms whose meaning have changed, the intent associated with the change, as well as background reasoning associated with implementing each change. Agencies will need to revise or update their planning documents (Fire Management Plans and potentially Land Management Plans) to reflect the revised fire policy implementation guidance and terminology.

As leaders within the wildland fire program, it is critical that we apply the following key points about the terminology updates throughout our respective agencies:

- Use of existing terms within agency policies, guidance, plans, publications, brochures, exhibits, et cetera is acceptable. These documents still have good information and requests for immediate updates may be unnecessary; rather wait until current stock is

exhausted and/or revision is planned. Recognize the number of materials in existence across the federal and state arena is vast and will take time and funding to replace.

- For both our internal and external audiences, we need to keep our terminology simple and continue to focus on telling our story versus getting caught up in explaining the difference between unplanned and planned ignitions and between wildfires and prescribed fires. The simplest way to approach our story for wildland fire is to describe our actions by telling our cooperators, regulators, and the public what we are doing operationally, why we are taking these actions, and how these actions affect firefighters, the public and the social, ecological, and economic communities.
- It is critical that local, regional, and national offices start or continue conversations with our partners, *especially at the local level*, whether they are cooperators, regulators or the public, before, during, and after any fire event to increase the understanding and our success with full implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the terminology updates that are occurring. It is imperative that prompt notification to neighboring agencies, jurisdictions, and other key partners occurs when there is any potential for concern or impact about a pending or potential fire incident.

NWCG will issue a follow-up memorandum addressing terminology use in the *Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2009)* for external audiences focusing on communicating with cooperators, regulators, and the public.

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Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Attachment A: Terminology Updates (crosswalk for terms found in policy)

cc: NWCG Executive Board

Attachment A: Terms whose definition and intent has changed with the Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2009).

Use this list to review current planning, operational, training, and information/educational materials for correct use of terms.

Term	Definition	Intent	What	Why	Where, When, How	Who
<i>a word or expression that has a precise meaning in the wildland fire community</i>	<i>a statement of the meaning of the term as used by the wildland fire community</i>	<i>the use or purpose of the term</i>	<i>expressing what the term is about and how it has changed</i>	<i>the cause, reason or purpose for change</i>	<i>the situation, circumstances and place for using the term</i>	<i>the person or group affected by use of the term</i>
Appropriate Management Response	The response to a wildland fire is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, the circumstances under which the fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, natural and cultural resource management objectives, protection priorities, and values to be protected. The evaluation must also include an analysis of the context of the specific fire within the overall local, geographic area, or national wildland fire situation.	Obsolete - 2001 Policy Definition - (discourage use in public forums)	Although obsolete, this term was used in Land/Resource and Fire Management Plans as the type and level of response to a wildland fire based on threats to lives and safety, resource values, and fire conditions. This may have included a flexible range of tactics and strategies to achieve one or more objectives. While the technical definition aligns with the 2009 implementation guidance, the term was often used incorrectly. In general, it is expected that “appropriate” is dropped and communications address the incident objectives, strategies and tactics.	Widely used incorrectly to refer to only those management responses which were intended to achieve resource benefits. Confusion existed as the term was used both as an objective and a strategy.	Remove as agency documents are updated.	Internal and public, discourage use

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Benefits	<p>Fire effects with positive value or that contributes to the attainment of organizational goals.</p> <p>(Synonym: Resource Benefits (Also known as Fire Benefits))</p>	<p>Represents one end of spectrum of desired outcomes from managed fire. The opposite of protection to minimize loss or damage.</p>	<p>Across the fire community, the term “Resource Benefit” has been applied to fires previously identified as Wildland Fire Use (WFU) fires. The 2009 implementation guidance eliminates the typing of fires as “good” (WFU) or “bad” (Suppression). Instead, communications should transition to discussing the range of management options, incident objectives, strategies and tactics used to effectively manage fires.</p>	<p>Fires are no longer “typed” into one of two possible bins. No single term can convey the full scope or degree of management options utilized.</p>	<p>Should be explained as a desired outcome focusing on successfully meeting resource objectives and protection objectives by location and condition.</p>	<p>Internal and public</p>
Escaped Prescribed Fire	<p>Prescribed fire that has exceeded or is expected to exceed prescription parameters or otherwise meets the criteria for conversion to wildfire. Criteria for conversion are specified in “Interagency Prescribed Fire – Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide”.</p>	<p>Defines a state where a prescribed fire is no longer doing what was expected.</p>	<p>Defines an ignition source for a wildfire that originated as a prescribed fire. Previously, an escaped prescribed fire had to be suppressed. Under the 2009 implementation guidance, an escaped prescribed fire can be managed to meet resource objectives identified in a LUP or R/FMP depending upon agency policy.</p>	<p>Be able to tell about situations where prescribed fires are converted to wildfire and explain actions are taken to manage or it.</p>	<p>When conversion occurs need to explain transition to wildfire.</p>	<p>Internal and public</p>

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Fire Management	All activities related to the management of wildland fires.	Cover the programmatic scope of wildland fire. Includes the entire scope of activities from planning, prevention, and mitigation; fuels management to fire response; post-fire stabilization and rehabilitation; and all related activities.	While the definition of Fire Management hasn't changed, the options available for incident management have. This will require that planning documents be updated to accommodate these changes so that managers are able to access the full range of options available under the 2009 implementation guidance.	The changes to the implementation guidance allow managers more flexibility for incident management.	As a generic term to capture the full range of decisions and actions associated with managing wildland fire.	Internal and public
Fire Type	The type of fire based on whether the ignition was planned (type: prescribed) or unplanned (type: wildfire).	Under the new implementation guidance, only two types of wildland fire - wildfire or prescribed fire- are recognized.	A management distinction of wildland fire based on ignition source to satisfy legal and budget constraints. Prior to the 2009 implementation guidance, fires were typed based on the management response – WFU or Suppression.	The distinction is our ability to select the timing, placement and conditions under which ignition(s) occur and allows managers to utilize a range of strategies and tactics to achieve both resource and protection objectives.	Relate to the ability to be proactive versus reactive in the response.	Internal and public

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Incident Objectives	Site specific guidance and direction necessary for the selection of appropriate strategy(s) and the tactical direction of resources on an incident.	Site specific statements based upon agency administrator's direction (things to be done) and constraints (things to avoid doing).	Incident objectives must be achievable and measurable, yet flexible enough to allow for strategic and tactical alternatives. Once human safety and values-at-risk are mitigated, land management plan objectives to fully or partially achieve desired conditions may be established. This ability to manage for multiple objectives is a change.	Firefighter and public safety will always be the foremost objective. Protection of private land values will not be traded off to achieve land management plan desired conditions.	Used in decision support and incident planning. Found in support documents, Incident Action Plans, Delegations of Authority. Objectives will be periodically reviewed and updated as needed as set by the agency administrator.	Internal and public
Initial Attack	An aggressive action to put the fire out consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.	Describes the initial response used on most fires where the intent from the onset is to put the fire out as quickly and cost effectively as possible.	Preplanned response of full perimeter control and extinguishment to achieve fire specific objectives which considers safety, cost and consequence.	Specifies a particular preplanned initial response.	Anytime the focus is on full perimeter control and extinguishment.	Internal and public

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Initial Response	<p>Immediate decisions and actions taken to react to an ignition.</p> <p><i>(Synonym/Formerly Known As: Initial Action)</i></p>	Respond to every reported wildland fire by evaluating, prioritizing, and acting.	Defining a range of options, based on size-up, resource commitment, and assigns accountability which considers safety, cost and consequence while retaining the flexibility to manage for multiple objectives.	All fires receive a response which may not involve taking action on the ground but may include a management or initial decision to postpone taking action on the ground to a later time based on conditions, safety and competing priorities.	A planned response, based on fire management objectives, initiated on every fire.	Internal and public
Prescribed Fire	<p>Any fire intentionally ignited by management under an approved plan to meet specific objectives.</p> <p><i>(Synonym: prescribed burn and controlled burn).</i></p>	A wildland fire originating from a planned ignition.	Wildland fire ignited to meet specific objectives identified in a written and approved prescribed fire plan for which NEPA requirements (where applicable) have been met prior to ignition. Includes incorporation of prescribed burn and controlled burn.	Terms used by our partners and the public in law, policy, conversation, etc. to describe a fire ignited by management action.	These synonymous terms, often area or agency specific, may be used interchangeably in local policy statements and agreements.	Internal and public

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Protection	Management objective to limit the adverse physical, environmental, social, political, and/or economic effects of fire.	Represents the desire to prevent damage from wildland fire. The opposite of benefit.	A management objective intended to limit loss, damage and threats from a wildland fire. Under the 2009 implementation guidance, this objective may apply to all or parts of fire.	Recognize that fire management actions focusing on protection objectives may result in reducing long term risk.	Results in active management strategies documented through planning, Incident Action Plan and actions on the ground to exclude fire or decrease fire intensity to minimize loss and damage.	Internal and public
Response to wildland fire	Decisions and actions implemented to manage a wildland fire based on ecological, social, and legal consequences, the circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected.	Convey that all fires receive a response by management and an initial decision.	Policy statement in the 2001 Review and Update of Federal Fire Policy which includes consideration of multiple objectives when defining the management of a specific fire.	Response to ignition is guided by the objectives and strategies outlined in the land/resource management plan and/or fire management plan.	As a generic term to capture the full range of decisions and actions associated with managing wildland fire.	Internal

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Suppression	Management action to extinguish a fire or confining fire spread.	Implies a tactic to "put all or part of a wildland fire out" rather than a type of fire.	The term is not a type or category of fire rather it describes what is being done to effect perimeter control or future perimeter growth.	Narrow the definition to describe a tactic of putting all or part of a wildland fire out while excluding suppression as a type of fire.	Describes one of the tactics that can be used on a fire or a part of a fire.	Internal and public
Use of Wildland Fire	Management of either wildfire or prescribed fire to meet resource objectives specified in Land/Resource Management Plans. (Synonym: Fire Use)	Describe where wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources consistent with management objectives.	A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape.	Objectives can be changed as fire moves across the landscape as opposed to either being managed for resource objectives or suppressed.	Planning documents that set goals and objectives for the use of wildland fire.	Internal and public
Wildfire	An unplanned ignition caused by lightning, volcanoes, unauthorized, and accidental human-caused actions and escaped prescribed fires. (See Escaped Prescribed Fire).	Define those ignitions where the location, conditions and timing cannot be set.	A wildland fire resulting from an unplanned event. Under the 2009 implementation guidance, escaped prescribed fires can be managed like any other wildfire depending upon agency policy.	Wildfire can be managed for multiple objectives, and portions of a wildfire can be managed concurrently for one or more objectives.	Provide an understanding of the conditions under which the fire occurred.	Internal and public
Wildland Fire	A general term describing any non-structure fire that occurs in the vegetation and/or natural fuels.	A general term that includes both prescribed fire and wildfire.	Elimination of wildland fire use as a wildland fire type.	There are now only two types of wildland fire.	Used as an overarching term when discussing both types of wildland fire.	Internal and public

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Wildland Fire Use	The application of the appropriate management response to naturally-ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas outlined in Fire Management Plans. Operational management is described in an Implementation Plan.	Obsolete term - Units that use the term wildland fire use in their Fire Management Plan should redefine wildland fire use as wildfires and define the objectives, strategies and tactics that can be considered in the response to a wildfire.	Although now obsolete, this was once used to describe the goals/objectives, strategies, and tactics for a naturally-ignited wildfire to achieve improvements or positive effects to natural resources or reduce risk as identified in land-use and resource management plans. Previously was reported by agencies but now there is no longer internal or external reporting of this type of fire.	This was used as a category/type of fire that is now included in wildfire. It is important to acknowledge that many fires may have benefits even when the focus is primarily on protection objectives.	Found in existing planning documents, to be changed when plans are reviewed and updated. Used outside NWCG and Federal Land Management agency documents. In some states it has been written into rules/laws.	Internal, public, and air quality.
Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)	The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. (Synonym: I-Zone, Wildland/Urban Interface) Citation: H.R. 1904-3 ‘Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003’	Define an area within or adjacent to private and public property where mitigation actions should occur to prevent damage and loss.	Concurrence with the WUI Committee’s definition.	Provide a general description which has been refined for specific use by federal, tribal, state and local communities. There is no commonly agreed upon definition.	A commonly used term within public and private communities and land management agencies.	Internal and external